



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF SOUTHERN ALBERTA

DISCOVERY

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From the Desk of A.I. Shumiatcher

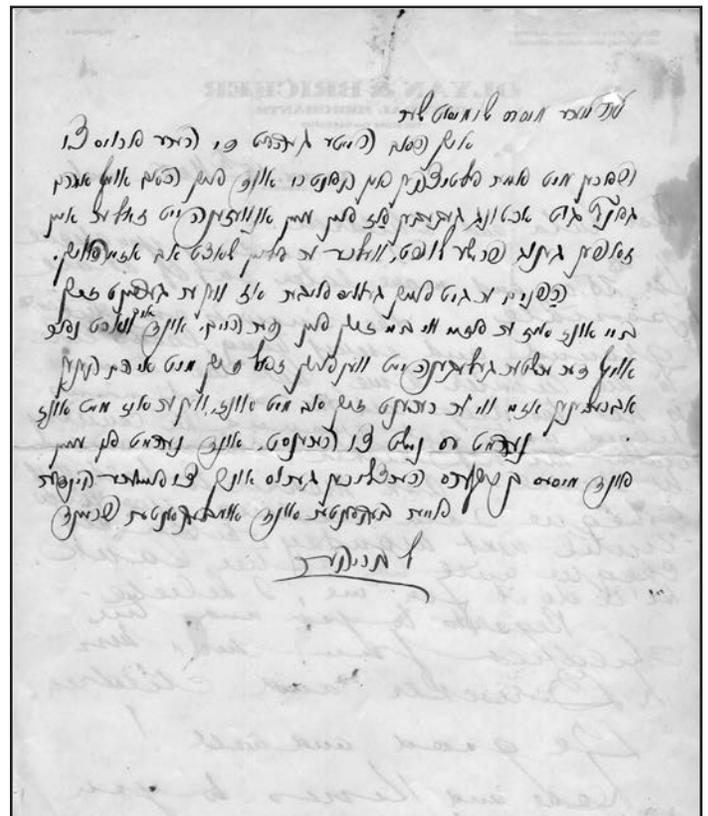
Many people researching the history of Calgary's Jewish community have come across documents with the stamp of "A.I. Shumiatcher" at the top. A prominent Calgary lawyer, Abraham Isaac was a young adult when he emigrated from Russia in 1911. Two years later, he married his childhood sweetheart Luba Lubinsky, and he was called to the Bar in 1930. He eventually became a King's Counsel, and remained actively involved in many aspects of Jewish Calgary throughout his life. The Glenbow Western Research Centre (formerly the Glenbow Archives) maintains an Abraham I. Shumiatcher fonds, consisting of 32 document boxes of textual records, reflecting Shumiatcher's wide-ranging interests.

While researchers are aware of this extensive collection of organizational and community papers, JHSSA is pleased to be the repository for some of his personal papers, including letters exchanged with his family in the early 1920s, when he was travelling throughout Alberta, as an inspector for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The file of correspondence is not extensive – only a few dozen documents – but it speaks not just to the man, but to the family, and the time.

Almost all the letters indicate not just a date at the top, but a location as well. His mother, with whom he corresponded in Russian, was in Vancouver for a time; his wife and children were in Calgary. Shumiatcher wrote to them from wherever he was in the province:

Viking, Philips, Edmonton, Innisfree, Chipman, and Lavoy. The file also includes a letter written in Yiddish to Luba, from Louis Bricker, who was a general merchant in Lavoy. This letter mentions how

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Yiddish letter from L. Bricker to Mrs. Shumiatcher, no date.

President's Message

By Sandra Lipton

In December, I had the honour of attending the presentation of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee medal to two of our longstanding JHSSA volunteers. JHSSA nominated Harry Sanders and Trudy Cowan for this prestigious award, and we were thrilled that our nominations were successful. It is very fitting that Trudy and Harry have been recognized for their many years of contributions to the preservation of our history. We are also proud that another of our board members, 2nd Vice-President Barry Finkelman, received this medal. The government of Alberta nominated Barry for his volunteer work on behalf of cultural heritage. Mazel tov to these JHSSA volunteers and others within our Jewish community who have been honoured for their contributions to Alberta with this significant award.



