



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA

DISCOVERY

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**JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
of Southern Alberta

תגלית

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## ***JHSSA 33rd Annual General Meeting:***

**Monday, October 30, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.  
Calgary JCC Auditorium and on Zoom**

### **Jewish Marda Loop**

**Presentation by Harry Sanders**

Join Harry Sanders, our unofficial resident historian and raconteur par excellence, as he shares stories from Jewish Marda Loop. All are welcome, though only JHSSA members may vote during the business meeting preceding this talk.

Also on the program: our annual recognition of those in our community who have celebrated their 80th birthday within the past year. Please contact our office if you are interested in serving on the JHSSA board, or if you know of someone who has turned 80 this year.



*Marda Theatre, 1964. Photographer: Rosettis Studio. Courtesy of Glenbow Library and Archives Collection, Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.*

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## **Bella Singer: The Woman Who Cared**

*Author's Note: There is scant documentation of the early lives of Bella and Abraham Singer. Much of this story relies on their memories, and those of their contemporaries. We would be pleased to receive any corrections or clarifications.*

**by Betty Sherwood**

Between her birth in 1881 in Radom, Poland, and her death in 1984 in Calgary, Alberta, Bella Singer lived a busy, generous and inspiring life. The eighth child born to Chaya Leeba Wajsborn (d. 1884) and Wolf Baer Scwajcer (1847-1924), Bella was three years old when her mother died in childbirth. Wolf Baer married Miriam Rzcynski (d. 1930) with whom he had two more children. Soon enough Bella was helping to raise her younger siblings and cousins, leaving little opportunity for formal schooling. As well, she worked in the family's two rooming houses by cleaning rooms and washing floors.

Abraham Cyngiser (1880-1942) and Bella were married in Radom around 1901 after he persuaded Wolf Baer to consent to their union. For many Jews in Radom, who constituted approximately 15% of the population, life was becoming increasingly challenging. Abraham and his brother Paretz fled, first to Germany and then to Canada, arriving in Toronto around 1907. Joining him soon after, Bella was not cheered by their few years in Hamilton and Toronto. Abraham likely worked as a peddler and a farmhand during their first years in Canada. They also returned to Poland briefly where Bella may have begun to formulate her ideas on how to help her family. It seems that Canada was becoming a haven for Jews and non-Jews from Poland alike. The *Calgary Albertan* noted in 1910 that Canada was a favoured destination for many Poles with the headline "Emigration to Canada Depopulates Poland."

Returning to Canada in 1911, the Cyngisers, now "Singers", continued west to Calgary, where they rented a two-storey building at 507 – 2nd Street East and converted it into a rooming house. Initially both Bella and Abe performed all the daily duties of running their boarding house, while Bella also cleaned suites at the Palliser Hotel after it opened in 1914. Abe sold scrap iron from decommissioned railway stock and was engaged in several other business ventures. Life was busy with the births of their children, Hymie (1910-1998) in Hamilton, and then three born in Calgary: Diane (1914-2009), Jack (1917-2013) and Rosalie (1919-2011).

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**PLEASE SUPPORT JHSSA WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP**

# Community Milestones 1923 and 1973

*Much of the information presented here is from articles about the community by the Calgary correspondent for Winnipeg's "Dos Yiddishe Vort", who signed himself as Ben Yitzkhak, and from the 1973 issues of "Calgary Jewish News".*

**by Agi Romer Segal**

## 1923

In 1923 Calgary Jews were starting to be hopeful that after a number of difficult years, conditions were improving. Due mostly to economic factors, about 75 Jewish families had left the city, many to California, with fewer than 200 Jewish families remaining. The Immigration Society, which had been very active at the start of the decade, was dormant, partly because many of its leaders had departed. The situation was so dire that the few consecutive days of rain in July were considered a hopeful sign. While the pool of community volunteers had certainly been depleted, communal organizations continued to work tirelessly.

Striking about the reports regarding the Calgary Jewish community in *Dos Yiddishe Vort* is how the various organizations worked to support common causes. Both the Zionist cause and the Talmud Torah received support across the board.

