



MONTREAL FORUM

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE
JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF MONTREAL

TO CATCH YOUR EYE

Throughout her career as an award-winning freelance writer, photographer and filmmaker, **Louise Abbott** has repeatedly demonstrated her skill in presenting the history and contemporary life of Canadians to her many readers and viewers. Her documentaries and photographic exhibitions are as eagerly awaited as her books and articles.

We welcome Louise to the pages of Montreal Forum as she describes the poignant and positive story of the Jewish community of Sherbrooke, Quebec.

In our next article, we cross the Atlantic with longtime JGS-Montreal member, **Annette Colton**, as she threads her way through those parts of the Ukraine where her ancestors once lived. We share her joy as she discovers connections with the past.

Remember in our last issue we had an article by **Janice Rosen** about a group of Jews who settled “down on the farm” in Western Canada? In this issue, Janice is joined by **Willie Glaser** to tell more delightful stories of Jewish farmers, this time in Ste-Sophie, Quebec.

Now it is time for a teaser. The many readers who enjoyed and learned from the article by **Alan Greenberg** last September on Canadian census records will be happy to know that in June he will be sharing with us a piece on finding Jewish burials. Those who are intrigued by Jewish mysticism will also find the article of interest.

And finally, let me assure you that **Stanley Diamond** will return to our pages in June with another of his insightful columns.

Anne Joseph

Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal	
Founded 1995	
Member of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies	
Web Site http://www.jgs-montreal.org	
Mailing Address 5599 Edgemore Ave, Côte St Luc, Montreal, Canada H4W 1V4	
Hot Line: 514-484-0969	
President.....	Stanley Diamond smsdiamond@aol.ca 514-484-0100
Programme.....	Merle Kastner merlek@videotron.ca 514-735-4739
Membership.....	Jerry Zell jjzell@videotron.ca 514-486-2171
Database Manager & Webmaster.....	Alan Greenberg alan.greenberg@mcgill.ca 514-483-3853
Editor.....	Anne Joseph aejoseph@videotron.ca 514-487-1214

PROGRAMMING

Address all enquiries to Merle Kastner
merlek@videotron.ca
 or phone our Hot Line – 514-484-0969
 All events at the Gelber Centre
 unless otherwise specified

MONTHLY LECTURE SERIES

Monday 17 March at 7.30pm

Victor Armony: “Travelling to the Ukraine with a Little Silver Spoon in my Pocket”

Tuesday 29 April

Annual Research Circle: Three members will present their latest research news.

Tuesday 6 May at 7.30pm (Shaare Zion)

Gary Frohlich: “Our Heritage & Our Health: Genetic Conditions among the Ashkenazim”

Monday 12 May at 7.30pm

Jill Culiner: “Finding Home: In the Footsteps of the Jewish Rusgeyers (Wayfarers)”

SUNDAY FAMILY TREE WORKSHOPS

10am to noon at the Jewish Public Library,
 5151 Côte Ste Catherine Road, Montreal

2nd March
 6th April
 4th May

**THE LAST JEWS OF SHERBROOKE
 by Louise Abbott**



Former Agudath Achim Synagogue

The story of the once thriving Jewish community of Sherbrooke, Quebec, has been well captured in words and photographs by Louise Abbott. We warmly welcome her contribution to our pages. Born in Montreal and now living in the Eastern Townships, Louise is an award-winning writer, photographer and filmmaker. This article, which first appeared in The Montreal Gazette on 7 April 2001, won the Norman Kucharsky Award for Cultural and Artistic Journalism given by the Professional Writers Association of Canada. It was reprinted in Quebec Heritage News in December 2007.

As we stood at the gate of the Jewish cemetery, Daniel (“Danny”) Heilig cinched the belt of his overcoat and then tugged on his tweed hat to keep it from blowing away. It was a chilly, wet day in early November. Most of the leaves from the tall, moss-covered maples lay in a sodden mat on the ground. But one faded orange straggler had caught on the cemetery fence and kept slapping against the chain links, unwilling, it seems, to join the dead.

When Jews gather in Sherbrooke these days, it is to mourn. The graveyard on du Souvenir has become their main connection to an era that has passed, to a community that has disappeared. Vinebergs ... Gillmans ... Budnings ... Cohens ... Echenbergs ... Greens ... Smiths ... Levinsons ... Weinstains. As we walked through the grounds high on a hill overlooking the city, Danny pointed out headstones and occasionally

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wiped away the drizzle that formed a fine mist on his glasses. Now eighty-six, he had been a friend, colleague, or relative of many of the deceased.

