ירשה

Heritage – Yerusha Winter 2015 Adar 5775 VOLUME 17, NO. 2 www.jahsena.ca

## HERITAGE

The Journal of THE JEWISH ARCHIVES & HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF EDMONTON & NORTHERN ALBERTA

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## Meyer Adler's Vegreville Store, ca 1928



JAHSENA Archives

Read more about the Adlers' life in Vegreville on page 5



From the Archivist's Desk..., by PAUL GIFFORD

Winter 2015

s most of you know, in 2013 we  $oldsymbol{\Gamma}$  saw the culmination of a several years project to open a recreation of the HB Kline Jewelry Store along Fort Edmonton Park's 1920s Street. What you may not be aware of is that JAHSENA provided funding to the Park to pay for another full time interpreter position through the 2014 season, with the understanding that this would result in the Kline Store's categorization as an A Site, meaning that there would always be somebody in the Store during open hours. I went down to visit the store and meet with our contacts on the Interpretive Staff supervisory team in early November, and was left with a good impression of the various programs which have been carried out over the course of the season, and I look forward to collaborating with the staff at Fort Edmonton Park on some ideas for new programs in the 2015 season. We've included an edited copy of the final report from the Park in this newsletter, and I'd love to hear any feedback from the general community that may not have been covered.

This fall saw our Annual General Meeting take place on October 30th, wherein City of Edmonton Archivist Kathryn Ivany gave a fascinating talk about the early history of Edmonton and the growth of a thriving city out of a small prairie town. Our thanks again to Ms. Ivany.

#### FAMILY FONDS

As I have been familiarizing myself with our files, it has become apparent that we have some gaps in our Family Fonds. For those unfamiliar with our

collection, we don't just collect information and files from the various organizations in Edmonton and its surrounding environs; we also collect information on the various family members of our community. If you or a relative has a family tree, a personal history, some anecdote about a grandparent, even a Bar/Bat Mitzvah invitation, we'd love to preserve it for future generations! To this end, starting with this edition we will periodically be including a blank family tree form; if you're able and willing to fill one out, we'd love to get them for our records. And if you've never done so before, give our office a call to see what information we might already have about your family history and come down to take a look; we're always happy to have visitors.

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, Archival Assistant Colleen Paull and Past President Jini Vogel are in the process of catching up on our backlog of oral history interviews. As our community ages, it is essential that we make sure to record these stories for posterity.

#### E-NEWSLETTER

Over the past few months we have started a new feature in the Jewish Federation's weekly e-newsletter: the History Question of the Week. Each week, we have been featuring an historical question, along with the answer to last week's question and a related picture. If you've yet to see it, I encourage you to take a look! If you have, let us know what you think! Are you enjoying our questions? Wish we'd focus on a different topic? Have a suggestion for a question? We'd love to hear from you!

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### ירשה HERITAGE

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## Rural Beginnings: Early 20th Century Jewish Life in Small Prairie Towns

For the winter 2015 newsletter, we are excited to present the first piece of a multi-part series on Jewish life in small Western Canadian towns during the twentieth century. In between the years of the late nineteenth century to the start of the First World War, millions of Jews immigrated from Eastern and Central Europe to North America. Some of them moved directly to Western Canada while others spent time in the United States before settling in the Canadian West.

This series of articles will explore the lives of some of the earliest Jewish families to settle in different parts of the Prairie Provinces. We hope that their stories will provide a textured account of their diverse experiences while highlighting some of the common threads that unite the experience of Jewish families living in small towns across the prairies.

In this article, we hear from Judge Larry Witten about Perdue, Saskatchewan and Dr. Bernie Adler about Vegreville, Alberta. As you will see, their experiences growing up in Vegreville and Perdue were very different, especially concerning their Jewish education. However, both have very fond memories of growing up in small towns, and both are proud about their strong involvement with the Jewish community in Edmonton.

#### Memories of Perdue, Saskatchewan

BY LARRY WITTEN



A be Witten was born in Radzilin, Ukraine in 1900 and emigrated to Winnipeg with his family in 1909. His father died in 1910, his mother subsequently remarried and around 1916 the family, for reasons unknown, moved to Perdue, Saskatchewan, a metropolis of about 250 people where his stepfather purchased a general store. He operated the store until about 1930 when Abe Witten purchased the store and his mother and stepfather moved to Denzil, Saskatchewan.