The Zionist cause received a boost with visits by major figures early in the year. In January alone, Rabbi J. Zlotnick of the national Zionist organization, Dr. Alexander Goldstein, and Colonel Patterson came to promote Keren HaYesod and the National Fund (later known as JNF). All emphasized the fact that there were Jews who needed a land to settle in and there were Jews who had the means to help make that possible through monetary donations. Colonel Patterson's appearance was significant because his speech drew a large Christian audience. Other Christian Zionists rallied in support. In July, A. Grant of Scotland spoke in the Allen Theatre about the potential of developing Palestine. Hadassah women continued their sewing; 297 items, from coats to handkerchiefs, were sent to Palestine, mainly for the hospitals.

The Talmud Torah supported Zionist activity and was itself the focus of much communal effort. Visiting Rabbi Zlotnick was impressed by the students' progress. The school was still small, but growing, and it was difficult to manage five grades with two teachers. Both National Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah pledged \$25 a month in support of the Talmud Torah. The development of the school library was a goal in 1923 and the latest publications were ordered from Europe. The students formed the Eliezer Ben Yehuda Hebrew Club. The highlight of the year was the June 3 installation of the school's cornerstone. The names of donors of \$25 and more were etched on the stone. Additional donors paid for the rights to unveil the stone. The purchasers passed on the honour to Rabbi Smolensky and to M. Zemans. The celebration raised \$450 of which \$22 came from the students for the library. In the 1923/24 school year a new curriculum was implemented. The Talmud Torah annual bazaar and dance in October was certainly a communal affair. Representatives of all the women's organizations and B'nai Brith played roles in the preparations and the fundraising. No Jewish businessman was spared and large Christian businesses were also



*Hyman and Mary Cohen. JHSSA #649.20. Source: Leona Bell.*

solicited by their Jewish patrons. The events included a Silver Tea, a lunch, a supper and a bazaar at the Al Azhar Temple. The \$800 raised was used to make a payment for the Talmud Torah building.

Another source of funds came from Jewish wedding celebrations. For example, \$10 was raised at the Horodezky/Switzer wedding and an amazing \$78.40 at the Goldenberg/Cohen wedding at the Isis Palace, where 235 guests celebrated until 2:00 am.

An April 1923 article raises an issue that speaks to community organizers even one hundred years on. It calls on all organizations to consult each other when planning events so no scheduling conflicts arise. All it would take would be the cost of a few cents for stamps. Apparently, despite much cooperation between groups, there was a need for a Community Calendar even with a population of 200 families.

It seems the perception of the Jewish community in Calgary depended on the beholder. In September 1923, visiting B. Zaretsky of Winnipeg published his impressions of the Edmonton and Calgary communities in *Dos Yiddishe Vort*. His main complaint concerned the prevalence of slot machines in both cities, but he characterized both communities as bourgeois and lacking in cultural activity. It is clear that he is coming from a left, labour-oriented perspective.

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## Milestones *Continued from Page 2*

A response to this critique by the regular Calgary correspondent appeared in the same newspaper on November 9. He corrects some factual errors concerning Calgary's demography. He also refutes the claim that the leftist Workman's Circle (WC) school shut down after a few short years due to opposition within the community. He clarifies that the school did not succeed due to poor organization and the failing economic situation. The Workmen's Circle school and the Talmud Torah were not in each other's way; they served different populations. When the WC school shut, most students did not transfer to the Talmud Torah. As for the claim of lack of intelligentsia among Calgary's Jews, one can point to the large Yiddish section at the public library whose books circulated widely. Interestingly, Mr. Ben Zaretsky moved to Calgary in the 1930s to teach at the I.L. Peretz school.

### 1973

Fifty years later, 1100 Jewish families lived in Calgary. Zionism and Jewish education continued to be main communal concerns. The fate of Soviet Jewry was an additional ongoing concern.