“My late uncle and aunt,” he gestured. Ben and Rose Cohen raised Danny after his mother’s death; he was just ten when he left Montreal to live with them. “Claire’s mother,” he gestured again. Claire is Danny’s wife, who was waiting for us in the car at the cemetery entrance. Her mother was a Polish-born Jew who had settled in New York but chosen to spend eternity close to her daughter.

We saw small headstones of lichen-spotted white marble that dated from nearly a century ago and larger headstones of polished black granite from more recent years. We also saw one grave that had been freshly dug. Danny explained that a monument would eventually be placed, and then family and friends would gather for an official unveiling and mourners’ *kaddish*, or prayer.

Like Danny and Claire, the woman who had died had once been part of a small, but thriving, Jewish community. Only a handful of Jews remain. As one of them, Danny had offered to escort me to the cemetery and then drive me around the city to show me where Jewish inhabitants used to live, work, and worship.

While he locked the gate, I looked up at the wrought-iron arch above it. It bore a Star of David and the words “Congregation of Agudath Achim Cemetery.”

This burial ground in Sherbrooke’s east end has been vandalized in recent years. But back in the car, the Heiligs emphasized that the desecration was a regrettable, but isolated, incident: the local Jewish community had traditionally experienced tolerance and goodwill. “We always had a very comfortable relationship with the English people,” Claire said, “Well, also with the French, we had a very good *entente*,” Danny

quickly added. “But not as close,” Claire concluded.

Even before pogroms caused them to flee the *shtetls* of Russia and other Eastern European nations en masse in the late 1800s, Jews had settled in various locales in the Eastern Townships. The greatest number took up residence in the commercial centre of Sherbrooke.

An advocate named Reuben Hart arrived first; he was listed in the 1863 census. By 1881 twenty Jews were registered. They continued to arrive throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Danny’s uncle Ben founded the B. Cohen Corporation in 1887; he dealt in scrap metal, rags, and animal bones, hides, and furs. “Farmers and trappers would bring in raw furs, which were sold to coat manufacturers,” Danny said.

In a pattern that repeated itself all over North America, Jewish newcomers often worked initially as peddlers. “They would take a pack and some merchandise and go out into the countryside with a horse and cart,” Claire explained. “They would sell their goods, make a slight profit, and buy more merchandise. They had nothing but innate intelligence, a great deal of ambition, the desire to survive, and a sense of charity---an ability to give part of what they had to relatives to help them.”

As they prospered, most of these itinerant salesmen opened clothing stores, furniture stores, or other retail businesses on Wellington in downtown Sherbrooke. For several decades, Jews owned almost half of the stores on this street.

By 1907 the Jewish community had grown large enough to engage a rabbi, obtain a charter for their congregation and rent quarters for services and other activities. After we had wended our way from the cemetery and crossed the St. Francis River, Danny slowed down at Dufferin and Frontenac. “That corner had the building that housed our first little place of worship.”

Originally an anglophone stronghold, Sherbrooke had witnessed a demographic shift by the turn of the twentieth century; French Canadians had come to constitute the majority of the residents. Nonetheless, English-speaking locals remained economically and politically powerful, and it was with them that Jewish citizens aligned themselves. Jews usually started off in leased living quarters close to their shops. When they could afford it, they moved into the



Danny Heilig at the Agudath Achim Cemetery

mostly middle-class, mostly English-speaking, North Ward.

Jewish children went to Protestant schools, and Yiddish gave way to English at home. Many Jewish parents did business with French Canadians, however, and urged their children to learn French.

With fewer than fifteen thousand people in the early 1900s, Sherbrooke was a “New World *shtetl* ... a place to conduct small business and maintain solid family ties,” Ruth (Echenberg) Tannenbaum and Myron Echenberg noted in a family history.

Today, with upwards of seventy-six thousand residents in its core, Sherbrooke still offers a relaxed tempo. “I get high blood pressure from the traffic and pace of a big city,” Danny said, as he navigated slowly, cautiously, from downtown to the North Ward.

We stopped in front of a neo-classical brick building with white pillars on Montreal Street. Now a French Pentecostal church, it was erected in 1920 as the Agudath Achim Synagogue and served families not only from Sherbrooke, but also from outlying towns like Coaticook, Drummondville, Lake Megantic, and Thetford Mines.