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The Establishment of the First Jewish Cemetery

JHSSA recently expanded the Tribute Card choices available to our supporters (see article elsewhere in this issue), and one of the new images features the old gates at Calgary's Erlton Cemetery. We were reminded of a paper written by JHSSA Founding President Jay Joffe^{ztl} in 1991, a short excerpt from which was published in *Discovery* that spring. We are pleased to now share his work, with his personal choices of punctuation and phrasing left untouched. Minor edits have been made for length, but the paper has not been fact-checked by JHSSA.

By Jay Joffe

[When Calgary's new Union Cemetery was established in 1899], there was only one Jewish family in Calgary. It is reported that anyone of the Jewish faith who died in the area previous to this was sent to Winnipeg for burial.

By 1904, the Jewish population of Calgary had grown to four families. Early in September of 1904, the death of a child forced this very small Jewish community into action. It was through the newly appointed Park and Cemetery committee of the City that these few Jewish families arranged for a section of the Union Cemetery to be designated for use as a Jewish Cemetery.

When the ten-month old infant, Goldie Bell, died on September 3rd in Calgary in 1904 there was no synagogue, no burial society (Chevra Kadisha) and of course, no Jewish cemetery. One can only imagine the many difficulties the family encountered because of this sudden death. The father of the child, Nathan Bell, and Jacob Diamond in cooperation with the Parks and Cemetery Committee of the city must have quickly selected a suitable site. A section of the Union Cemetery lands was designated for use as the Jewish Cemetery. After the location for the cemetery was decided, the burial took place. The small but beautiful first headstone poignantly

reads *Goldie Bell / Born December 9, 1903 / Died September 3, 1904 / Our Darling.*

The following month on October 20th, this entry appears in the city council records:

... Your Committee on Parks and Cemeteries beg to report as follows: on the application of Messrs. Diamond & Bell for a portion of the Cemetery to be used as a Hebrew burying ground.

We went to the cemetery and met Messrs. Diamond and Bell on Friday last. The piece of land they want is at the extreme west side of the cemetery, next to the quarter section line as shown on the attached plan.

We would recommend that this land be sold to Messrs. Diamond and Bell to be used as a Hebrew burying ground and that the price of said land be \$160.00.

Respectfully submitted, ...

The Messrs. Diamond and Bell, who arranged for the \$160 over three payments, in three years, were Nathan Bell; listed in the Henderson's Directory of the time as manager of the Alberta Cigar Co. Ltd. located in the Barber Block on Stephen Avenue, telephone 129; and Jacob Diamond, manager and owner of the Diamond Liquor Company, located at 232 Stephen Avenue East.

To put this purchase in context of today's values, we would have to appreciate that in 1904, a labourer in Calgary was being paid 25 c per hour. If he worked a 60-hour week for a fifty-week year, he would earn \$13.75 per week for a total of \$687.50 per year. Another comparison is the Statistics Canada figure which allows 6% inflation per year to bring this property to a 1991 value of \$25,452.49. With just four Jewish families in the city, this small cemetery initially would have seemed adequate.

You will find Goldie Bell's memorial stone on the northeast corner of the cemetery.

When seen today, it is difficult to comprehend how small the

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Old Gates at the Erlton Jewish Cemetery. JHSSA #251

The First Jewish Cemetery *Continued from Page 2*

original cemetery site was. The total size of this first cemetery measured 26 feet wide by 93.1 feet long. Today the cemetery covers almost the entire block and this first stone literally becomes lost surrounded by over a thousand headstones.

