

Roderick MacLeod and Mary Anne Poutanen

UPSTAIRS FOR HEBREW, DOWNSTAIRS FOR ENGLISH: THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF STE-SOPHIE, QUEBEC AND STRATEGIES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1914-1952¹

The history of Jews within Quebec's public school system has largely focused on Montreal, and it is a story of an often bitter struggle for recognition and representation. David Rome, Arlette Corcos, and others have stressed the political and legal debates over the "Jewish School Question," as it came to be known.² They have talked about the accommodation of Jewish immigrants in well-entrenched Protestant institutions which denied them a voice in the making of policy or in the delivery of education; it was not until the 1960s that Jews were allowed to sit on the city's Protestant school board.³

It would not be true to say, however, that earlier, Jews were forbidden to serve on all Quebec public school boards, as the newspapers in the 1960s claimed. In fact, as Mrs. Max Goldberg of New Glasgow has noted, Jews were involved in public school boards in the Laurentians north of Montreal for several generations before they got their rights in Montreal.⁴ While Jews had to be represented on the Montreal Protestant School Board by Protestants, as early as 1914, the Jewish community of Ste-Sophie formed a school board comprised entirely of Jews within the Protestant public school system.

The Ste-Sophie Protestant School Board, as it came to be known, met regularly from 1914 to 1952, at which point it merged with nearby Protestant boards. For this entire period, it

operated a single school—essentially a one-room school house with an attic space that served as an additional classroom—where children were taught in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew. Two generations of pupils received their elementary education within these walls, an education that satisfied both the desire to impart traditional Jewish values and languages, and the need to provide access to the English-language public school system.

In this article, we examine the role of the local school board in enabling Ste-Sophie Jews to provide an education that differed considerably from that received by co-religionists in Montreal. By creating an autonomous school board, they were able to tailor the curriculum to meet their own needs. Unlike Montreal's Protestant school board whose members were government appointees, the Ste-Sophie trustees were elected by their fellow citizens and were accountable to them. The trustees, moreover, undertook a wider variety of tasks than managing schools. Lacking access to local government, the Jewish residents of Ste-Sophie looked to their school board as a venue for debate on all sorts of matters critical to the community. Despite the multiple purposes of school board and school, which also served as the colony's synagogue, and the exclusively Jewish student body, the Ste-Sophie school came under the jurisdiction of the Protestant Committee of the province's Council of Public Instruction. It was visited regularly by the Protestant school inspectors for the region, who monitored the quality of teaching and ensured that the standards met those of the Protestant curriculum. In the process, boundaries were blurred between ethnic groups, and the law was interpreted according to local practice. This curious arrangement constitutes a rare example, unique in Quebec, of a Jewish community making use of the existing educational structure to advance its own needs.

Indeed, it was the confessional nature of Quebec schools that provided the opportunity for Ste-Sophie Jews to preserve their religious and linguistic traditions while integrating with mainstream society. In conformity with Quebec law,

public schools were run by the local municipality (normally a parish or township) and were open to all children. If, however, a minority wished to establish a separate school board, it could make use of the “dissentient clause” in the legislation. In most parishes where the majority of residents were Catholics and where schools were run along religious lines, dissenters would be Protestants seeking either a Protestant or a non-confessional form of education. In Ste-Sophie, however, the minority was Jewish, and their elected representatives on the school board were Jews, though the board itself was labelled “Protestant” marking it as separate from that of the Catholic majority.

This study, which is part of a more comprehensive investigation into the history of Protestant education in Quebec, uses school board records of the McGill University Archives, related documents at the Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress, the private papers of Gault Finley, oral history, newspaper accounts, superintendents’ reports, and petitions and letters which were sent to the superintendent of education in Quebec City. In this article, we shall explore first the social and demographic background to the colonization movement and specifically to the colony in Ste-Sophie. We shall then discuss the complex process by which the school board was established and the complex relations among the trustees, the community, and the directors of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). Finally, we shall analyze the role played by Ste-Sophie’s school board as both an educational institution and a de facto municipal government.

Ste-Sophie’s Jewish Colony

The colony of Ste-Sophie was located in the parish of Ste-Sophie-de-Lacorne at the foot of the Laurentian mountains forty kilometres north of Montreal. The colony was established as part of a concerted effort to settle Jewish families from eastern Europe on Canadian farms, an aspect of the government’s agriculture-oriented immigration policy that dated from the end

of the nineteenth century. During this period, the Jewish population of Canada rose from 2,445 in 1881 to 16,401 twenty years later, and 126,411 on the eve of the First World War.⁵ The government's enthusiasm for Jewish immigrants was limited by the conviction that Jews did not make good farmers and tended to end up as part of a growing urban, industrial, working class.⁶ Indeed, over a third of the country's Jewish population lived in Montreal in 1901, a proportion it maintained well into the 1930s and beyond.⁷ Shortly after the turn of the century, however, a handful of Jewish families settled in Ste-Sophie, in nearby New Glasgow and in St-Lin,⁸ near the towns of Joliette and Ste-Agathe further to the north, and in LaMacaza up in the mountains. These colonies constituted the first Jewish settlements in Quebec outside Montreal, Quebec City, and Trois-Rivières.