While the congregation was nominally Orthodox, secular Jewish institutions dominated synagogue life: B’nai B’rith, Hadassah, Hebrew Ladies’ Aid. A *cheder*, or elementary Hebrew school, was held after regular school classes and on Sunday mornings.

By 1921 the number of Jews in Sherbrooke had reached 265 in an overall population of 23,660. A wave of Jewish immigrants arrived that year and the next. For some, Sherbrooke was a final destination, for others, a stopover. By 1931 the number of Jews had slipped to 152. The Great Depression was one factor in the exodus. The search for Jewish spouses was another.

In 1937 clothing manufacturer Sam Rubin moved his operation from Montreal to Sherbrooke to resist unionization. About twenty-five Jewish families accompanied him, bringing “stronger ties to Judaism and to Yiddish culture,” according to Tannenbaum and Echenberg, and, in the younger generation, potential Jewish marriage partners.

Although forming a tightly knit community, Jews looked beyond their own ranks, too. Many served on the board of the Sherbrooke Hospital, the YMCA, the Rotary Club, and other Anglophone organizations. In both wars, many enlisted for military service.

During the post-war boom, the Jewish community remained vibrant, and it was then that Danny and Claire began their life together. In 1947 Danny took over his uncle Ben’s

business with his cousin Sam. The same year, he met Claire in Montreal. She was visiting a friend: he was bowling in a B'nai B'rith-sponsored tournament.

Claire, whose accent bears the unmistakable stamp of her New York Jewish childhood, has never forgotten the day that Danny proposed. "I asked: Does Sherbrooke have any movie houses? Does it have indoor plumbing?" She laughed. "I thought Sherbrooke was backward," she admitted. "I never asked about the Jewish community. Jewish culture was something I'd always taken for granted."



Last Service at Agudath Achim - 1983

Claire married Danny in 1948 and upon her arrival in Sherbrooke, she immediately found a friend in another transplanted American Jewish woman. She also gradually found her place in

the local Jewish community. For years, she "didn't wander out of it at all, didn't want to, didn't need to."

Continuing along streets in the North Ward, where the Heiligs themselves live, we saw the onetime homes of various Jewish families. The neighbourhood today is predominantly francophone. Danny speaks French and plays tennis once a week with longstanding francophone friends. Claire, however, never became fully bilingual. As the Jewish community shrank, she became increasingly involved in the broader anglophone community, only curtailing her involvement in associations like the University Women's Club after two strokes in 1997.

On our return to the Heiligs' apartment, Danny retrieved a box with photos from the 1950s and 1960s inside. He picked out a few including the *bar mitzvah* of his son, Lewis; a *Hanukkah* party; and a B'nai B'rith fund-raising dinner. He rhymed off the names of the smiling faces and then added wistfully, "It was a very friendly group."

In 1955, with three hundred-odd members, the Jewish community was confident enough of its future to construct a two-story extension to the synagogue to accommodate a *Talmud Torah*, or religious school for *bar mitzvah* preparation; meeting rooms; and other facilities. Just a year later, Sam Rubin sold his King Street plant to an American company. A year after that, as the needle trades in Quebec faltered, the plant closed. Most of the Jewish employees departed. In addition, the children of even deeply rooted Jews continued to go elsewhere for their education, marriage, and careers. Many became well-known professionals in Montreal, such as criminal lawyer Raphael Schachter, the grandson of the Rev. A. S. Mittleman, Agudath Achim's spiritual leader from 1919 to 1954.

During the 1960s, shopping malls sprang up in the suburbs, and Wellington Street stores found it hard to compete. Some of the Jewish owners

pulled up stakes. By 1967 the *Sherbrooke Daily Record* reported: “Sherbrooke’s Jewish community struggles to continue.”

The back-to-the-land movement and staff hiring at local CEGEPs, universities, and hospitals brought a few new congregants. Among them were artists Chick and Marsha Schwartz. They had left Montreal in 1977 to settle on a farm outside Stanstead and wanted their three sons to study for their *bar mitzvah*. They soon discovered that the Sherbrooke congregation no longer had a resident rabbi, and the *Talmud Torah* had all but collapsed. Marsha set about resurrecting classes with the assistance of the Heiligs’ daughter, Robin, then a Bishop’s University student.

It became more and more difficult, however, to draw a *minyan*, or quorum of ten adult males required to hold religious services, and the remaining synagogue members faced crippling maintenance and repair expenses for the building. They made the painful decision to sell it, directing the funds to a foundation established for the cemetery’s upkeep. About seventy people from near and far attended the last service in 1983. “It was a reunion and a farewell,” Claire recalled.