The community had been gearing up the previous year to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Israeli statehood. The Jewish National Fund Negev dinner at the Shaarey Tzedec in January featured guest speaker Irwin Cotler. The United Jewish Appeal (UJA) campaign kick-off event guest speaker was Shimon Peres, then Israel's Minister of Transportation. The women's campaign chair, Edythe Hashman, highlighted the need to support Soviet immigrants to Israel. Her goal was to raise the number of women UJA donors from 643 to 900. That year, 64% of UJA funds were slated for allocation to overseas causes. [In 2023 the allocation for national and overseas causes was about 16%.]

Israel celebrations, dubbed "Shalom 25", had been launched with fanfare in the spring of 1972. The community-wide planning committee's work culminated on May 6, 1973. The day began with joint services of the Beth Israel and Shaarey Tzedec congregations, attended by over 350. There was a display of essay entries and a performance by Young Judaea dancers and United Synagogue Youth's (USY) multimedia presentation. In the afternoon, local radio and TV stations aired Israel-related programs. That evening, 600 people gathered at Beth Israel for an Israel Cabaret with performances by the local newly-formed Masada dance troupe and the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) choir. Twenty-five candles were lit in honour of the State of Israel.

In 1972, the decision had been made to allocate UJA funds to the two Jewish day schools. To ensure that the funded education met the needs of the community, after having consulted with leading experts in the field, Calgary Jewish Community Council (CJCC) set

up the Jewish Education Committee, chaired by Maurice Paperny and Dr. Carl Safran, to develop a community-wide education survey. Survey responses were to be sent directly to education experts at the University of Calgary. (Dr. Safran had been honoured the previous year by the Calgary Public School Board with the naming of the Carl Safran School on 13th Avenue S.W.) One of the findings of the survey, according to the *Calgary Jewish News*, September 1973, was that there was a lack of young leadership ready to lead the community.

Plans continued to build a new Jewish Community Centre on the recently purchased lands on 90th Avenue S.W. as the House of Israel could no longer accommodate the current needs. Costs were rising. The initial 1972 cost estimate of \$558,000 had already risen to over \$600,000 by July 1973. In the meantime, the Jewish Centre Activities Committee, chaired by Jack Century, arranged for the use of Mount Royal College facilities, making a wider range of activities available.

Various organizations held programs highlighting the plight of Soviet Jewry. Calgary Hebrew School junior high students named

January "Soviet Jewry Month." They engaged in a letter-writing campaign and even organized a special school lunch reflecting the diet of Soviet prisoners of conscience—4.5 ounces of black bread and 2/3 cup of cabbage and potato soup. Mrs. Ravvin was invited to address the students about her trip to Russia. Students held a rally and sold \$3 "Let My People Go" chains. Beth Tzedec Congregation hosted Esther Markish, widow of noted murdered Soviet Yiddish writer Peretz Markish.



1973 JNF Negev Dinner program: cover, and photo of guest speaker Irwin Cotler.

To meet local social needs, a pilot project was initiated by NCJW and Jewish Family Services under the auspices of CJCC to provide pre-packaged kosher meals to seniors and shut-ins for a nominal fee of \$1.50. Another project addressed an additional concern in the community. Shaarey Tzedec Sisterhood hosted a speaker about Tay-Sachs disease in early October and later, NCJW staffed two Tay-Sachs clinics testing 443 people. (See *Discovery*, Winter 2010)

Having proudly met fundraising goals for the 1967 Emergency UJA campaign and having recently celebrated Israel's achievements, the Calgary Jewish community was shocked by the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. *Calgary Jewish News* described the response as one of "unity and determination." An emergency UJA campaign was activated and funds from other projects were diverted. For example, NCJW donated \$5000 from investments that had been earmarked to fund a geriatric unit in the future JCC campus.

The community also showed its support for Israel at Hadassah's Youth Aliyah event held at the Majestic Inn on November 4. *Carnival Cabaret* was directed by Miriam Creemer and produced by Joe Brager.