Apart from federal immigration policy, the Jewish colonies owed their existence to the efforts of established Canadian Jews and of Baron de Hirsch, one of the world's leading Jewish philanthropists, and the institutions he created, most notably, the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), established in 1891 with headquarters in Paris. In Montreal, a number of charitable organizations had existed since the 1870s to assist Jewish immigrants, but many Jewish leaders began to feel that every effort should be taken to help these families become self-sufficient—ideally, as farmers. Hirsch shared this conviction, and gave substantial amounts of money to make it possible. The notion was partly born of a desire to counter the stereotype of Jews as urban people and, by extension, traders and “exploiters” rather than producers. More important was the conviction that to provide people with farmland was to contribute most effectively to the economic development of the country.⁹ The principal vehicle for promoting rural settlement in the Diaspora was the JCA. Over the course of the following decades, the Association relocated persecuted Russian Jews to farming colonies around the world, notably in Argentina, Palestine, the United States, and Canada.¹⁰ A romantic venture,

the goal was to “productivize” poor Jewish émigrés by loaning them money to purchase land and equipment and to pay transportation costs to the rural areas. The colonies in Canada, mostly on the prairies, owed their success to the Baron de Hirsch Fund and to successful lobbying of the federal government to reserve lands in certain chosen areas. The JCA was careful to ensure that Jewish settlers were not isolated, but linked together in a rural community with access to Jewish schools and synagogues.¹¹ The policy nurtured the social life of colonists and allowed for the survival of Judaism and the Yiddish language.

In Quebec, the most promising territory for a colony seemed to be the region north of Montreal, a still relatively unsettled wilderness at the turn of the century that would later be developed for tourism. The foothills of the Laurentians had been farmed since the 1820s by Scots and American settlers, and more extensively from the 1860s by French Canadians, who were spurred on by Catholic missionaries such as Curé Labelle, the priest of St-Jérôme from 1868 and later the province’s Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Colonization.¹² The Catholic colonization of this region resulted in the establishment of several new parishes, and English-speaking Protestants were soon outnumbered by French Canadians even in the areas where they had been settled for two or more generations. The village of New Glasgow, for example, was originally a Scottish settlement which by the 1840s was included in the Catholic parish of St-Lin; it later formed part of the parish of Ste-Sophie.

Ste-Sophie’s Local Economy

Making a living was not easy for farmers in the Laurentian foothills where poor soil made anything more than subsistence farming difficult. Jewish families proved resourceful: many of them had grown tobacco in Russia, but in Canada they diversified their farming practices. On 2,317 acres of land (of which

slightly over half was arable), the Ste-Sophie farmers raised chickens and dairy cows and grew hay, grains, and vegetables for their own consumption.¹³ In time, some farms had a surplus to sell, and Montreal provided a ready market. Prosperity did not come to all residents, however, and disparities became a source of communal discord. Following electrification of the district in 1939, poultry farmers who heated their coops with electricity were able to increase their flocks and their standard of living, while those who could not afford to do so did less well.¹⁴

By the First World War, many families had devised means to supplement their income. Ever conscious of the poverty they had known in the Old World and the crowded conditions of Jewish life in Montreal, they decided to open their homes to Jews from the Main yearning to breathe fresh country air. As later Laurentian entrepreneurs of various religious backgrounds would discover, tourism could be a lucrative business. For the Jews of Ste-Sophie and Montreal, the arrangement proved mutually beneficial: the host families received welcome cash; the city dwellers had access to clean air and could put on weight with a solid diet of farm produce. Some households took in as many as four large families, each of whom would pay \$35 for the entire summer.¹⁵ The willingness of Jewish farmers to take in visitors gave urban Jews an opportunity to experience rural living that they would not otherwise have had, except for the taste of “countryside” available on Sundays in the larger city parks.¹⁶ Furthermore, there were no alternatives for these families, given that most non-Jewish hotels in the Laurentians refused to admit Jews. During the 1920s, Ste-Sophie’s Jewish population grew to over 200, and in the 1930s, hotel-keeping became the principal industry. Those who lacked space or chose not to take in boarders sold their surplus vegetables to summer vacationers and to local hotels. Other Jews operated stores and a creamery, traded in livestock and hides, supplied logs to local lumber mills, and provided trucking and livery services.