Some former congregants took to commuting to synagogues in Vermont or Montreal to worship and educate their children in Judaism. Others created the Eastern Townships Jewish Community. At its peak in the late 1980s, this informal group brought together fifty widely dispersed Jewish or interfaith Townships families. Members met in different homes for children’s instruction, special services, and communal celebrations.

The Heiligs were delighted to see this resurgence of Jewish life in the region and joined in. But in the intervening years, most of the children have grown up and left to study or work outside the Townships. Some of the parents have moved, too. Get-togethers are rare.

Danny put away the photos. “I was sad when my friends left,” Claire said. “But I’ve learned to accept it.” The Heiligs decided long ago that they would stay in Sherbrooke forever; they have reserved plots in the Agudath Achim Cemetery for themselves and their two children. “We love it here, and our roots are here,” Danny told me. “When people used to ask me about moving, I’d always say, I’m going to turn out the lights in the synagogue, and we’ll be the last to leave.”

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**DEADLINE FOR THE JUNE 2008 ISSUE
OF MONTREAL FORUM - 15 MAY**

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO HISTORY by Annette Colton

Annette Colton has been an active member of JGS Montreal for several years. Like so many of us, she had long dreamed of a chance to explore the lands and homes of her ancestors, and then right out of the blue, an opportunity to fulfil this dream popped up in the form of an invitation from a cousin to accompany her and her son on just such a venture. Grasping this opportunity, Annette was soon making plans for the journey and within just a few weeks was winging across the Atlantic to meet her cousins and begin turning dreams into reality.

This was a trip back in time, not just in space. A trip to the Western Ukraine, to an area that was originally part of Eastern Galicia, which was a province in the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to WWI. Between WWI and WWII this region was part of South-eastern Poland, and after WWII it became part of Western Ukraine under Russian rule. Today it is independent Ukraine. It is because this area has changed political jurisdiction so often that there is so much confusion by family historians as to the name of their country of origin, and even where it is located. It is also why records for this region are so difficult to locate and obtain.

I made this trip for personal reasons. Both my parents came from towns not very far from one another in Eastern Galicia, and I was curious about the towns they were born and raised in, as well as the surrounding area where they spent their childhood. For years I had wanted to visit this area, especially since research information and records are not readily available. Both my parents lost entire families in the Holocaust and there has always been a great void in our family history. I still do not know the names of many of my close relatives. I wanted to do more than just go as a tourist and visit landmarks.

My cousin Nurit and her son Yair live in Israel. Last Pesach, to my surprise, Nurit said that she and her son also wanted to take such a trip and

asked me if I would be interested in joining them. They would be travelling to the same shtetlach (shtetls) that I wanted to visit and such an opportunity would not likely present itself again.

Lviv – Friday to Sunday

Travel arrangements were inconvenient in that I would arrive in Lviv on a Friday. With real trepidation I made arrangements to spend the Shabbat with Rabbi and Rebbetzen Bald, who are Stolener Chassidim, and Thank G-d I arrived safely in Lviv a few hours before Shabbat. What an unbelievable Shabbat experience that was for me with their family of several children. What a remarkable couple. The rebbetzen made reservations for me at the Dinester Hotel, which was a 15 minute walk from their apartment and the shul. She arranged for the guard from the shul to accompany me. There was no way for me to find my way alone, since everything is written in Cyrillic and no one speaks English. The rabbi and rebbetzen are originally from New York and are in Lviv to help educate and support the remaining Jewish population. They are involved with renovating and restoring a beautiful shul that survived destruction, with the support of a shul from London, England. They also run a Jewish day school.

There are several older Jewish men who attend the shul and eat their Shabbat meals together in the adjacent hall. They are alone and consider each other to be family. It was pouring with rain on Saturday and I could not walk back to the hotel during the day, so spent an extraordinary afternoon talking with them and their guests.

On Sunday morning I walked around the centre of Lviv and wandered through the flea market. The only thing I saw during the whole week in the Ukraine that was disturbing and anti-Semitic was the sale in the market of caricatures of Jewish men handling money. I was told that the only contact or experience many people have had historically with Jews was as merchants or money handlers.

Ivano Frankivsk, Nishinov – Sunday

That afternoon my cousins arrived. After a two-hour drive to Ivano Frankivsk, we met Rabbi Kolesnik, who was to be our guide for the next two days. He took us to see Nishinov, which was about 20 minutes from Ivano Frankivsk. We found the location of the house where Yair's grandfather lived before the war, and afterwards we walked across the bridge over the Dniester River: by then it was twilight and very surrealistic. Yair was so moved that he said he was once again close to his grandfather and understood so much more about him.