# High Holidays at Congregation House of Jacob 1923

*Part of a report by correspondent "Ben Yitzkhak" published in Dos Yiddishe Vort, Winnipeg, November 1923. Translated and edited here by Agi Romer Segal*

This synagogue is the only one in Calgary. The synagogue ended the year well (may it not be any worse going forward), financially and morally. Everyone paid up and made a donation towards the building; funded the ritual bath with a few hundred dollars. The income for the year, factoring in ritual slaughter fees, is over 5000 dollars. There are two prayer quorums in the morning. In the evening, older Jews sit around a long table learning *Mishna*. On the High Holidays, the synagogue was packed. Jews from the small cities came to Calgary for the holidays. Rabbi Smolensky delivered sermons. On the first day of Rosh Hashana, he appealed to support the Talmud Torah. After he was finished, Mr. Ginsberg rose to call out the names of the donors. \$810 was pledged.

Jews give. They do not take the bad times into consideration. The Talmud Torah is dear to them. The elderly Jews with the large prayer shawls with silver collars and their white robes brought to mind former times. The little children who attend the Talmud Torah stand by their fathers and pray. Everything is lovely, except for one flaw: the grown-ups run around talking and not allowing the others to pray. They are those who only got the most basic Jewish education from a *melamed*. They do not understand the prayers. They are very familiar with the Christian holidays, but about the Jewish ones, on the other hand, they have no concept.

On Yom Kippur, before the *Kol Nidrei* prayer, Rabbi Smolensky gives a [Yiddish] sermon. A few Jews listen to him. The youth do not understand him. He speaks at length; the congregation becomes restless. (A few say that he led everyone up to the heavens and he did not want to bring them down again.) He finishes talking, it is still and *Kol Nidrei* is sung ...

On Yom Kippur, before the Musaf prayer, Rabbi Smolensky gives a speech in English for the younger generation. Mr. Joffe speaks about the *Keren Kayemet* [Jewish National Fund]. He calls on people to purchase a thousand dunams of land in the land of Israel. Mr. Ginsberg rises again and asks how much each one will give for the Land Fund. The first 6 names called are for \$25. Two for \$20. Afterwards, many tens and fives and threes and twos. The women in the balcony raise their hands so their names should be called. The non-Jew who writes the names hands over a note with over \$500. Everyone feels good. All have done their duty.

After the closing *Ne'ila* prayer all hurry home. Cars stand waiting by the synagogue. People shake hands. They kiss. Everyone feels that a good year is coming. The older Jews sanctify the new moon.

On Sunday, on the eve of the Sukkot holiday, the annual elections for a new board of directors takes place. All members of the congregation attend. Everyone is prepared to create a complete turn-around this year. Everyone pays their debts in order to have voting rights. The secretary reads the annual report. People are satisfied and clap. Mr. Goldberg gives a speech with remarks on the duties of the newly elected and praises for the officers of the past year for their good work. Afterwards it is decided to donate \$50 to the Talmud Torah and 2% of the income from Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to the National Fund – a total of \$21.18.

On Simchat Torah, there is dancing and singing and parading with the Torah. People celebrate. The Talmud Torah children with their flags sing lovely songs under the supervision of their teachers. A few make a "*I'chaim*" (the new president Mr. Groberman has taken care of that.)

On Simchat Torah during the day, the president invites people to his home. The older Jews become tired walking so far (he lives in the west.) For this, they receive their reward. Long tables are laden with every delicacy. Everyone rejoices. People give sermons; people talk about everything under the sun. One talks of ethics; Mr. Smolenskin [may or may not be a misspelling of Smolensky], a great artist in reciting verses, rhymes about each and everyone. Actually, the president is responsible for everything: he has provided too much drink. People celebrate the entire day. The new president promises to perform wonders this year (May that be true.)

## Upcoming Events

### Erev Shel Shoshanim

**November 25, 2023 6:00pm, Calgary JCC**

We are excited to present this romantic night out in partnership with several local Jewish organizations. The program will begin with *Havdalah*, and will include dinner and a show. The evening's entertainment will feature love songs sung by Laura Shuler, interspersed with stories drawn from our Schmaltz lunch programs, highlighting local romance stories. Tickets will be available through Calgary JCC, and we will send out details through our email list and website.