Anne (Pollock) Witten was born in St. Thomas, Ontario in 1908. In 1914 her family moved to Biggar, Saskatchewan,



Anne Witten and family, Provided by Witten family

some twenty miles from Perdue. Anne and Abe were married in Biggar in 1927 at the home of Max and Becky Hock, one of three other Jewish families in Biggar.

The newlyweds shared living quarters behind the Perdue store with Abe's moth-

er and stepfather for a few years until the elders moved to Denzil, Saskatchewan. Not an ideal situation and certainly not likely to happen in today's society.

Abe and Anne's children, Norman,

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#### RURAL BEGINNINGS

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Lynn and Larry were all born and raised in Perdue until the family moved to Edmonton in 1949.

During the family's time in Perdue, Abe operated the store known as Perdue Farmers Supply which, as you might expect, was very close to their home. Abe would go home daily for lunch and a nap so one of the young children would look after the store during his or her school lunch break. Abe taught the children how to fill orders, take telephone orders, make change, mark down the charged items and how to watch for one particular lady who was a kleptomaniac. Abe had an arrangement with the lady's husband to just mark down as a charged item any items she stole. Nobody in the village except the Witten family and her husband knew that she was a kleptomaniac. Another situation unlikely to happen in today's society.

Saturday nights in the store was a true country experience as the farm families came to Perdue to shop, and for the ladies and children to enjoy the excitement of the Saturday night movie on the hard benches while the men would go to the beer parlor. The families would come to the store where the ladies would bring in for barter milk, cream, home made butter, fresh eggs and other items. The men would bring in furs they had trapped including wolf, coyote, beaver, mink, rabbit, etc. One of Larry's Saturday night jobs was to take in the furs, stack or hang them depending on the size and provide to Abe the name of the farmer and the number and type of furs delivered. Abe then resold the furs to St. Louis Furs operated in Saskatoon by Anne's brother Hy Pollock. Another situation unlikely to happen in today's society.

One of the other jobs carried out by Larry and perhaps his siblings was to deliver by bicycle any telephone orders filled in the store. As well, the children learned which farmer's wife made salty



Anne Witten, ca 1925, Provided by Witten family

butter or otherwise, whose eggs had the yellowest yolks and whose cream was the thickest, as the customers would specify their preferences. This was important as the cream, milk, butter and eggs were kept in a cool dugout which was more easily accessible by little people. Knowledge of who made what and who wanted what meant fewer trips down and up the ladder. Another situation unlikely to happen in today's society.

The Wittens were the only Jewish family in Perdue but that was mostly irrelevant, except that Anne came from a kosher home while Abe did not. As you might expect there wasn't a kosher butcher in Perdue and at the outset of their marriage they purchased meat from a kosher butcher in Saskatoon, some forty miles away, which meant that meat was delivered by train or bus. Legend has it that after a brief period of time when Abe was having trouble with the quality of the kosher meat (or perhaps the price), he said "Anne, make a choice, either the kosher meat goes or I go." She chose Abe!

We did not receive any Jewish education and I have little memory of celebrating Jewish holidays, although I do remember loving the fried matzoh my mother made at Passover. Travellers, mostly Jewish, would call at the store to



Abe and Anne Witten, early 1930s, Provided by Witten family

show their merchandise and I recall one man in particular who always seemed to arrive at Passover, would overnight with us, and eat what I as a youngster thought was more than his share of fried matzoh.

During the time the Wittens lived in Perdue three Jewish families, the Hocks, Packers and Spectors lived in nearby Biggar. Almost every other Sunday, weather permitting, Abe, Anne and some of the children would drive to Biggar to visit those families. Each visit was dinner and a subsequent poker game. Alternate Sundays the Biggar friends drove to

Two of Anne's brothers and their families lived in Saskatoon so there were also visits to Saskatoon but as that was a forty mile excursion those visits were not quite as frequent. Once in a while the "big city cousins" would visit us in Perdue and



Lynn, Larry and Norman Witten, ca 1937, Provided by Witten family

would love to work the hand operated water pump in the back yard, but would not be quite as fascinated by the backyard outhouse.

Although we certainly knew we were Jewish, being so did not play a major role in our lives, just as being Catholic did not play a large role in the lives of the only other family in town who was not Protestant. We were all involved in every

The Vegreville Touch

BY DANIEL ERIN, BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH DR. BERNIE ADLER



For a small town, Vegreville had a large Jewish population of ten families; the Jewish families shared good relationships and worked hard to contribute to the overall community. Healthy competition in business accompanied a supportive and friendly environment in life's other affairs. It was a close community that welcomed Jewish families from different communities with open arms.