At the time this tiny lot was purchased, it was located at the far northwest end of the Union Cemetery lands. It was then and is today conveniently separated from the main Union Cemetery by a well travelled road. In 1904 the road was named Victoria Road because it passed in front of Victoria Park, now the Stampede grounds. Today Victoria Park has become part of the Macleod Trail. [sic]

This well travelled road became the dividing line which separated the Protestant Union Cemetery to the east, from the Chinese Cemetery and the Jewish Cemetery to the west, and behind them, the Catholic St. Mary's Cemetery.

In these early years, the City Parks and Cemetery department continued to record all the Jewish deaths in their register on a separate page titled "Jewish Plot". These records were kept up to 1914, which interestingly is the date the Chevra Kadisha was formally incorporated.

In 1907, a further allocation of land was made immediately north of the small existing plot. In 1909, on December 29th, the following entry appears in the city records:

... We recommend that a transfer do issue to the Congregation of the House of Jacob, of land sold and set apart by the city in Union Cemetery, to be held in trust as a burial place for all of the Jewish persuasion in Calgary.

The Jewish population in the city had grown from one family in 1888 to four families in 1904, to twelve families in 1907. By 1911 there were seventy-five families, 613 people in the Jewish community. It was this small, quickly growing community which was soon to complete the first synagogue, The House of Jacob, dedicated in 1912.

THE LATER JEWISH CEMETERIES

Queen's Park

In 1943 the City of Calgary and the Jewish community had another problem concerning a Jewish cemetery. From its establishment in 1904 as the first Jewish cemetery, the Burial Society had controlled the cemetery. In the early 1940's a Mr. Louis Belzberg, in a dispute with the society, had tried to establish a Jewish section in the city's Queen's Park cemetery. His mother was the [second] to be buried in this section at Queen's Park. Later, when non-Jews were also buried



Molly Belzberg gravestone, Queen's Park Cemetery

in this section, the family obtained an injunction restraining the city because such burials violated the orthodox religious principles.

The Jewish Burial Society opposed the injunction stating that a second Jewish cemetery was not needed and the city disallowed the injunction. Later, in a similar application, but this time proposed by the Jewish Burial Society and endorsed by the entire Jewish community, the application was approved. It appears that a

compromise had been reached with the Burial Society controlling both cemeteries.

In December of 1943 this endorsed application was approved by the City Council. It is interesting to note that council approved that "the two persons of Protestant faith could be removed at the expense of the Jewish community from the section". Today the Jewish section at Queen's Park has about 100 graves and is preferred by the Singer, Switzer and Belzberg families.

The Beth Tzedec Cemetery

In 1975 Ted Riback donated 7.66 acres of land on Macleod Trail near Midnapore for use as a Jewish cemetery. The cemetery lands were given to the Beth Israel Synagogue and although the synagogue controlled the cemetery, it was available to the entire Jewish community. Mr. Riback had zoned the land and landscaped the property before donating it to the synagogue. Recently this synagogue merged with another to become the Beth Tzedec Congregation. The new Beth Tzedec now administers the cemetery and it holds about 50 graves.

Today [1991] Calgary has three Jewish cemeteries. The Chevra Kadisha (Burial Society) looks after preparations for all three. All memorial services are conducted from the Jewish Memorial Chapel on 17th Avenue for all the congregations.

CONCLUSION

Thousands of cars pass the old Jewish cemetery every day but very few people realize it is there. It sits high above the Macleod Trail, just out of view. Traveling south on the Macleod Trail, it is on the west side, just a few blocks past Cemetery Hill. Today the cemetery can be reached in minutes from downtown so it is hard to imagine that in 1904 it was quite far by horse and buggy from the city proper. The cemetery gate is always open. Inside, even though the grounds encompass almost an entire city block, the cemetery still seems quite small. The combination of Hebrew and English inscriptions on headstones are the only clues that suggest that somehow this land is different.

[Ed note: In 2005, a new cemetery was established – and the Chevra Kadisha relocated – to Highway 22x & 37th St SW, and the 17th Ave site was sold for redevelopment. It should be noted that the cemetery gates are no longer left open, but can be accessed by code.]