Please also watch our emails and website for information on our upcoming Jay Joffe Memorial Program at Beth Tzedec Film fest this November.

## JHSSA News

JHSSA is redeveloping the Jewish War Veterans' exhibit case at The Military Museums. If you have memorabilia from family members who served in the Canadian Armed Forces in the First or Second World Wars, and would consider lending or donating them, please contact Sandra Morton Weizman at weizman@telusplanet.net by November 1, 2023.

JHSSA is also looking for photographs and documents pertaining to Pioneer Women/Na'amat to add to our display during their Convention this October. Please contact our office as soon as possible if you have anything to contribute.

## Bella Singer *Continued from Page 1*



*Bella Singer in front of Shaarey Tzedec Menorah wall sculpture. JHSSA#1660.*

Having realized that her relatives would not be safe in Poland, Bella provided tickets for two of her nephews, Charlie Switzer (1898-1997) and Solomon Bleviss (1895-1989) to make the journey to Calgary in 1912. They had to promise to accept any type of work and repay Bella quickly so more family members could be sponsored. Recalling those years, Charlie says "I told her to send me a ticket" which around that time cost \$62. Charlie's grandfather hired smugglers to get him

into Germany and on to Antwerp, with the voyage to Halifax taking about two weeks.

In merely a few years, dozens of Bella's relatives reached the safety of Canada because of the "human lifeline" she had created. Sadly, this steady flow of newcomers was interrupted by the First World War, but at the same time, success and prosperity came to Bella and Abe. They purchased their first home at 405 – 12th Avenue East in 1920 and continued to move into increasingly affluent neighbourhoods. Abe bought farmland on the outskirts of Calgary which may have been one of the farms where immigrating relatives could qualify as agricultural workers as a condition of settling in Canada. They purchased the Cascade Hotel in Banff in 1923 and operated it for several years.

Buying buildings and converting them into rooming houses during a time of burgeoning growth in Calgary proved to be a source of steady income for the Singer family and a first home for many of their relatives. Their sons recall that Bella spent 16 hours a day looking after their various rooming houses and their relations. Of Bella's ten siblings – Mendel, Mindell, Faiga, Rivka, Sarah, Jacob, Jessie, Noma, Myer and Gershon – only Faiga, Sarah and Noma did not have the good fortune to emigrate. Prominent Calgary lawyer (and later Prime Minister) R.B. Bennett advised Mrs. Singer on legal matters and assisted with immigration issues. She was directly responsible for more than 300 relatives making the arduous trip from Radom to Calgary.

Abe, whose life was cut short by a heart attack, was the first person to be buried in the Jewish section of Queen's Park Cemetery. His headstone reads: "To the cherished memory of our beloved husband and father, February 9, 1942."

Few of those who remained in Europe survived the Holocaust. While recuperating in hospital, one survivor, Sucher (Sid) Cyngiser

(1924-2023) suddenly remembered a name and address in Calgary. He was accepted into Canada in 1949, the last of the hundreds of family members who Bella helped out of Europe.

Mrs. Singer continued to devote time, energy and resources in support of numerous causes in Calgary and Israel. The Bella Singer Calgary Chapter of Mizrahi-Hapoel flourished in the 1950s. She donated the Aron Kodesh and the large Menorah wall sculptures (now in Beth Tzedec Synagogue) in the new Shaarey Tzedec Synagogue in 1959. The cornerstone of the Calgary Jewish Academy, constructed in 1970, honours Abe and Bella. She established scholarships at the University of Calgary and Bar Ilan University in Israel. The 1976 Jewish National Fund Negev Dinner paid tribute to her with a donation to the new Canada Park.

In Yiddish the term "meema" means an esteemed aunt and over time, Mrs. Singer came to be known as "The Meema", as if she were the aunt of the entire community. Even at simchas being celebrated by families other than her own, The Meema was accorded a place of honour in the seating arrangements.