Lanchyn – Monday

On Monday we set out for Lanchyn, the town where my father and Nurit's father were born, as well as our grandparents and great-grandfather. First we went to the cemetery, just an overgrown field that probably held a few hundred graves. It is believed that the first burials took place in this region about 400 years ago. We found some old stones with Hebrew letters, but no headstones.



Annette talking to her husband

me that he called at that very moment.

While Yair was saying Kaddish, my cell phone rang: it was my husband calling from Montreal. Imagine how strange it was for me that he called at that very moment.

We then walked around the town and saw what was believed to be one of the old shuls in Lanchyn that had been used by the Germans as a storehouse, but was still recognizable by its construction. Prior to the war, about 300 Jews lived in Lanchyn, but the marketplace and most of the houses around it have been demolished. We walked to the Prut River and saw the schoolhouse, as well as the places where our parents played and swam. Women were doing their wash in the river, and roaming free around us were cows, horses and chickens. It seemed as though nothing had changed from 100 years ago.

We asked a woman if there was anyone in town who might recall the Kramer family, but she explained that most of the families that lived there many years ago had "left", and that most of the people who lived there now were recent arrivals. We continued on to see the forest outside the town where the Jews from this town were taken and shot.

Kolomyya and Ottynia – Monday

We continued on to Kolomyya, a larger town that several of my parents' siblings had moved to from smaller shtetlach. The centre of this town has been preserved and is very picturesque. The shul where the Baal Shem Tov prayed has been restored, and was named Bet Haknessat Yerusalayim because it was a centre for the religious Zionist Mizrachi movement at one time. You can see Mezuzah markings on several houses across from the shul.

We looked unsuccessfully for several family homes, but did find the house that my father's brother had lived in. This was a shattering experience for me because when my father made a trip in 1933 to visit his family, he wanted them to emigrate to the U.S. The story that was repeated so painfully by my father was that his brother told him that he was making a living, his boys were getting an education, and he lived in a nice house, so "why should he leave?" When I saw the house I understood that the story was true. He did not live in a wooden shack. The house is still being used today. I was shaking from head to foot as I saw history come alive and the tragedy of it as well. As we were leaving Kolomyya, we stopped to see the memorial just outside the town at the Szeparowce Forest where hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews from the area were murdered during the war. What a day.

Tlumach and Pshybluv – Tuesday

On Tuesday we went to Tlumach, where Yair's paternal grandmother had lived. Yair and Nurit remained, while I moved on to the small shtetl where my mother's family had lived.

To get to Pshybluv, where my mother was born, looked on the map to be perhaps a 20 minute drive. Actually it took over an hour on dirt roads to reach Pshybluv, where before the war 32 Jews had lived. The first woman we met sent her teenage son with us to find the Jewish cemetery, located on a small hill at the edge of town. He told us this was where the Jews were buried and that no one would go near, or damage, the hill. We could not find any markings.

Back in the town, it seemed like everyone had come into the street to see what was happening. They came on foot or by horse and buggy, and the women all wore babushkas on their heads.



Pshybluv citizens welcome us

One woman remembered the names of some of the Jewish families, and she explained to us that while there was no synagogue in the town, the Jews went to the oldest man, David, to pray at his house. He had a Torah. When the Germans came, they killed or took away all the Jews and burned the village. The houses that we saw were all dated after WWII. We were told that one Jew was hiding under the bridge, but someone reported where he was, and he too was killed.

When I showed one old man a picture of my mother's brother, he did not recognize him, but to my shock and surprise, when I showed him a picture of my mother's uncle he hesitated and stared at the picture for a few seconds and then said to me "this man didn't live here – he lived in Bortniki". My mother's uncle in fact did live in the adjacent town of Bortniki.

Bortniki, Khotimir & Obertyn – Tuesday

Next stop, Bortniki, where to our surprise there was a small one-room museum. The director himself escorted us to visit the oldest woman in town. She remembered the Jewish families and most of their names. She went to school with them and was friends with some of the children. The house across the street was the Udesman house, and the tree that she pointed to was over 100 years old. There was no Jewish cemetery in this town, and she explained that the Jews were taken to Khotimir, Tlumach or even Ivano Frankivsk to be buried. The Jews prayed at the home of the oldest Udesman and after he died they prayed at Moiska's house. We were taken to the house that Moiska lived in to see that the well he built over 100 years ago was still working and had the best water in town. Chickens, ducks and even a turkey roamed free in front of the houses. The first women told us that one of her relatives helped save a Jewish girl. However in this village we were also told that all the Jews were taken away. We thanked them all, and continued on to Khotimir.

