

## The Prairie Provinces

### Introduction

Jews started coming to the Canadian West in the 1880s for the same reasons as other immigrants: to escape religious persecution in their European homelands, and for the promise of vast tracts of cheap land. More specific Jewish reasons for immigration were to escape pogroms in Russia, or to avoid conscription into the Russian Army. Some came for the gold rush, and some were merely following the maxim, “Go West, Young Man.”

While many started out in farming colonies run by the Jewish Colonization Association, the Baron de Hirsch Society or the Montefiore Society, most of these ventures eventually failed, as the Jews of Eastern Europe insofar as they had farming experience, were primarily mixed-crop farmers, and the climate and soil of the prairie provinces was not conducive to this kind of farming. It didn't help that they were mostly given land in the infertile and arid Palliser Triangle. When the failure of their farms forced them to move off their colonies, the Jews tended to migrate first to the small towns, where they set up general stores.

While the general store was the popular choice for a business, there were also Jewish clothing stores, Jewish doctors embarking on their first practice. Jewish teachers and nurses could be found in rural areas, as could a number of Jewish farmers, those who raised and sold cattle, fur traders, hotel owners, and auto dealers. There were also Jewish pedlars, who traveled their small town routes and were treated as long-lost relatives when they met other Jews in a town or village.

Over time, the Jews in small towns gravitated to the larger centres of Edmonton and Calgary, where the constantly increasing Jewish populations had developed religious and educational institutions and provided social and business opportunities. As

Edmontonian Joe Shoctor noted:

There were three constants in small town western prairie life: the grain elevators, the Chinese restaurants and the Jewish general stores. They have all but disappeared. The desire – no the need for Jewish and higher education and a Jewish cultural atmosphere denuded small town Alberta [and Saskatchewan] of its Jews.

## **Small Towns and Farming Colonies**

### **Saskatchewan**

The first Jewish immigrants to Saskatchewan came in the last days of the nineteenth century. Saskatchewan's first Jewish resident was Max Goldstein, a Russian-born tailor who opened a store in Fort Qu'Appelle in 1877. He also served as a quartermaster during the second Riel Rebellion in 1885. In 1901, there were a total of 198 Jews in all of the Northwest Territories. The first settlement was formed near Moosomin, also called New Jerusalem, in 1882. The oldest established Jewish colony was formed near Wapella in 1888. By 1892 there were 20 families. Wapella was followed by the colony at Hirsch near Estevan in 1892, where the first Synagogue in Saskatchewan was built. It is home to the oldest Jewish cemetery in the Province, and initially hosted 47 families from Russia. The Lipton colony came in 1901, with 40

families, and in 1906, Edenbridge was founded, then colonies at Sonnenfeld (1906) and Hoffer.

In 1926, the Canadian Pacific Railroad finally reached the colony of Sonnenfeld. At the same time, the Jewish Colonization Association purchased an additional 8800 acres of land for resettlement of more Jews. That colony reached its peak population at the end of the 1920s with 217 people. The Edenbridge Colony (literally, Yidn Bridge, or Jew's Bridge) was settled by Lithuanian Jews who had lived in South Africa. It peaked at 232 in 1919, but had dropped to 187 by 1931, when it celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the colony. At that time the community had a synagogue, community hall, two public schools, a young person's club, a dramatic society, a Yiddish newspaper and regular classes in Hebrew, Yiddish and religion. The Edenbridge synagogue and cemetery are still standing, and the ark from the Sonnenfeld colony is now in the Montefiore Synagogue at Heritage Park, Calgary.

The small towns of Saskatchewan were also home to many Jewish families, who mostly ran the general stores. By the mid-1920s, there were Jews in Melfort, Kamsack, Yorkton, Melville, Estevan, Weyburn, North Battleford and Moose Jaw. Most of these towns had their own synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, Talmud Torahs and cultural organizations. One of the largest of these communities was Moose Jaw, whose synagogue, the House of Israel, was completed in 1926 thanks to funds raised from both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. They also had a long-standing B'nai Brith lodge.

At its peak in 1931, the Jewish population of Saskatchewan reached 5,047, and the numbers have been declining ever since. The 2001 census counted 2,090 Jews in the

Province, which has had a negative population growth in its general population for many years.