The eleven branches of the Switzer family maintain their connections with reunions, family trees, guidebooks and memoirs. Even 25 years ago, the family was estimated to include at least 2000 individuals, and during Mrs. Singer's life-time there were numerous Switzer family simchas. It was said at one of her birthday celebrations at the Palliser Hotel during her 90s, "not many in our midst have known a personality who has appeared on the cover of *TIME* [sic] but many around the world owe their lives to Calgary's own "cover woman"". Bella's story did indeed appear



*Singer Family Seder, c.1950. JHSSA #1951. Source: Mort Levitt.*

in the Canadian edition of *TIME* magazine on March 9, 1959, with the title "The Woman Who Cared." However, the belief that she also appeared on the cover has turned out to be family lore. Mrs. Singer died at the Calgary General Hospital on April 9, 1984. Both Rabbi Abraham Postone and Rabbi Lewis Ginsburg officiated at the funeral of this modest and charitable woman. Her headstone reads: "To the cherished memory of our beloved mother, grandmother and great grandmother who lived with beauty and grace."

# Tracing Jewish Mewata Today:

## *A Walking Tour for Historic Calgary Week, 2023*

by Norman Ravvin

A walking tour of Jewish Mewata may sound like an imaginary outing. One can walk through the western edge of Calgary's downtown, but where is the subject matter for the tour? This is a fair question, since the traces of Jewish Mewata are so faint as to be almost absent. The second last standing landmark would have been the husk of Ravvin's Furniture store, which stood at the northwest corner of 6th Avenue and 9th Street — an epicentre of Jewish business and residential life for almost a century — until it was finally pulled down by the city in 2022. A collaborative effort between myself and Calgary heritage expert Shaun Hunter led us to recover an expansive sense of the character of the Mewata district in early Calgary, as well as how its landscape came to be inhabited by Jewish newcomers from the Russian empire, many of whom hailed from a single area near the city of Gomel, now Belarus.

There were two important earlier quarters of Jewish commercial business and residential life in Calgary. These were located along 4th Street West and East, and in the part of the city now known as the East Village, centred around Centre Street and 12th Avenue East. The latter was particularly well-established in the first decades of the twentieth century and followed the pattern of immigrant corridors in Montreal or Toronto, with Jewish homes, shops, bakeries, religious infrastructure, and the establishment of community institutions. But movement west toward Mewata began not long after the city grid was laid out there around 1905, with the streets, at that early point, bearing names of settlers and CPR men. The east side provided proximity to transport lines, intercity travellers, and the important City Hall Market in today's Olympic Plaza, but Mewata had its own pleasant proximities, whether to the riverside, the Mewata Park playing fields, or to new suburban developments in Hillhurst and Sunnyside, accessible via the Bow Marsh Bridge. Other important early Mewata landmarks were the military barracks, completed in 1918, and Mount Royal College and its music conservatory, which opened to students, including some from the nearby Jewish community, on 7th Avenue and 11th Street in 1911.

As we developed a route for the walking tour, we used the corner of 6th Avenue and 9th Street as a focal point, in part based on historical documents that helped us bring the surrounding streets into view. Henderson's city directories and digitized newspapers from Calgary's first decades revealed that numerous Jewish-owned businesses, many of them corner groceries, were near to this crossroads in the mid-1920s and after. These businesses were crucial to the livelihood of newcomer families from Russia and Russian Poland, some having their inception as market stalls at the City Hall Market further east. Moving west from the area of first settlement proved attractive, as the streets east of Mewata Armory filled with new catalogue-ordered and Craftsman style houses, which were a few steps up in comfort from those available east of Centre Street.