There were beautiful fields all along the dirt roads, which had been made for horse and buggy – certainly not for cars. Here in Khotimir we found the Jewish cemetery in the middle of fields where cows were grazing. The old man tending the cows told us how he personally witnessed the murder of the entire Zorger family by the Germans in 1943 right here in the cemetery. There had been about 160 Jewish families living in Khotimir, and they were taken away to the ghetto in Ivano Frankivsk.

On our way back to Ivano Frankivsk, we drove through Obertyn, another town where one of my mother's uncles lived. Again a very similar story unfolded. The synagogue was destroyed, as was the original marketplace.

What a day. It will remain engraved in my memory always. It certainly reaffirmed what I already knew about Jewish life in the very small

shtetlach of Eastern Galicia. Even more than before, I now understand my mother's sensitivities, and feel somewhat closer to her aspirations and yearnings.

Wednesday to Friday

The final two days I spent back in Ivano Frankivsk and Lviv, where I said goodbye to my

cousins. While in Lviv, I had a prearranged visit to the State Archives with a researcher, but found nothing new. And so while I may not have found new genealogical information about my ancestors, I did learn far, far more about my family than I could possibly have imagined before returning home on Friday, a few hours before the Sabbath began.



A TALE OF TWO WILLIES IN STE-SOPHIE

**by Janice Rosen
Archives Director
Canadian Jewish Congress
Charities Committee
National Archives**

Introduction by Janice Rosen

Following my article in the December 2007 issue of Montreal Forum about recent research interest in the former Jewish Colonization Committee colonies of Western Canada and the Quebec Laurentians, this contribution continues the rural collections theme.

We recently acquired a long-coveted archival document for the CJCCC Archives: a 160 slide lecture about the Jewish community of Ste-Sophie created in 1989 by the late Ruth Lehman, a Montreal photographer, with the assistance of her companion Nathan Rosenberg, who grew up in the region.

The theme of the show was Jewish Ste-Sophie of the past and the present, so many of the slides are copies of old photos. The slides and their accompanying sound cassette were donated by Mr. Rosenberg, whose cousin Fred Rudy had a few months earlier donated a Ste-Sophie memoir by Rosenberg and Rudy, as well as several old documents and a tin-plate sign from the family's kosher-kitchen summer destination, the Kottenberg Inn.

I assigned the task of identifying and cataloguing the images to Willie Glaser, recalling that he had spent some time in the village soon after his arrival in Canada. Seeing the images and hearing Ruth's poignant narration evoked a wealth of Willie's own memories, and inspired him to scan and share with us many of the snapshot photographs he took there 60 years ago. The notes he wrote to help me with this article are more informative and interesting than anything I could write on the subject, so I am turning this issue's column over to him.

Willie in Ste-Sophie Short Vignettes by Willie Glaser

I arrived in Canada in 1947 with the Canadian government "Polish soldier farm labour scheme", was sent to Quebec, and was then released from the Polish army at the Saint-Jean Military College.

In St. Jean I was matched up with a French dairy farmer from Ste Therese, but after just a few weeks I realized that I was keen to be in a Jewish environment. So I approached JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) to help me find

a Jewish farmer - not knowing if there were any Jewish farmers in Quebec. JIAS told me about a Jewish farm community in Ste-Sophie.

So on my day off, a Sunday, I went to Ste-Sophie early by bus, which stopped at the Goodz general store, where I inquired about how to find Jewish farmers. I was told to go to Paisley Road, because "all the Jewish farmers are located on the right hand side of the road." On reaching the area, I knocked on several doors, but nobody could use farm help. Around noon I came to the house and chicken farm of Willie and Mary Zaritsky. They invited me in for lunch, and we had a little discussion.

Willie hired me. I was paid the amount stipulated in the government contract, that is \$45 a month, plus room and board. Actually, Willie did not need any help, but my arrival was an opportunity to give Mary a break from work for a year. I took over most of her work, but she still did the handling of the eggs.