### **Northern Alberta**

There were a good number of small towns and villages in northern Alberta in the first half of the century where Jews made their homes and started their first businesses. Often there would be a single Jewish family and they usually owned a general store.

In most of these towns, Jews were active in the general life of their communities and served in chambers of commerce, town councils and in some instances as mayors of communities. Although they lived under conditions that separated them from larger Jewish communities, they did not abandon their religious beliefs, customs and traditions. Many made the long treks to Edmonton or Vegreville to celebrate Jewish holidays and visit with relatives or to buy kosher meat.

Vegreville and Camrose were two communities with larger populations of Jews. By 1919, the Jewish community of Vegreville was established with a synagogue on 47<sup>th</sup> Ave., off 49<sup>th</sup> St. By 1931, the community had grown and decided to build a larger place on Main Street and 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue. When the bylaws of the Vegreville Hebrew Association were approved in 1933, one of the conditions governing any future sale of the synagogue property was that the funds were to be donated to Jewish causes in Palestine. In 1973, when the Agudas Israel Synagogue was sold, the funds were donated to the State of Israel and eventually used to build a synagogue in Kibbutz Alumim, Israel.

By the 1920s, several Jewish families had settled in Camrose and the surrounding villages, and there was a unique Hadassah group composed of women from Camrose, Wetaskiwin, Ponoka, Lacombe and Red Deer.

Elhanan Hanson ran a general store in Northern Alberta and wrote stories of the fur traders in Yiddish, which he later published as “Treyder Ed and Other Stories of the Canadian North.” One of Alberta’s early pioneers, Martin Nordegg (formerly Cohn), an immigrant from Silesia around 1906, built the largest mine in Alberta and created a model town that bears his name to this day.

### **Central Alberta Colonies**

The Montefiore community, settled by transplanted European Jews who had arrived mainly from North Dakota, was the largest in Central Alberta. The synagogue was built in 1913 in the south central Alberta farming community now known as Sibbald, which was the center of the colony of Jewish immigrants who had settled there in 1910. The building served about 30 Jewish families as their synagogue, school and community centre until the harsh farming conditions of the Great Depression forced most residents to move elsewhere. This building has since been purchased and restored by the Calgary Jewish Community, and moved to Heritage Park in Calgary. Other central Alberta farming colonies included Rumsey/Trochu, founded in 1906/07, and Alsask/Montefiore, on the Saskatchewan border, founded in 1910, mostly by families originating in Russia who had previously farmed in the US.

### **Pine Lake**

In the early 1890s, fifteen families, comprising some 70 men, women and children, settled around Blank's Lake, on or near Sections 28 and 33 of Township 36, Range 25, West of the 4<sup>th</sup> Meridian near Red Deer, Alberta. Rabbi Blank, the new community's leader, had a modest log cabin built on the southwestern edge of the small lake that was later to bear his name. The rest of the Jewish settlers lived in tiny shacks or dugouts nearby.

The fledgling colony had very limited resources. The settlers had some seed potatoes, but very little in the way of seed grain. Shortly after the colony started, Rabbi Blank went to Red Deer with most of the community's money to buy a horse and a gun. Tragically, while hunting shortly thereafter, the Rabbi dropped the gun, which then went off and killed the horse. The poor man purportedly cried out "I am ruined!" The weather in Central Alberta in the early 1890s was very cold and dry. As it was, the Blank's Lake colonists had very little in the way of farming experience. Virtually their only food source was some potatoes they had been able to grow, as well as some fish they had caught in Pine Lake.

Eventually, the Russo-Jewish Relief Committee in London, England, learned of the destitution at the Blank's Lake Colony. In May, 1894, Joseph Jacobs, chair of the Relief Committee, arranged to have \$400 sent to help the colonists.

The money was spent on several bushels of grain and sacks of flour, and a number of horses. Unfortunately, the colonists had already pledged their small 1894 crop for some desperately-needed farm equipment, and the influx of cash was short-lived.