Insurance maps from the 1910s show neat rows of houses filling in the road grid on 6th and 7th Avenues, while nearby blocks



*"First Nations at First Calgary Exhibition and Stampede." Dwight Block in the background, corner of 6th Ave and 9th St. W. c. 1912. Courtesy of Glenbow Library and Archives Collection, Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary.*

remained undeveloped. A remarkable photo, taken in 1912 on the occasion of the first Calgary Stampede, captures how the city's western development took shape in close contact with long-established Blackfoot peoples. The building behind the seated riders, dubbed the Dwight Block, became the anchor for grocery businesses and homes owned and rented by the Libin, Shapiro and Ravvin families at 6th Avenue and 9th Street a decade later. Henderson's and newspaper ads help us recall Jewish-owned groceries cropping up on the west side; and one begins to understand the difference between a grocery and a confectionery, since it was almost always the latter that gained headlines when thieves targeted their stock of pipe tobacco and cigarettes. Jewish institutional outposts did not follow the population as it moved west to Mewata. Synagogues, schools, kosher abattoirs and the *mikvah* (ritual bath) remained where they'd first been established on the east side of the downtown. From Mewata one rode a streetcar east and south to the Peretz School, established in the Beltline in 1927, to the City Hall Market, or to any of the other established businesses further east.

Our walking tour traveled a compact far-west downtown route, beginning at the Bow River's bank, then heading along 5th Avenue, 10th Street, by way of an alley way to 9th, around the corner at 6th Avenue, and continuing back to the western locale at 11th Street near to where Mount Royal College once stood, which is dominated today by the city's new Contemporary Calgary art gallery in its repurposed Planetarium building. The tour made use of the riverside BowForth Park and other viewpoints along the way, but the goal of the walk was to gain a sense of the once lively Jewish residential presence as well as the variety of business activity in the area — always, of course, in locales now filled with buildings *other* than the ones that once housed them.

*Continued on Page 7*

## Mewata

Continued from Page 6

Ad for Ravvin's Furniture and Appliances. "Calgary Herald", July 1954.

Two notable houses of the period remain in the area, neither of which happen to have been associated with Jewish lives as far as we know, and neither are in very hopeful shape. These are the Arts & Crafts style Webb House on 5th Avenue, with similarities to the house my grandparents owned on Seventh; and the older two-storey brick Elsworth residence, c. 1911, on 10th Street. These endangered structures provide us with a last visible link with early residential Mewata. In other ways the streetscapes of the past must be garnered from old postcards, photographs like that of the first Stampede-era Dwight Block, and via the few recorded memories we can recover from descendants of early Mewata families.

One family story that came to the fore as we developed the walk is that of the Shumiatchers. In 1923, the widowed matriarch Chasia moved from the family's original home on 4th Avenue East to 1137 - 6th Avenue West, where she lived until her death in 1955.

It was on the east side where Chasia's daughter Esther met the acclaimed Yiddish writer Peretz Hirschbein, who, when passing through the city on a lecture tour, came down with Spanish Flu and stayed on with the Shumiatchers to recuperate. Hirschbein and Esther were married in 1918, and in later years, when the two returned to Calgary from far-ranging travels, they stayed at the Shumiatcher's Mewata home while each contributed to the Yiddish cultural scene by giving talks

and readings. In a recent *Canadian Jewish Studies* article on Esther Shumiatcher (vol 34, 2022), Agnes Romer Segal tells us that whenever he was a guest on 6th Avenue, Hirschbein, among the best-known Yiddish writers of his era, regaled the family "with tales . . . about the distant lands he had visited" with Esther.

The Shumiatcher's west side home, like much of 6th Avenue, is now the site of major condominium development, so it is a challenge to imagine that in the 1920s, '30s and after, the house, surrounded as it was by a host of other Yiddish-speaking, Russian-born families and their businesses, was a kind of focal point of Jewish communal life, on streets that now show not the faintest hint of it.

*The southern Alberta Jewish Community is located in the traditional territory of the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika, Stoney-Nakoda and Tsuut'ina Nations, and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.*

## More Mewata

In Calgary's early days, the western section of downtown was federal land reserved for park purposes, and in 1906 the park was officially named Mewata – a Cree word meaning "oh, be joyful". Moving south from the Bow River, the area surrounding the site of the old Armory (built in 1917) expands east to the downtown core, and south to what is now called the Beltline. Jewish businesses included several Libin-owned groceries and confectioneries, Solomon Shapiro's Harvard Confectionery, Fradkin & Laven Confectionary, The Winnipeg Grocery (est 1911) and Harry Libin's Radio Centre; closer to the core were Jack Chertkow's Olympic Apartments and Olympic Bowling Lanes, as well as Olympic Lunch (later owned by Barney Gelfand).