Creating the Ste-Sophie Dissident School Board

With little money to spare, the farm families improvised when it came to synagogues and schools; religious services were held in private homes, and parents sent their children to existing public schools. As it did in the colonies in western Canada, the JCA provided grants to help pay for the services of a *shochet*.¹⁷ In general, proximity to Montreal meant that there were fewer problems obtaining such services than in the West.

Despite economic hardship, educating children was always a priority for immigrant Jewish families. A key problem in the New World was finding ways to maintain language and tradition while integrating into mainstream society. For the settlers in Ste-Sophie, a degree of religious education was provided by rabbis in informal classes in private homes, but a proper school, like a proper synagogue, was a luxury they could not afford for some years. The option of public school was complicated in Quebec, where school boards were either Catholic or Protestant, and property owners paid school taxes to one or the other board.¹⁸ In Montreal, Jews and other minority groups were forced to rely on the willingness of either the Catholic or the Protestant board to find room for their children in schools; although they paid taxes, Jewish property owners enjoyed no representation on the boards.¹⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, Montreal's Protestant board had taken the children of Jewish immigrants under its wing; with Protestant families moving away from the centre, it needed additional students to fill its schools. In 1903, the provincial government passed legislation that defined Jews as Protestants "for school purposes." Protestant school boards, which already represented a minority, would now automatically educate the province's Jewish children and, consequently, receive the taxes of Jewish property holders. Although this change regularized the status of Jewish children, Jews still could not sit on the school boards.

Like the community in Montreal, the Jewish colonies in Joliette, St-Lin, and New Glasgow turned to the local Protestant

boards to educate their children. Jewish pupils appear to have been accepted and tolerated by teachers and fellow students alike; the Protestant curriculum was broad enough not to exclude non-Protestants even for Bible study. The New Glasgow school board valued Jews' presence in classrooms that would otherwise have been half-empty; the two-room school held 40 students in 1912. In Ste-Sophie, where there were no Protestants, Jews sent their children to the local English Catholic school. While the village of New Glasgow was only a few kilometres away, the journey was made difficult by very poor roads.²⁰ Convenience, however, had a price. In the Catholic schools, Jewish children were made to feel unwanted despite their willingness to accept the curriculum, take part in prayers, study the catechism, and participate in other religious practices. The school teacher proved to be highly intolerant of her Jewish pupils, insisting that they eat from separate dishes and cutlery at lunchtime, and on occasion assaulting them verbally and physically. On one Passover eve, the teacher deliberately locked the Jewish pupils in a room after class to prevent them from attending the holiday dinner on time; the children escaped only by breaking a window.²¹ This act was the last straw for the Jewish community, which promptly ended their association with the school and the Ste-Sophie Catholic school board.

In 1913, with 43 children whose needs were not being met by the local school commission, the Jewish families of Ste-Sophie felt that they were ideal candidates for seeking dissentient status. It is not clear whether they knew that no Jews had ever formed a public school board in Quebec. Since, however, they were legally classed as Protestants for school purposes, it seemed to make sense to dissent from a Catholic majority as the Protestants of other areas had done. Jewish dissenters could then establish a school that would meet their needs, reflecting Jewish values while at the same time integrating their children in Canadian society. They may have taken a cue from the Baron de Hirsch Institute school in Montreal. It was operated in cooperation with that city's Protestant school

board from 1894 to 1907, and taught secular subjects in English and Jewish subjects in Hebrew.²² At any rate, a public school run by Jews for Jews seemed a good way to secure the kind of secular education provided down the road in New Glasgow, while allowing religious traditions to be maintained.

The would-be dissenters sought the assistance of the JCA and found an ally in Mr. E. Guilaroff, one of its leaders. Sympathetic to the plight of the Ste-Sophie children, particularly in the wake of the Passover incident, Guilaroff arranged funding to build a school and hire a teacher. The school would also serve as a synagogue, although some preferred that services continue to be held in private homes. There was also some dispute over who should have the right to donate land and advance the cause of education. The Simpkin family won the honour, and in the summer of 1913, the school was erected by communal effort on a corner of their farm just south of the village.²³ Meanwhile, Guilaroff requested an annual subsidy for the school from George Parmalee, the Director of Protestant Education and chair of the Protestant Committee. Guilaroff assured Parmalee that it was the intention of the Jewish inhabitants of Ste-Sophie to form a dissentient school board once the school was completed; he assumed there would be no difficulties given that there were no Protestant schools in the municipality. New Glasgow being “an entirely different district and parish, and a good few miles distant.”²⁴