With the ongoing grim conditions, all but six of the families left the district, presumably for Manitoba or the United States. The Russo-Jewish Relief Committee sent

more relief money in the spring of 1896, but by the time it arrived, the colony was down to six residents. The oat crop from the previous fall had frozen and the potato crop was poor. Moreover, Rabbi Blank had signed a contract for supplies with a merchant in Red Deer and then found himself unable to pay. In the spring of 1896, the last of the Blank's Lake colonists left.

### **Lethbridge**

The first Jewish family to settle in Lethbridge was that of Harris Goodman, in 1905. In 1909, after the first Jewish death in the community, the citizens organized to buy a cemetery. By 1913, the population had grown to around 60, and in 1911, the Hebrew Congregation of Lethbridge was incorporated with 19 male members, and Rabbi Aaron Goodman was hired. By 1921 there were over 100 Jews in the city, as well as 50 in nearby communities who came in for services and celebrations. By 1935, a former church was purchased and converted into the Beth Israel Synagogue. A B'nai Brith Lodge was formed in 1939, and there were several women's groups, including Hadassah and Ladies Aid, Pioneer Women, National Council of Jewish Women, Young Judaea and BBYO. In 1952 the community hired Rabbi Morris Susman, who stayed for 10 years. The population peaked at 70 families in 1953. A new synagogue building was built in 1956, but then the population began to rapidly decline as more and more of the community decided to settle in Calgary. In early 2000, a Hillel group was established on the University of Lethbridge campus. Today, only about 30 Jews remain in Lethbridge.

### **Medicine Hat**

This community in Southeastern Alberta became a major manufacturing and farm service centre around 1900, which is when permanent Jewish settlement came to the area. In 1912 the Jewish population came together to form the Sons of Abraham congregation. They bought a Torah scroll and hired the community's first Rabbi, who also served as Shochet and Hebrew teacher. Cemetery land was donated and the first funeral was held in 1916. Later, the Jewish graves were moved to a section of the Hillside municipal Cemetery. By 1930, there were over 100 Jews in Medicine Hat, whose greater population was 9000. There were many community cultural and social activities, and in 1929, the congregation bought land for a synagogue, but did not buy a building for the site until 1938. Jewish citizen Harry Veiner served as the city's mayor from 1952-1966 and again from 1968-1974. Born in Dysart, Saskatchewan, he played for the Regina Roughriders (Later the Saskatchewan Roughriders) and was a great athlete. He also served with the Calgary Highlanders during World War II, and was invested in the Order of Canada in 1982. The community reached its peak of 57 families in the 1950s, and in 1955 the synagogue was renovated and re-dedicated. Although a few Jewish families remain, the synagogue closed in 2000.

### **Southern Farm Colonies**

In Southern Alberta, Jews could be found in many small towns and farming colonies or coal-mining villages including Bassano, Beiseker, Macleod, Irricana and Strathmore in the 1920s, and Rumsey, Munson, Olds, Rockyford, Trochu, Magrath, Pincher Creek, Red Deer, Alliance and Warner in the pre-war decades. Drumheller had the most Jews at 44 in 1931. About one-fifth of the area's Jews lived in small towns in 1921,



but that number dropped off dramatically after the Depression and World War II. After leaving farming, the Jews tended to start small businesses like general stores and supply houses. After World War II, most Jews had left the small towns, preferring to be in the larger cities, primarily Calgary.

### **Dawson City, Yukon**

A century-old Jewish Cemetery, uncovered 10 years ago, is one of the few reminders of the Jewish contribution to the Gold Rush.

The Jewish population in Dawson City fluctuated from a high of about 200 at the height of the gold rush to about a dozen by 1931, the last year someone was buried at Bet Chaim Cemetery. Without a rabbi or synagogue, worshippers gathered in homes, stores and meeting halls for Passover and other celebrations, according to historical records.

Known in the beginning as simply the “Hebrew Congregation,” members chose in 1910 to name their group in honour of Baron Hirsch auf Gereuth, the German-born philanthropist who had helped out fellow Jews throughout Europe.

The first person buried at Bet Chaim was Samuel Simon, a prospector who drowned in the Forty Mile River on September 1, 1902. Others later buried there include Jacob Klein, a clothier who committed suicide on July 9, 1903; Samuel Ross, a merchant who died in his home on July 28, 1911, of an unspecified illness; Abraham Packer, a seller of guns, knives and hardware, who suffered a heart attack on February 26, 1918; and Jacob Rosenfeldt, who died January 8, 1931, of unknown causes.