Reading Jay's article 30 years later brings up interesting thoughts about land, and what the Erlton parcel might have been before the city sold it to our community. From its hilltop location, without houses or other development, one could have seen the river both in the northeast, towards what is now Stampede Park, and to the northwest, not far from where a small park called Mok'nstsis, a Blackfoot word meaning 'elbow', was established in 2012. The park's location, and the location of the Jewish community of Calgary, is in the traditional territory of the Kainai, Piikani, Siksika, Stoney-Nakoda and Tsuut'ina Nations, and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

Twenty-Two Days of Evacuation

Almost 500,000 Jewish men and women served in the Soviet Armed Forces during World War II. The Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, but this agreement was broken when Hitler launched an invasion of Soviet-held territories in 1941. This attack started the war on the Eastern Front, and the Soviet Union joined the Allied forces. Victory Day, observed on May 9th in Russia, Israel, and many countries in eastern Europe, commemorates the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in 1945.

Many members of southern Alberta's Jewish communities emigrated from the former Soviet Union, and many carried memories, both civilian and military, of WWII. The following story was written by Anna Golant[†] in 1991, when she participated in a project of the then-Calgary Jewish Centre Seniors Department, called "Ani Zocher: I Remember".

By Anna Golant

When WWII started we were living in USSR. My father was called to serve in the army on the first day of the war. My brother and I were left with my mother. My brother was thirteen and I was eighteen years old at the time.

We were told to leave the city as the Germans were moving in. However, it was practically impossible to leave as there was no transportation available at all. Fortunately, my mother found people who were coming through the city; they had a horse and buggy. We joined them, they allowed us to put some of our possessions on their buggy, and we walked. Our whole family was coming with us. There was my mother, brother and myself, my aunt and uncle, and another uncle with two children.

We left the city on June 22nd, 1941. We walked for twenty-two days. It was a very rainy summer and there was mud everywhere. By the end of the day, we were totally soaked. At night we would sleep in the empty barns and try to dry off but in the morning, we'd be soaked again within a few minutes. The Russian army was retreating and many times they would spend the nights in the same barns with us. They would also share their food with us. Without them we would have had no food at all.

Along the way we were constantly bombed. The German planes would come and the sky would turn black. They would start bombing and the Russian soldiers would scream at us to lie down. We would fall down into the mud. After each bombing, we would bury the dead and help the wounded. Those who lost loved ones were crying and screaming for help.

Eventually we reached a city called Uman. It was very quiet there. We were very happy and thought that finally we would be able to rest. There were many people like us in the city, and we were all allowed to sleep in the school. During the day we went to a restaurant, there was even music playing. It was so peaceful that we thought that we were far away from the war. We were wrong.

Our first night in the city disaster struck. Germans had surrounded it. Paratroopers landed at night and we were in the middle of a war zone again. At 4:00 am we heard a lot of noise coming from the street.

When we looked, all we saw were panicked people running. We were all scared. We started running as well. The few possessions that we had brought with us were left behind. We only had the clothes on our backs. I managed to grab a gas mask and a small bag with all our family photographs.

There was much confusion and no matter what direction we went, we met the army and they told us that the Germans were that way. There was nowhere left to go. They were everywhere. However, we saw a commander who knew my father. He recognized us and offered to help us. He took us into his army car and drove us out of the city using the only path that was not guarded by the Germans. During all the confusion, we lost all our family. Now it was just brother and myself. We did not know what happened to the rest. Once we were outside the city, he let us out and we started

walking again. Thus we walked with no food or clothing until we reached the river Volga. On the Volga we got some help and were sent to Ufo, a city in Bashkirskaya republic. This is where I stayed until I was called to serve in the army. The photographs that were saved are with me now. I will be passing them on to my granddaughter to save for the next generation.



Anna Golant, no date.