The first Synagogue (built in 1919) brought the community closer together, and by 1931 the Jewish community was thriving to the extent that they decided to build a larger place of worship.

major social event including taking part in school Christmas Concerts and the Anglican or United Church Christmas parties. We were not excluded from anything nor did Anne and Abe discourage the children from participating in everything.

The area school was in Perdue being a four room school, grades 1-4 in one room, 5-8 in a second room, 9-10 in a third room and 11-12 in a fourth room. All students assembled together each morning before classes for announcements and to sing the National Anthem and The Lord's Prayer.

It would appear that being the only Jews in Perdue, the lack of Jewish education, participating in Christmas concerts, attending Church based Christmas parties and singing The Lord's Prayer did not leave any emotional scars as confirmed by the next paragraph.

Two weeks after the family left Perdue to reside in Edmonton, Larry attended Young Judaean Camp at Chestermere Lake and made lifelong friends. During their adult lives in Edmonton both Norman and Larry were deeply involved in the Jewish community and served on many Jewish boards and their children all attended Talmud Torah and participated in Jewish youth activities. Lynn who has lived her adult life in Toronto was for over twenty years secretary at a Toronto synagogue. Abe and Anne also made lifelong Jewish friends in Edmonton and participated fully in the Jewish community.

I have only fond memories of my small town upbringing.

Larry Witten is a retired Provincial Court Judge having served as a Judge for twentythree years and prior thereto practiced law in Edmonton for twenty seven years.



Meyer Adler in his store, February 1937, JAHSENA Archives

While growing up in Vegreville, Bernie Adler's parents wouldn't allow him to play sports, because they were worried that he would hurt his hands. This prohibition now seems prescient because, as many know, Bernie went on to make a living with his hands as a dentist after graduating from the University of Alberta (U of A) in 1957. However,

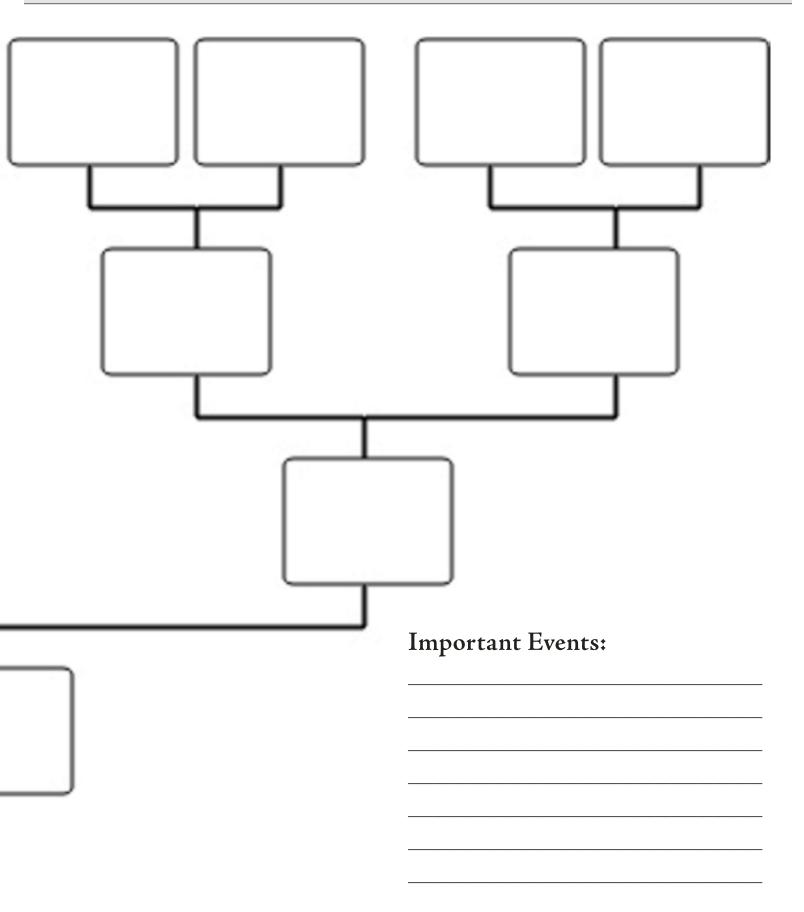
long before becoming a dentist, Bernie was also a studious musician, which is why his parents originally outlawed sports. He started playing piano at age seven—practicing for two hours a day—and made it to Grade Ten of the Royal Conservatory of Music. At his graduation, Bernie proudly played Chopin's

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding this form, please don't hesitate to contact us at the JAHSENA office; we're always happy to help.

are able to fill in any further information such as birth dates, place of birth, careers,

volunteer work, etc we'd love to take that in as well.