### **Yellowknife, NWT**

The Glick family began their sojourn in Yellowknife when J.I. Glick and his wife Sadie arrived there in April, 1945 after he returned from service in WWII. Their son, Harold, joined them when he was released from the army six months later. After several business ventures, including terms as alderman and later, mayor, Glick built the Gold Range Hotel in Yellowknife. Son Harold started Yellowknife Radio and Record Shop. Along with a couple of other families in town, Jewish visitors to Yellowknife were always able to find a kosher meal and a place to stay while on business trips to the North.

### **Calgary and Southern Alberta**

The first Jewish immigrants to settle permanently in Southern Alberta were Jacob and Rachel Diamond, who came to Calgary in 1889, five years after the railway.

Diamond led the first formal religious service in Calgary (1894), purchased land for a Jewish Cemetery (1904) and brought the first Rabbi, Hyman Goldstick, to Calgary in 1906 (a joint venture with the Edmonton community). He also was responsible for the first synagogue, the House of Jacob, a 500-seat edifice, built in 1911, a year before Beth Israel was built in Edmonton.

The first Jewish organization to be formed in Calgary was the Chevra Kadisha, which incorporated in 1904. By 1914 a local Jewish newspaper noted many Jewish organizations in Calgary, including the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the Zionist Society of Calgary (1907), the Yiddish Library of Calgary, the Jewish Workmen's Circle and the Vaad Hair, formed in 1912. A B'nai Brith Lodge began in 1917, and a Jewish Ladies' Aid Society and Council of Jewish Women were formed in 1920. The Hadassah group was formed in 1917 but not formally established until 1921. A Jewish Literary

Society was formed in the 1920s and the beginning of the Calgary Jewish community Council came in 1928 when a group came together to raise funds for a new community building. Pioneer Women formed in 1935 and Mizrachi in the 1940s. Histadrut was incorporated in 1937, and the Sharon Zionist Club and Canadian Friends of Hebrew University in the early 1940s along with the Calgary Zionist Council.

The House of Jacob Congregation was incorporated in 1909, and the building was completed in 1911, where traditional Orthodox services were held. The first permanent Rabbi, Simon Smolensky, arrived in 1917, and served until 1939. The building was demolished in 1968, and the community made do with temporary locations until a new Synagogue, the House of Jacob-Mikveh Israel, was built in 1986.

The Talmud Torah Hebrew School was established originally in 1910. At that time, there were 100 Jewish families in Calgary. The school closed in 1911, but re-opened in 1912 with three teachers and 100 pupils. After another brief closure and several more moves, the school opened in its own building in 1920, and then moved to another in 1930.

By the 1920s, Calgary's Jewish population had started to grow. In 1921, there were 1233, compared to 600 in 1911 when the House of Jacob was built. By 1931, there were 1604, compared to 1057 in Edmonton, 11 in Lethbridge, 104 in Medicine Hat and 44 in Drumheller. In 1920, there were enough children to warrant the purchase of a building for the Hebrew School. Jewish cultural activity flourished in Calgary at that time, as evidenced by the posters of Abraham Shnitka, King's Printer, the only Yiddish printer in Western Canada.

The I.L. Peretz school started classes in 1927, and a new building was built in 1929 to house a Yiddish Day School, which survived until 1958. The Jewish Community Centre opened a new building in 1930, which became home to the Beth Israel congregation in 1935.

The post-war years saw the opening of Camp B'nai Brith on the shores of Pine Lake, Alberta, not too far from the former Jewish Colony at Blank's Lake. This Camp was founded by the Edmonton and Calgary B'nai Brith lodges for the Jewish children of Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 1959, the Calgary Hebrew School opened a new building. In 1960, a new Chevra Kadisha chapel was opened. The Calgary Jewish Community Council began in the mid-1950s and hired its first professional director in 1962. A new Peretz School building was opened in the early 1960s. The school continued to flourish until 1987, when it amalgamated with the Charles Waterman Talmud Torah to form the new Calgary Jewish Academy. Congregants of the new Orthodox Shaarey Tzedec Synagogue held their first services at High Holy Days in 1959. Many of the best-loved clergy in Calgary served there, including Rabbi Lewis Ginsburg and Rabbi Abraham Postone (both of whom also served in Edmonton). In 1986, it amalgamated with the Beth Israel Synagogue to form the Beth Tzedec Congregation, and joined the Conservative movement.