Albert Korobok, no date

The JHSSA Southern Alberta Jewish Veterans of World War I & II Database includes over 30 men and women who served with the Soviet military before coming to make their homes in southern Alberta. We would like to expand our collection of material regarding the service and experience of these veterans. Please contact the office if you have photos or documents to share.



Arkady Shtein, no date

Shumiatcher *Continued from Page 1*

welcome Abraham was at the Bricker home, and this would have meant a lot to Abraham, who seems to have sometimes found life on the road lonely. One of the pages in the file isn't so much a letter as a journal entry, and the first several paragraphs bemoan the fact that although he had left Calgary "two weeks and one day ago", he had not yet had a letter from either his wife or his children, despite having written to them several times. His spirits must have been very low, for he then writes, "This is what I am getting as a reward for all the sacrifices which I am bringing all my life for the family. This is a tragedy of life." Thankfully, this despair was short-lived, as the next paragraph, in a different ink, says, "Coming downstairs a letter from Minuetta and Morris was handed to me by clerk, just received, they wrote it on 7th to Hafford, Saskatchewan [where he had been previously] and it was returned here. They should be pardoned."

While the file contains no letters from Luba, there is one that Abraham wrote to her on September 21, 1926, that speaks volumes about their relationship:

Dear Luba: --

On Sunday, the 21st day of September 1913, our wedding took place at 405-2nd Ave NE, Calgary Alberta.

This means that thirteen years ago we entered the bonds of matrimony and those holy bonds are still new and fresh in me as if same had taken place a very short time ago. That time flew very, very fast, it seems to me.

May we celebrate befittingly our wedding anniversary year in and year out. May we be rejoicing those moments with our hearts full of gladness and happiness in the full sense of that word. May those happy returns of that day be very, very many.

Looking back thirteen years ago we may account for and check up all sorts of moments, days, weeks, months and even years that brought us happiness, joy, rejoicing, satisfaction, contentment, but also a great deal of heartbreaking grief, sorrow, discontent, and sometimes even despair. This is then an indication that the life spent together was one full of storm hurricanes, gloom & sadness, but also full of tranquility, beautiful breezes, gladness, happiness and sunshine. This means that our life was a full one.

By right it is not thirteen years since we know one another, but longer than that; since we should figure from the time we first met and that was in September of 1907, or nineteen years ago. I believe

that I could have written a whole book on our life together since then, if not a few books in all.

I feel like saying very much indeed on this day, but I am indisposed on account of being very tired from the work, the heavy and rough roads as well as the unfavourable weather conditions prevailing just now in the country. I am being shaken very hard while driving, but I feel that I must be carrying out my mission faithfully and I am on duty now. Will therefore say a few more words only.

Let and may those rainy, gloomy days of our life together in the past, be exchanged for days, weeks, months and years of sunshine, happiness and gladness only. May we have contentment and satisfaction ONLY from every step which we will be making in life together from now on and MAY WE NEVER KNOW OF ANY SORROW WHATEVER. It is about time that we should know of happiness alone. May our children bring us happy hours, weeks, months and years in the not far distant time. May the wishes and desires, hopes and aspirations of every one of us be realized and materialized at an early date, because I feel certain that everyone of them is of a noble and high calibre ONLY.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY.

Your Abraham

The last letter in the file, dated Dec 27, 1926, was also written to Luba. The closing paragraph reads: "Hope you had a real fine rest, my darling. Do not be lonesome, because I will be with you soon."

Abraham Shumiatcher died in January, 1974; Luba, the following October. They had been married for 60 years.



A.I. Shumiatcher, 1919. JHSSA #1169



Luba Shumiatcher, 1919

Past Programs

JHSSA was proud to participate in last November's Archives Roadshow, hosted by the Montreal Jewish Public Library. A recording of the program can be found in the Video section of our website, under the Publications tab.

The experience of Jewish mayors in Canada was the focus of our April program, co-sponsored with Temple B'nai Tikvah, featuring their scholar-in-residence, David Koffman. Local connections included Harry Veiner of Medicine Hat, and Allan Barsky of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, who, while not a local himself, was the brother of long-time-Calgarian Harry Barsky.