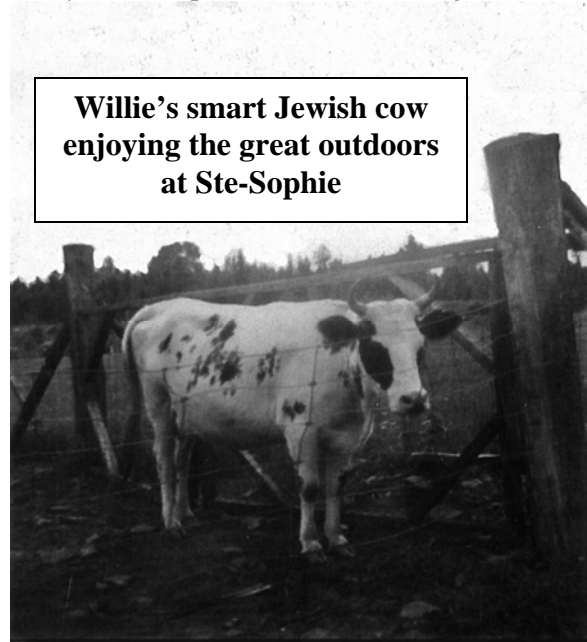
Always a highlight was the arrival of baby chicks. They were literally just a handful of little things, and so very fluffy. They had to be taught how to drink water by cuddling the chick in your hand and dipping its beak into water. The sound of their chirping was heavenly music.

Summer arrived, and with summer the guests for the Goodz Hotel arrived. On Shabbat, only the feeding of the chickens and milking of the resident cow was looked after. In the afternoon I used to walk over to the Goodz Hotel to chat with the guests, but this did not last long. Some of the lady guests soon realized there was this young, good-looking, single guy available. When they started to import the marriageable girls from their *mishpoche* to the hotel, I was invited to dinners and had to listen to various proposals. After two weeks, I stopped visiting the hotel and made myself scarce.

Back to the resident cow. She was a very smart Jewish cow and wore a big melodious bell. During the summer I had to lead her to a large

field for grazing. At the end of the field was a large stand of trees and heavy undergrowth. At milking time, when I had to take her back to the stable, she hid in the undergrowth and stood perfectly still so as not to ring her bell. She never used the same hiding place twice, and I always had to spend extra time finding her.

**Willie's smart Jewish cow
enjoying the great outdoors
at Ste-Sophie**



Another highlight was when Willie Zaritsky would take me with him in his truck to Montreal to deliver eggs and chickens. That was when I began to get familiar with the Rachel Market.

The Yom Tovim were not to be missed. The little country synagogue was packed with all the Jewish farmers and their families from Montreal, with the addition in summer of the many Montreal Jews who had cottages in Ste-Sophie. There was also Mr. Gontovnik, the resident shochet, who was probably the only shochet in Eastern Canada serving in a country community.

When winter came, Willie got himself a contract to clear the snow in Ste-Sophie itself and the surrounding roads. I had to go with him, and there was always something for the co-driver to do. Sometimes Willie woke me up in the middle of the night to say that it had stopped snowing, and out we went to plough the roads.

When my government contract as a farm worker came to an end, Willie Zaritsky suggested that I stay in Ste-Sophie. There was a farm available with a nice house and chicken house, the whole deal for \$2,500. I already had bought about 75 baby chicks from Willie and raised them, and he sold them for me in Montreal.

The offer was very tempting. If I had bought that farm, I know I would have made a good job of running it, but the big city of Montreal was

beckoning me and off I went. There I soon met Jean, who became my wife: we were very happily married for 56 years.

Willie Glaser

And back to the archivist for a final note: we expect to enhance our Ste-Sophie information with one more donation, as Merle Kastner will soon be donating copies of the photos she recently took of all the old graves in the Ste-Sophie cemetery.

Janice Rosen

Montreal - In Days Gone By JEWISH CEMETERIES IN THREE RIVERS

During the summer of 1901, the Corporation of the City of Three Rivers applied to a judge of the Superior Court for the right to expropriate the property known as the Jewish Cemetery on Alexander Street. The rationale was stated as being for sanitary reasons, to permit removal of the bodies and draining of the land. The real reason later became obvious when the owner of the property adjoining the cemetery offered to buy the land.

Aaron Hart had designated this land, which was at that time part of his personal garden, for use as a burial ground for his own family and any member of the House of Israel. In time Aaron's four sons and two of his grandsons completed arrangements for this land to be designated by deed as a burial ground for the Jewish People of the province. The events were summarized by the Rev. Meldola deSola, of Shearith Israel in Montreal, when he spoke on 2 November 1901.