By the 1960s, Calgary's Jewish population approached 3000. At that time the Calgary Jewish Family Service Bureau opened. The agency became a beneficiary of the United Way in 1961 and continues to offer social services to families in need. The Hillel group was formed at the University of Calgary in 1967. There are now over 200 Jewish students at the University of Calgary, and Hillel has expanded its services to include

Mount Royal College. The new Calgary Jewish Centre opened in 1979 on 90<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W. and has become the hub of the modern Calgary Jewish Community. It is also home to Temple B'nai Tikvah, Calgary's Reform congregation, founded in 1979. Akiva Academy is the community's Orthodox day school, founded in 1980.

### **The Edmonton Jewish Community**

Edmonton, Alberta was first incorporated as a town in 1892. At that time, there were about 700 permanent residents. Abraham and Rebecca Cristall, Edmonton's first Jews, arrived in 1893. Abe became a successful businessman, and helped to bring more Jews over from his native Bessarabia. By 1901, there were 17 Jewish citizens in Edmonton. In 1904, Edmonton became incorporated as a city, and in 1905, Alberta officially became a province and the CN Railway arrived.

That same year, William "Boss" Diamond came to Edmonton. He had come to join his brother Jacob, Alberta's first Jewish citizen (1889), in Calgary, in 1892. He set up in the clothing business in competition with Abe Cristall, but the two of them worked together to lay the foundation of Edmonton's budding Jewish Community. Together with eight other men they formed the Edmonton Hebrew Association in 1906. They hired Rabbi Hyman Goldstick of Pilton, Latvia, to be Rabbi, Shochet and Mohel for both the Edmonton and Calgary Jewish Communities.

In 1907, Cristall purchased land on the south side for a Jewish cemetery and the Chevra Kadisha was formed. In 1912, the foundations were laid for the Beth Israel Synagogue. Abe Cristall served as the first president, and William Diamond as the second, a position he held for 31 years. In 1912, the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society

was founded, with classes being held in the basement of the Synagogue. In 1925, the Society erected its own building, and in 1933 it was incorporated as the first Hebrew day school in Canada.

In 1928, a second congregation was started in the basement of the Talmud Torah building, which later became the Beth Shalom congregation (conservative). In 1932, it was formally organized and they engaged Rabbi Jacob Eisen, who became the first English-speaking Rabbi West of Winnipeg. Also at that time, the Peretz or New Yiddish School was organized and opened in a building at 10135-95 St. An offshoot of the Arbeiter Ring, which started in Edmonton in 1922, it had its heyday in the early 1930s, but had to close in 1939 due to declining enrollment

By 1941, Edmonton's population had increased to 93,817, and the Jewish population stood at 1,449. The post-war years saw rapid growth in both the Jewish and general population of Edmonton. As a result, a new Beth Shalom Synagogue was built in 1951. A new Beth Israel Synagogue building was constructed in 1953, as well as a new Talmud Torah Building that same year, reflecting the population shift of the Jewish Community from downtown to the West End.

In 1954, the Edmonton Jewish Community Council was formed as an umbrella organization for the community, and served as such for 28 years. On September 20, 1982, the Community Council merged with Edmonton United Jewish Appeal to become the Jewish Federation of Edmonton.

Alberta's booming oil-based economy brought increased Jewish and general immigration over the next two decades, with major influxes from elsewhere in Canada, and from Hungary, Russia and South Africa. From a Jewish population of 1,748 in 1951,

the community grew to 2,910 in 1971 and to 5,430 in 1991. Today it stands at around 6,000.