In early May, at a JCC Golden Age luncheon, Laura Shuler and company again regaled us with love songs and stories of romance, with an encore presentation of "Better with Schmaltz". Thanks to everyone who shared their family stories, and to the talented corps who brought such warmth to our hearts.

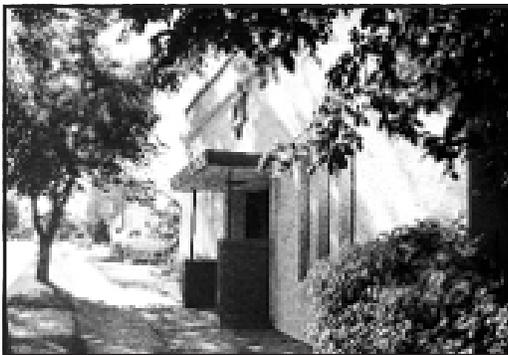
This issue's publication date coincides with Canadian Jewish History Month, which started off with a presentation by historian Ellin Bessner at the Military Museums, co-sponsored by JHSSA. Bessner's insights into the experiences of Jewish veterans never fail to educate and enlighten.

JHSSA NEWS

New Books:

JHSSA is pleased to now hold a copy of David Sidorsky's memoir *When I was (Almost) One-and-Twenty*. Completed just before his passing in December 2021, the book chronicles his experience of the historical happenings between November 1947 and September 1949, including the founding of the State of Israel and his service in the Israeli army. Thank you to his daughter, Emily Kronenberg, for this donation to our Local Authors collection.

Former Calgarian David Eisenstadt donated a copy of his book *Under the Radar: 30 Notable Canadian Jewish Musicians*, to the JHSSA's Harry and Martha Cohen Library. Several of the included musicians have southern Alberta connections.



*Sons of Abraham Synagogue, Medicine Hat, AB.
Image Courtesy of the Esplanade Archives. 0760.0125*

New Display Boards:

Anyone coming into the JCC since January will have noticed the wonderful new JHSSA display board in the main entryway. Our old boards served us well, and will continue to be put to use in other parts of the Centre, but the new board, framed into an existing window well, has been enthusiastically received by JCC staff and patrons.

Upcoming and Other Events:

Canadian Jewish History Month sees JHSSA well-represented in several locations around Calgary, starting with the JCC. When you're at the Centre in May, take time to explore the timeline panels JHSSA originally created for our "A Joyful Harvest" exhibit, featuring highlights of our community's development, from the late 1880s through to Alberta's centennial in 2005.

The "Calgary's Story" display team at Calgary Public Library will be doing a remount this year, and the library itself will again post a list of recommended Jewish books.

For this summer's Historic Calgary Week, JHSSA is pleased to welcome former Calgarian Norman Ravvin, who's been digging into the history of his family – and the Jewish community – in the area around the old Mewata Armoury. Ravvin is a respected author and a gifted raconteur, and we're looking forward to the stories he'll share. Keep your eye on your email for specific program information and timing, once it becomes available.

Calgary-Yukon Connection:

With information provided by JHSSA, the Jewish Cultural Society of Yukon has revamped its website (jcsy.org) and historic display panels to include mention of Joseph Barron, one of Yukon's earliest merchants. He left Dawson in 1915 to be closer to his sons, Jacob (JB) and Abe, who had settled in Calgary after graduating law school in the United States.

The Yukon society has also revised their historical booklet, which we hope to add to the Harry and Martha Cohen Library when it becomes available.

New Tribute Cards:

Tribute cards are a wonderful way for members of our community to reach out to friends and family while supporting the activities of JHSSA. We are pleased to announce that we have added seven new images to our assortment, including several from our smaller communities. Our new favourites include Marcia Kalef riding in the Stampede Parade, and an angled perspective of the Sons of Abraham Synagogue in Medicine Hat. We would like to express our thanks to Esplanade Archives in Medicine Hat, who have granted us permission to use the image at no charge.