#### RURAL BEGINNINGS

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Impromptu No. 1 in A Flat Major.

Dr. Adler's parents—Meyer and
Libby—arrived in Vegreville in 1927
after emigrating from New York. Their
sole possessions for the journey included
coats, boots, and a gun. They chose the
small Alberta town because Libby had
an uncle living in Mundare who owned
a small building in Vegreville, where she
eventually opened a small second-hand
store that sold furs, hides, and furniture.

Mr. and Mrs. Adler built a small home behind this store. The house lacked plumbing and running water, so very often Bernie and his siblings (Sidney, Ted, Eli, and Diane) had to haul water and coal into the house. Moreover, the young siblings would have to share the same bath water, with the oldest getting to go first and the youngest last. After their baths, the siblings all shared the same bed. Unfortunately, their small house was destroyed during a fire, but the family broke down a sidewall and windows in order to save their piano.

From a humble, parsimonious start in Canada, Bernie's father opened a small restaurant that would eventually evolve into a grocery store and, finally, a department store that sold the finest goods in Vegreville. The store had a beautiful selection of high-quality men's suits, shoes, gaudy ties, and ladies' dresses. (In fact, Bernie still wears some of these suits today.) After graduating



Young Bernie Adler, JAHSENA Archives

from high school, Bernie worked in the store until going to the U of A, but he went back to Vegreville after one year of university to work at the store for seven days per week, often staying until 1am.

Bernie fondly remembers going to Cheder on Mrs. Bella Olyan's back porch, where he and other Jewish children learned how to speak Yiddish and read Hebrew; Mrs. Olyan's Cheder was an essential component of Jewish education for Jewish children growing up in Vegreville. Mrs. Olyan also encouraged children to join the Young Judea Group,



Bernie & Miriam Adler at Klondike Days, ca 1968, JAHSENA Archives

which gave Bernie and others the opportunity to go to Jewish camps and meet other Jewish children. Bernie was always excited to attend these camps and meet new friends. The Adler's also kept a kosher home; they sourced their kosher food from Edmonton. Indeed, Bernie remembers that his mother, Libby, meticulously ensured that the family kept kosher.

Bernie has fond memories of growing up in Vegreville. He led a sheltered life and had the opportunity to get a diverse and rewarding education.

## On Display

#### At the JCC...

Currently on display at the new JCC you will find an exhibit of artifacts from our collections. Come visit us at 10220-156 St., Suite 200 to see the exhibit and our new offices. If you would like to donate a book, document or a piece of memorabilia to add to our collection, call 780-489-2809.

#### On the Web...

Check out the Archives Society of Alberta Exhibit prepared for Archives Week 2012, entitled "Looking Good, Alberta, Fashion in the Archives," at www.archivesalberta.org. You will find five photos from our collection, one of which, a photo of Lou Moss Menswear is featured in a new 2014 calendar, which is available from our office. Also check out the Peter Owen exhibit online at the same website under "Letters from the Trunk." Old issues of our newsletter, Heritage/ Yerusha are available on our website, www.jahsena.ca.

#### FROM THE ARCHIVIST

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Remembrance Day 2014, JAHSENA Archives

#### **New Book!**

Finally, our big announcement: JAHSENA is in the process of preparing another book for publication. I'll keep the specifics vague at the moment, but we will be orienting this project in a somewhat different manner than our first publication. Rather than looking at families, we will instead focus on a number of brief sketches about Jewish individuals who have made outstanding contributions to life in Edmonton throughout the past century and change, illuminated by pictures which many of you have yet to see from our pictorial archives. More details will be released later in the year as the writing moves on, so keep an eye on our section in the Jewish Federation's weekly e-newsletter, and of course this space in future editions of Heritage.