All of these new immigrants brought with them the organizational life that contributes to Edmonton's vibrant Jewish Community. Local branches of many Jewish organizations exist in the city today including the Canadian Zionist Federation, Edmonton Hadassah-WIZO, and chapters of ORT, Na'amat, B'nai Brith and Emunah. Local offices of the Jewish National Fund are located at the Edmonton Jewish Community Centre, founded in 1970. The Edmonton chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women was responsible for founding the City's Jewish Senior's Drop-in Centre (formerly the Golden Age Club) in 1954, as well as Jewish Family Services. An all-Jewish Curling Club, the B'nai Brith Menorah, existed briefly in the 1960s and '70s.

The community's third congregation, Temple Beth Ora Reform Congregation, was founded in 1979, and incorporated in 1980. It rents space at the Jewish Community Centre. In 1996 Congregation Beth Tzedec, a break away from Beth Shalom, incorporated and began to hold services at the Talmud Torah. Chabad Lubavitch arrived on the scene in 1991, and in 1993 a second Hebrew Day School, the orthodox Menorah Academy, was founded.

In 1999, a new building for Edmonton Talmud Torah was erected and the next year, a new Beth Israel Synagogue was built reflecting a further westward shift in population.

In the fall of 2004, Edmonton elected its first Jewish mayor, Stephen Mandel. There has always been a strong tradition of civic involvement in the Edmonton Jewish

Community, with members serving on the boards and executives of many local arts, cultural, educational and fundraising organizations, as well as in the Judiciary.

## **Regina**

There were originally nine Jews living in Regina in 1891, but by 1901, there was only one left. By 1911, the population had risen again to 130. Undoubtedly, the first Jews of Regina had settled initially on the surrounding farm colonies in Southern Saskatchewan, namely Wapella (1888), Hirsch (1892), Lipton (1901), Cupar (1901), Sonnenfeld (1906) or Edenbridge (1906). The Heppner family farm at Wapella was the first permanent Jewish farm in Canada. Several Regina families maintained their farms at these sites into the 1990s.

The Chevra Kadisha was the first Jewish organization to emerge in Regina, in 1904. The first minyan took place in 1905 at a private home. The Cemetery was formally established in 1915. The leader of the community at this point was William L. Nathanson, proprietor of the Clayton Hotel, who helped form the first minyan, and played a key role in the establishment of the first Talmud Torah. The first Jewish wedding to take place in the community was that of Dora Schacter and Joseph Schwartzfeld on January 23, 1909. Dora's brother Jacob is the namesake of the Orthodox synagogue in Regina, the Beth Jacob, as the first organizational meeting took place at his home in 1906. By 1910, the "House of Jacob" congregation had hired a professional shochet and established regular weekly minyans. By 1912, there were 12 families, and a building committee was organized. The committee purchased two lots for \$1600, and in 1913, the cornerstone was laid for the new synagogue, which was completed in time for Rosh



Hashanah services. That same year, the community established a Talmud Torah in rented space on 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue for 40 children and two teachers. Within the year, a building was moved onto a lot on St. John Street to permanently house the school. The next to be established was the Regina Zionist Council. Also in 1913, the community began negotiations with the City for the formal transfer of title of the two acres of land on Broad Street already in use as a Jewish Cemetery. This charter was granted in 1915.

By 1916, Regina's Jewish population had increased fourfold in five years to 495. By 1921, there were 860 Jews in Regina, a growth rate higher than that of the general population. The peak of the Jewish population occurred in 1931 at 1,010. On the other hand, the Jewish farm population in the five major colonies peaked in 1916 at 966 and then slowly started to decline. By 1931 the number of active Jewish farmers had sunk to 157. This indicates that in Regina, as throughout the West, there was a slow but steady exodus from the farms to the towns and then to the larger centres of Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary and Edmonton. Many also moved to larger cities like Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver.

The First World War brought with it a groundswell of Zionist enthusiasm, which reached its peak with the Balfour Declaration Parade of 1920, when the whole Jewish community marched through the city. The war also gave rise to the growth of many Jewish organizations within the city, including the Jewish Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Brownies, Cubs, AZA and Young Judeans. The Hebrew Ladies' Benevolent Society was established in 1914, the Brandeis Lodge of B'nai Brith in 1915 (charter revoked in 1923), the Regina Chapter of Hadassah in 1921 and the Anna Selick Junior Chapter, established in 1927; the Hebrew Sick Benefit Association in 1921 and the Ladies

Auxilliary to the Talmud Torah in 1927. A new B'nai Brith Lodge was chartered in 1929, which still exists. A major Zionist convention was held in Regina in 1928, which brought together Jews from across Western Canada. In 1920, the community hired its first Rabbi, Menachem Kalef, who served for 25 years.