I have to draw your attention to ... the trouble which has arisen in connection with the old Jewish cemetery at Three Rivers. We have every reason to believe that the true cause of the expropriation proceedings was the desire of a certain individual, living in Three Rivers, to acquire the plot of land for purposes of his own. Acting upon the instructions of the treasurer of

our congregation, a lawyer of this city filed an appearance in opposition to the expropriation, and it was expected that the Jewish community of Montreal would, in due course, oppose the action vigorously. But, meanwhile, it appears that a descendant of one of the original owners of the cemetery assumed that the land was his own personal property and sold it to the individual who had instigated the expropriation proceedings: and, thereupon, the corporation of Three Rivers dropped these proceedings; thus clearly showing what was behind the whole transaction.

As a result of this extraordinary and most high-handed action, the bodies interred in the old cemetery have been removed to another field, to an unconsecrated piece of ground, and we have been politely informed that the rites and ceremonies of the synagogue may now be performed ... As the matter now stands, the owner of the land in which the bodies have been buried may, if he feels so disposed, at any time dump into a ditch the remains of the men who first unfurled the banner of Judaism in this country, or burn them as the old coffin boards were burned on the site of Dominion Square four decades ago. We have often spoken of the services rendered by the fathers of our community, and have dwelt upon our debt of gratitude to them. Today their remains have not as much as an assured resting place ... "

The new owner of the land had had the bodies disinterred at his own expense, and removed

to a plot of land on the Côteau St. Louis. This was done in the presence of some Hart family members, but none of them were Jews. Most of Aaron Hart's children and grandchildren had remained Jews, but thereafter in greater and greater numbers, Hart males intermarried with Christians and thereby produced non-Jewish offspring. By 1901, there had not been a Jewish burial in Three Rivers for more than 40 years.

The right of any member of the Hart family to sell property that had been designated as a Jewish cemetery is questionable. The Jewish community of Montreal protested vigorously, but after several meetings, they recognized that the damage had already been done, and the matter was dropped.

The spectre of further desecration of Jewish graves in Three Rivers resurfaced early in 1909, at which time the Jews of Montreal reviewed in a little more detail the history of Jewish burials in Three Rivers. Back in the early 1800s, when available land for more graves in the original Jewish cemetery on Alexander Street had become too scarce for comfort, Ezekiel Hart (1770-1843) looked at his own large family and decided to make available a portion of his own property on Prison Street for use as a second Jewish cemetery. This second cemetery remained the property of successive heirs of Ezekiel Hart.

The one thing which had obviously not been foreseen in Ezekiel's time was that by the end of the century, the Hart families still living in Three Rivers would no longer be Jewish. Nonetheless, having witnessed the horrific sequence of events eight years earlier, the heirs of Ezekiel Hart decided that their best move would be to negotiate the most favourable deal possible with the local authorities. The cemetery had been made available to all Jews in the province, but the financial burden sat with the Ezekiel Hart heirs. And they could not afford the cost of litigation which would probably result from determined opposition to the expropriation.

The decision was reached, with the co-operation of Meldola deSola and the Board of the Spanish and Portuguese congregation, to move all Jewish remains from both the original Alexander Street cemetery (already removed to the Côteau) and the Prison Street cemetery to Montreal for reburial in the Mount Royal cemetery of Shearith Israel.

Clearly there was a need for co-ordination and control of all those involved in this massive undertaking. Success in this role could be achieved only if those people overseeing the project were appropriately regarded in both the Hart family and the Jewish community. This task required a great deal of sensitivity and knowledge in dealing with fragile emotions – but also of importance was the requirement for exceptional knowledge and skill in all the many practical matters involved in the actual removal and transportation of the remains.

Miriam Hadley (a.k.a. Lalla) Hart and her husband Alfred Belasco were the ones who orchestrated the requisite, and at times complicated, plans for this delicate operation. Lalla's paternal grandfather was Ezekiel Hart, and her maternal grandfather was Ezekiel's brother Benjamin.

And so it was that the bodies and stones were removed from Three Rivers and reinterred in Montreal's Mount Royal cemetery of the Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews in October 1909, with the Rev. Meldola deSola officiating. The plot consisted of 31 graves, with space left in one corner for Alfred and Lalla (Hart) Belasco. As it happened, Alfred and Lalla both died in England and were buried there.

The community of their day was much indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Belasco for their commitment to the enterprise, and today's community should be equally appreciative.

Anne Joseph

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