Fond Farewell:

JHSSA bids a fond farewell to Kevin Ko, who has completed his contracted work on our photo collection. While there is still much to be done, the inventory system that he established is sure to stand us in good stead as we move forward with this vital aspect of our holdings. We wish him well in his new position with the University of Calgary archives.

New Photo:



*Samuel Isaac Levitt and Family, on the farm near Hubalta, 1937.
Back row (l-r): Samuel Isaac Levitt, Rae Levitt, Rebecca Levitt, Mrs Freidman, Jack Levitt, Rose Levitt, Miriam Levitt
Middle row, seated (l-r): Bill Levitt, Maxine/Mary Levitt, ? Freidman? (Rose Levitt's sister), baby Mel Levitt, Becky Levitt
Front, stretched out: Louis Levitt
Source: Terry Levitt*

2023 Membership List

Membership donations are used to support the projects and operations of the JHSSA, which is an independent, self-sustaining organization. We issue official tax receipts for all donations. Our membership year is from September to August. Welcome to our new members. Special thanks to all those members who have made donations beyond their membership fee. Please inform our office of any inadvertent omissions or corrections so we can include them in our next issue.

In addition to our
Anonymous members:

Individuals

Brian Belzberg
Sheila Bermack
Annabelle Bondar
Sarabeth Carnat
Jeri Churgin
Bernice Cohen
Donna Crawford
Alberto De Mayo
Tish Dvorkin
Jennifer Eisenberg
David Eisenstadt
Reva Faber
Lynda Feingold
Barry Finkelman
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Linda Jeffery
Lily Joffe
Irena Karshenbaum
Rachel Kerr-Lapsley
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Emily Kronenberg (in
memory of her father
David Sidorsky)
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Phil & Ruth Ullman
Fred & Joyce Zemans

President's Message *Continued from Page 1*

In December JHSSA was featured as part of a cross-Canada archives roadshow. Much appreciation to our Office Manager and Program Coordinator Katie Baker for her excellent presentation on our archival resources.

If you have not yet checked out our library catalogue available online thanks to funding from the Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation, I encourage you to do so. We are continually adding works related to the Jewish experience in southern Alberta. Our Local Authors collection contains two Yiddish poetry books by former Calgarian Esther Shumiatcher-Hirshbein. While all books can be viewed in our office, many can also be borrowed by JHSSA members.

Please mark your calendars for a Historic Calgary Week presentation by former Calgarian Norman Ravvin. Consult our website for details on this and other upcoming programs.

We are pleased to announce that we have been assigned casino dates September 12 and 13 and look forward to your support in staffing the casinos. Casino funds are a key source of financial support for our operations.

Thank you so much to all our members, board, and staff for your support and dedication. Welcome to our new members and extra gratitude to those members who increased their level of annual support. We are also indebted to major donors such as the Alvin & Mona Libin Foundation who annually provide significant funding to our organization. It is thanks to this support that JHSSA can preserve and provide access to valuable pieces of our local history such as the Shumiatcher papers featured in this issue. We are grateful to those of our LIFE & LEGACY donors who have formalized their commitment and encourage those who have not yet participated in this program to please consider becoming a

legacy donor to ensure that your support for JHSSA will continue in perpetuity. A future with ongoing funding for our various programs ensuring our past is not forgotten is a welcome goal.

I am pleased to welcome Donna Crawford and Irena Karshenbaum to the board and thank outgoing member Marni Besser for her contributions over the last six years.

Wishing you all a happy Shavuot, and a warm and relaxing summer.



Harry Sanders and Trudy Cowan, proud recipients of Historical Society of Alberta Queen's Platinum Jubilee medals, 2022. JHSSA #AA3260

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The editors welcome submissions for publication relating to areas of Calgary and Southern Alberta Jewish history. All articles should be typed, documented and sent for consideration.

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