The original B'nai Brith Lodge helped to raise the money to purchase land and erect a new Talmud Torah building, whose cornerstone was laid on May 11, 1924. Classes began on September 22, 1924 with 150 students and three teachers. By 1926, all the major Jewish organizations in the city were amalgamated into one administrative entity, the Regina Hebrew Federated Budget, or Community. By this time, the community had become large enough to sustain a full-time kosher butcher shop, governed by the community. Rabbi Kalef served as shochet, and taxes were collected on the meat to help support the community. However, this butcher shop proved to be one of the most contentious issues the young community had to face.

The thirties hit Saskatchewan hard, but the Jewish population in Regina did not decline all that much. From a high of 1010 in 1931, it only dropped 7% by 1941 to 944. All of the major institutions survived. A new Hadassah chapter was formed during that decade and the Regina Hebrew Savings and Credit Union was formed in 1937 with 68 members. It was the first credit union incorporated under the Province's new Credit Union Act. Membership was open to "persons being of Hebrew descent, residing in the city of Regina and Southern Saskatchewan south of Township 28." The entrance fee was 25 cents and shares cost \$5.00. It offered loans to members of the community who could not qualify for ordinary bank loans. The union was dissolved in 1972.

The thirties were also a time of flourishing Yiddish culture, and as a result, a new Yiddish school was established in Regina, as in Edmonton and Calgary. The Jewish National School was located in the old Labour Temple, just north of the synagogue. By the outbreak of WWII, however, the community saw the need to re-unite and shelve their differences to show a united front, and the two schools were merged once again.

On September 11, 1945, a committee was formed to build a new Community Centre. A decision was made to purchase land, and the corner stone was laid four years later. Meanwhile, the old Ottawa Street synagogue was condemned as unsafe in October 1946, and fundraising for the new building took on a new urgency. During the summer of 1948, just after the establishment of the State of Israel, the Canadian Jewish Congress arranged for 14 teenaged war orphans to be resettled in Regina, which marked a new era in the Jewish community. On September 3, 1950, the new Jewish Community Centre and Synagogue was officially opened. On that occasion, 193 charter members and their families were present as well as dignitaries from across Canada.

In the early 1950s members of B'nai Brith founded a curling club. The rink was built in the summer of 1952, and opened on January 23, 1953 as the "Wheat City Curling Club." Curling continued to be popular well into the 1970s, but in 1979, the rink was sold to another group, and the proceeds from the sale were put into a trust fund to benefit the Beth Jacob Synagogue and the Hebrew School. Also that decade, a new Talmud Torah was built, which opened on April 18, 1955.

Women's involvement in communal activity increased dramatically during the post-war period, with two new chapters of Hadassah as well as the Hadassah Bazaar, which continued until 1984. In 1964, the Synagogue Board approved Bat Mitzvah

ceremonies for young women. The first Bat Mitzvah took place in 1969. In 1967, the community again considered mixed seating in the synagogue. After a change in its spiritual allegiance from the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire to Yeshiva University of New York, the congregation voted in 1973 to ask permission for mixed seating from Yeshiva University. They were turned down. It wasn't until 1987, after the congregation, whose numbers were now much diminished, declared independence from any Rabbinical supervisory body, that mixed seating was instituted on a permanent basis at Beth Jacob.

The Reform Temple, Beth Tikvah, was founded in Regina in 1990, probably due to a high rate of intermarriage within the community. In addition, a mixed burial ground was opened in the Jewish cemetery for inter-married couples in 2005. In the 2001 census the number of Jews in Regina was roughly the same as it had been since 1951-- 720, roughly the same size as the Saskatoon community.