Archivist Paul Gifford laying wreath,
JAHSENA Archives

I have been with JAHSENA now for more than six months, and I've happily had a chance to meet or speak with a great many of you. Your kind welcome and patience as I've made the rounds and introduced myself has been greatly appreciated, and I look forward to meeting with those of you whom I've yet to have a chance to meet, and to the months to come.

#### Casino Announcement

As most of you are aware, one of our major sources of funds is our bi-annual casino fundraiser. Well, the time has come again, and we will be holding our next Casino on June 28th and 29th of this year at our usual location at the Palace Casino in West Edmonton Mall. This fundraiser

is essential in allowing us to continue our work in preserving the cultural artifacts of our community for generations to come, so please consider contacting the office at either (780)489-2809, or jahsena@shaw.ca to volunteer for a shift; after all, it comes with a free meal!

## DONATION CARDS

JAHSENA now has donation cards with historic pictures on them available for purchase. Mark your special simchas by sending a donation to JAHSENA. Contact the office for more details at: 780-489-2809. We have received the following donations:

#### MAZEL TOV

- To George & Judy Goldsand on the occasion of their grandson Ross'
  Bar Mitzvah, from Joseph & Odette Masliyah
- To Sandy Shuler on her 60th birthday, from George & Judy
- To Jane and Edgar Karstaedt on the occasion of their 60th Anniversary, from the JAHSENA Board
- To Lilian Green on her 90th Birthday, from the JAHSENA Board
- To Gillian Horwitz for receiving the City of Edmonton Salute to Excellence Award for Community Service, from the JAHSENA Board

#### SYMPATHY

- To Jini Vogel with wishes for a speedy recovery, from the JAHSENA Board of Directors
- To Marcy Hutton and family for the loss of Drew Hutton, from George & Judy
- To Tessie Finkelstein of Vancouver, on the death of husband, Norton, from George and Judy Goldsand
- To Howard Davidow and Anita Sky, on the death of brother-in-law, Norton Finkelstein, from the JAHSENA Board
- To Hersh and Lois Sorokin, on the death of brother-in-law, Norton Finkelstein, from George and Judy Goldsand
- To Ruth Nolan and family on the death of Harry Nolan, from the JAHSENA Board
- To Margaret Frohlich and family on the death of Sam Frohlich, from the JAHSENA Board

# HB Kline Store on 1920 Street in

Fort Edmonton Park



Eye chart activity in front of Kline's, Provided by Fort Edmonton Park

The following is an edited version of a report submitted to JAHSENA by John Kubicek, the Public Interpretation Coordinator (Post Railway Era) at Fort Edmonton Park, regarding our provision of funds for the purposes of hiring an additional interpreter for 1920s Street this past season.

In 2014, Fort Edmonton Park received funding from the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta (JAHSENA) for one costumed historical interpreter position on 1920 Street for five days a week, over the full season. The purpose of this funding was to ensure more consistent staffing and interpretation of the recreation of Herman Kline's Jewelry Store.

As a result of this additional interpreter position, there was a sufficient complement of costumed historical interpreters on 1920 Street to be able to designate Kline's Jewelry Store as a continuously staffed location, seven days a week, from Victoria Day Weekend

in May until Labour Day, and during weekends in September until the end of the season. Only one other historical building on 1920 Street was continuously staffed. In contrast, during the previous summer, staffing limitations only allowed for an interpreter in Kline's at certain times of the day on certain days of the week.

One major result of this continuous staffing at Kline's was that many more visitors discovered that the shop was not just a storefront, and could be entered, ensuring a significant increase in visitors going inside to explore. While visitors were inside the shop with the interpreter, the door was left open to attract others, and when there were no visitors inside the shop, staff positioned themselves outside to invite passing visitors to come in.

During the summer, a number of visitors came into the shop and talked about their own personal experiences with Kline's Jewelry store when it was still on Jasper Avenue. One couple told

a story of shopping for a wedding ring in Kline's several decades ago, and then showed the interpreter the ring in question. It was rewarding to see people connecting with the building on a personal level and sharing their experiences.

Another success of the continuous staffing of Kline's was the ability to provide a detailed explanation to visitors about the furnishings and artifacts and what they represented. The costumed interpreters were able to build on the visitor's curiosity and interest by detailing the larger story of local Jewish history.