Mount Royal College was a dominant presence in the area, and violinist Jascha Galperin, a Jewish immigrant from Odessa, was a dominant presence in the College's Conservatory of Music. Among the musicians listed in a 1943 program for a youth orchestra he founded are Juliet Paperny, Judah Smith and Maurice Paperny, all children of families with deep roots in the Calgary community.

Their families were part of the large Shumiatcher clan, whose matriarch also lived in Mewata. Nearby were the Maerov's, and community founders Jacob and Rachel Diamond, whose house still stands as Brinkhaus Jewellers. The 1911 Chevra Kadisha ledger has Mewata-area addresses for W. Grinberg and Ch. Soltzman; unattributed lists c1930 include Maurice Cohen, Abraham Kadish, Louis Kugler, Hyman Lipetz, Sam Rosenbaum, Sam Samuels, David Sanderson, Isadore Steinberg, M. Wener, Max Waterman, Jacob Wolf, Leib Braunberg, H Cohen, J Chernoff, H Crystal, S Davis, H Dvorkin, I Engle, I Florence, L Fradkin, Mrs Hyman, L Lieberman, M Madorsky, M Segal, A Sholomenko, S Wolfson, Mr Dean, Mr Jashunsky, and I Kredenster.

Close readers of this Discovery issue may have spotted another near-Mewata community member: The last paragraph of "High Holidays at Congregation House of Jacob 1923" says "... the president [Mr Groberman] invites people to his home. The older Jews become tired walking so far (he lives in the west.)" Henderson's 1923 Directory lists Morris Groberman at 1214 -13th Ave SW – a far walk, indeed, from the House of Jacob at 3rd Street and 5th Ave SE.

# President's Message

by **Sandra Lipton**

Spring 2023 was a busy time for JHSSA. In April, JHSSA and Temple B'nai Tikvah co-sponsored a presentation on Jewish mayors by David Koffman. May marked Canadian Jewish Heritage Month and JHSSA was involved in three events including a wonderful special display mounted by JHSSA archivist Roberta Kerr. Thank you to office program coordinator Katie Baker and the many volunteers, especially Laura Shuler for her work in creating and leading the very successful Schmaltz program highlighting love stories from our oral histories. Much appreciation to The Military Museums for co-sponsoring a program on Canada's Jewish soldiers of the Second World War featuring an enthralling presentation by Ellin Bessner. In August, for Historic Calgary Week, we sponsored two walking tours.

We are so grateful to our oral history volunteer interviewers and transcribers and were especially pleased to honour Mel Ksienski with a 2023 Shem Tov Award for all his dedicated work transcribing these precious stories. A special thank you to Mel

and to Sara Drabinsky for coordinating our September casino and to all our casino volunteers.

JHSSA is also most appreciative of our LIFE & LEGACY donors who are not only ensuring future support for JHSSA, but have also qualified us for current financial assistance through \$8,200 in bonus funding. With 54 individuals/couples committing to leaving a legacy, we have to date generated a projected future endowment of over a million dollars.

As we start our new membership year, I thank our new and renewed members. If you are not yet a member, please consider joining us in keeping our history alive. Thank you so much to all our members, board, and staff for your support and dedication.

I hope to see you on October 30 for our first in-person AGM in four years!

Wishing you a happy and healthy 5784.



## Correction

Apologies for the incorrect photo that accompanied the A.I. Shumiatcher article in the Spring 2023 *Discovery*.

Thank you to our eagle-eyed readers who pointed out that the photo we mistakenly used was A.I.'s cousin Leo Smith (Sholomenko).



**A.I. Shumiatcher, 1919.**  
From JHSSA #1169

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