## **Saskatoon**

The first Jews to settle in Saskatoon were William and Fanny Landa, in 1907. Landa came from the Lipton Colony, where he had settled in 1904, and brought his family in 1905. They built a dugout with a sod roof on poplar logs on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. Later, they moved to a railway car. The first minyan was purportedly held in 1908 in a rented house, although some insist the first Minyan took place in 1910. The community also hired the first Shochet, as well as the first Hebrew teacher that year. Classes were held in the Cahill block until the purchase of a former church in 1911, which was converted into the Talmud Torah. Mr. O. Koukoy obtained land for a Jewish Cemetery, and also established the first synagogue. Agudath Israel, in

1912. By 1914 the Talmud Torah had 50 students and two more teachers. In 1918, a Hebrew High School was established.

Because it was such a small community, kosher meat was always a problem, even though the community met regularly at Zaitlin's Kosher Restaurant. In the 1920s and '30s, about 95% of women kept a kosher kitchen, but by the 1960s, the last Kosher butcher shop closed its doors.

Many Jewish organizations developed in the 1910s, including the Chevra Kadisha, the YWHA, the Hebrew Ladies Aid, the Herzl Zion Club, the Talmud Torah the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and B'nai Brith Lodge #739, organized in 1913. During the First World War, the community was very active in raising relief funds for the Jews of Russia. The first Young Judea Club was organized in 1919. That same year, a second synagogue opened, Congregation Agudas Israel. A new Talmud Torah with four spacious classrooms, was built in 1928. The Chesed Shel Emes was erected in 1948.

The cultural life of the Jews of Saskatoon flowered in the 1920s, with many travelling Yiddish productions coming to town to play at the Strand Theatre. In 1921, Moe Ames started the Saskatoon Yiddish players, who performed many classic works. They were taken over by the Zionist organization in 1930. The Jewish Cultural Club of Saskatoon's Jewish Chorus presented the city's first Jewish choral concert on May 19, 1937.

The Ladies Aid of the Talmud Torah was founded in 1918, and the Ladies Auxilliary of the Agudas Israel in 1919. Saskatoon Hadassah was started in 1923. The Good Behaviour Club for boys aged 7-11 began in 1927. The Saskatoon chapter of Pioneer Women was launched in 1932. In 1936, 75 women from the Talmud Torah

Auxiliary and the United Jewish Relief Committee banded together to form the Saskatoon section of the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada.

Most of the Jews in Saskatoon ran small family businesses, which employed other Jews. The attitude of the gentiles in greater Saskatoon was often restrictive. The Hudson's Bay Company didn't hire Jews, and the University of Saskatchewan School of Medicine had a Jewish quota at one time. The Saskatoon Golf Club did not allow Jews, so the Jews founded the Riverside Country Club.

The University of Saskatchewan Hillel was organized in 1948. At that time, over 100 of the University's 2000 students were Jews. They even had their own newspaper, *Kol Hillel*. By 1954, there was talk of building a new Synagogue/JCC complex, and in 1955, B'nai Brith inaugurated its Silver Plate dinners to raise money for the venture. On May 15, 1957, the sod was turned for the new building. The new Agudas/Israel/JCC opened its doors in 1958 as a Conservative synagogue. Both it and the other synagogue were under the governance of the Community Budget, led by President Albert H. Krolik. Celebration of Bat Mitzvahs started at the synagogue in 1962. By the mid-1960s, membership in the synagogues and the population of Saskatoon started to decline (195 families). On June 14, 1965, the community decided to dispose of the old synagogue building and the Chesed Shel Emes, next door to it.

Russian immigrants started coming to Saskatoon in 1978, and eventually, JIAS settled 59 people there. In 1982, the Saskatchewan Jewish Council began to function. In 1986, the Saskatchewan Region of the Canadian Jewish Congress was established. In 1992, Saskatchewan finally attained representation on the National Budgeting Conference of UIA Canada.

The Saskatoon Jewish population rose from 77 individuals in 1911 to a peak of 793 in 1961. By 1991, the population was 615, and it has continued to hold steady as people of all faiths have left Saskatchewan for larger centres. The census of 2001 enumerated exactly 700 Jews in Saskatoon. The only other new development in the community has been the establishment of Congregation Shir Chadash in March, 2000, as a result of a split in the former Agudas Israel Congregation. Both of these congregations are now Conservative.

Debby Shoctor

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