To support the increased interpretation of Kline's, several new activities were introduced during the 2014 season. This included an era-appropriate eye chart for an eye exam activity which interpreters invited visitors to participate in. This activity was usually done in the space at the back of the store, but occasionally on the street as well so as to capture attention. City of Edmonton artifacts curators also provided silver spoons for interpreters to use for a

polishing activity, to support the "living history" illusion and spark conversations. Finally, a Hebrew letters program, which showed visitors how to write their name in Hebrew, was developed by two of the staff with Jewish backgrounds.

To supplement these activities, a photo album detailing local Jewish settlement history using photographs found in the JAHSENA publication The First Century of Jewish Life in Edmonton and Northern Alberta, was created and placed in Kline's for interpreters to show to visitors. This album was very popular, as interpreters used it to enhance their conversations with visitors not only about H.B. Kline and his family, but also other notable members of the early Edmonton Jewish community.

Prior to the season, new training materials were developed for 1920 Street interpreters to enhance the interpretation in Kline's, including more readily accessible information about the artifacts in Kline's, the history of early Jewish immigration to Edmonton, the optometry profession in the 1920s, and background on H.B. Kline and partner Abe Fratkin. In addition, the 1920 Staff History Manual for interpreters was revised and sections on Kline's Jewelry Store and early Jewish immigration were added. Then JAHSENA archivist Debby Shoctor also delivered a training session to interpretation staff before the season began in May.

Overall, this partnership was clearly a successful venture which resulted in an enhanced experience for Park visitors and greatly increased engagement of visitors with the Kline's and early Jewish community-builders narrative.

Make sure to check out the Kline store, along with the other historical re-creations! Fort Edmonton Park will reopen for the summer season in May. For more information their website is available at: http:// www.fortedmontonpark.ca



Fort Edmonton Park reconstruction of Kline's Jewelry Store, Provided by Fort Edmonton Park



H. B. Kline store, 1922, JAHSENA Archives

#### JAHSENA Recent Acquisitions

These items have recently found their way into the archives, and are available for research purposes:

Ex-Edmontonian Eliot Phillipson has recently written and published a beautiful history of his extended family, and he has generously donated a copy for our archives;

A curling trophy from the 1960s was donated by Roberta Sheckter;

A copy of the 1989 Jewish Times and 1988 Gala Dinner honouring Larry and Tulane Rollingher was donated by Tulane Rollingher;

Alpern wedding pictures were donated by Sylvia Alpern;

Various pictures were donated by Jane Karstaedt;

Photos of Fred and Rose Swartz were donated by their daughter Sandra Shuler;

Various photos and 15 books were donated by Stephanie Hendin;

Marsha Bercov donated 8 books across a spectrum of topics relating to Jewish life;

Evelyn Schayer gave us more than two dozen books, vinyl records, and a treasure trove of old family letters from Bebe & Hymie Lieberman:

A copy of the Hadassah-WIZO cookbook, donated by Leo Superstein;

Cyril Sapiro sent us a copy of the 1956 and 1957 Westglen yearbooks;

We would also like to thank Rick Vogel for his donation of a new printer for the office, and our Archivist Paul Gifford for his donation of a large number of assorted office supplies.

As always, Sharon Abbott has kept a close eye on any articles about the community at large which might be of interest to us. Thanks, Sharon!

Unfortunately, due to space issues, for the foreseeable future we will no longer be accepting donations to the Jewish Federation Library. Please contact Beth Shalom synagogue or the Jewish Drop In Centre if you'd like to donate collections relating to Jewish history or Judaism in general.

We are still accepting donations of books relevant to local family or organisational history. Should you have any questions about donations, please contact our office.

#### "FROM PEDLARS TO PATRIARCHS: A LEGACY REMEMBERED" and "BITTERSWEET MEMORIES: THE WAR YEARS"

The Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta is taking orders for copies of "From Pedlars to Patriarchs: A Legacy Remembered," and its sequel: "Bittersweet Memories: The War Years" its documentary films about the history of the Edmonton Jewish Community. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of these films, they are available on DVD for \$18. Please contact the Archives office at 780-489-2809.





#### Help Us Preserve Our Past for the Future!

I (we) would like to become part of the continuing quest into our historical past by joining the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta in the category marked. A charitable receipt will be issued. Membership for other than individuals includes spouses. Membership includes an annual subscription to Heritage/Yerusha, the Society's newsletter, published 3 times a year.

Enclosed is my cheque for \$ Payable to the Jewish Archives and Historical Society of Edmonton and Northern Alberta (JAHSENA).

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	I have historical material that I would like to donate Please call me				
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