The matter, however, was not that simple. Although Parmalee did not object to the overall plan, he pointed out that Ste-Sophie and New Glasgow were not in different districts; in fact, the village of New Glasgow lay within the municipality of Ste-Sophie, and the New Glasgow Protestant trustees constituted the dissentient board of the municipality. “That Protestants reside chiefly at one end of it and the Roman Catholics at the other does not change this relationship,” he explained, and he advised the Jews of Ste-Sophie to seek support from the Protestants of New Glasgow.²⁵ This was not what the Jewish community had wanted. Furthermore, the

secretary-treasurer of the New Glasgow board, Herbert Hamilton, indicated that the board had no resources to contribute to a new school in Ste-Sophie. Parmalee suggested that action be delayed until the autumn when the Protestant school inspector for the region, J.W. McOuat, would visit the area. The Jews agreed to postpone forming a board, so long as their school could open. Thanks to the JCA, they were able to hire an English teacher and a Hebrew teacher at \$300 each for the year.²⁶

McOuat visited Ste-Sophie in early December 1913. Guilaroff came from Montreal to speak for community leaders Solomon Shaposnick and Harry Kahansky whose command of English was limited. Guilaroff convinced McOuat of the Jews' determination to operate the new school as a public institution under the Protestant Committee, but independent of the New Glasgow trustees. The New Glasgow board was agreeable to such an arrangement, since it could not accommodate the Jewish children of Ste-Sophie in its school. McOuat also came to appreciate the local geography: the l'Achigan river, which ran near the village of New Glasgow, was a more natural territorial division than the boundary between the parishes of Ste-Sophie and St-Lin. New Glasgow had natural links to St-Lin, having once been part of its parish; Protestant children from St-Lin attended the New Glasgow school. McOuat suggested that the Protestants of St-Lin and New Glasgow unite as a separate school municipality, perhaps under the name, "New Glasgow," and leave the Jews of Ste-Sophie to form the official Ste-Sophie dissentient board. All parties agreed to this solution, and McOuat outlined his proposal to Parmalee.²⁷ The "Jewish Farmers and Settlers" of Ste-Sophie held a meeting on December 25th, at which Solomon Shaposnick and four others were elected school trustees.²⁸

Parmalee, however, was not satisfied with this arrangement. According to law, there could be only one dissentient board in any school municipality, and he insisted upon strict adherence to the Education Act. He also indicated discomfort

with the idea of a Protestant board comprised entirely of Jews. Sensing the Jews' determination, he recommended that they petition for the right to form a new school municipality "for Protestants only."²⁹ This procedure was intended to bring all the "Protestant" taxpayers of a given area under the control of the separate school board, not merely the ones that had dissented. Thus, any Jews who later acquired property within the territory of this new school municipality would contribute to this board and to the operation of the new school. Parmalee may have believed that the government would never sanction the establishment of a "Protestants only" school board for Jews. But to the community itself, he was as helpful as possible and recommended that the new school receive a grant from a special fund to help poor rural municipalities. He drew the line, however, at Guilaroff's suggestion that the new school municipality should be described as "Jewish" and proposed, instead, the name, "Hirsch," because of its connection with the Baron de Hirsch Institute.³⁰ The name "Scotland" was finally adopted—a reference to the area's Scottish past—which satisfied Parmalee and did not seem to displease anyone in the community.

After some months of negotiations, the government agreed to the establishment of the new board on condition that its territory be only that part of Ste-Sophie where Jews were concentrated, and not the surrounding municipalities such as New Glasgow. A further requirement was that the request should come from a majority of taxpayers within the designated area. The petition requesting the separate municipality was drawn up by a notary in St-Jérôme and sent to the government in May 1914. It contained 36 signatures from taxpayers whose properties were collectively valued at \$25,100.³¹ The Scotland school municipality was created by order-in-council in July in time for the inhabitants to elect their trustees legally. Thirteen heads of household attended the first meeting and unanimously appointed Solomon Shaposnick chair. Simon Cliff was elected secretary-treasurer.³² Although more trustees were elected than was legally permissible, the extras satisfied the needs of a

diverse and participatory community. Disagreements among school board members were frequent throughout its history, in large part because the school board dealt with a wide variety of matters besides education.

The Community and Its School Board

At the Scotland school, children were taught downstairs in English and upstairs in Hebrew and to a lesser extent in Yiddish. The English teacher might take the older grades in the morning, leaving the younger ones in the care of the Hebrew teacher upstairs, switching after lunch.³³ (A daily half hour of French was added in 1917.) The Hebrew teacher usually served as the community's *shochet* and sometimes as its rabbi. The *shochet* slaughtered poultry and animals in a shed behind the school—an example of the blurring of secular and religious in the school. Although the school budget was offset chiefly by school taxes and fees (the latter being the normal way teachers were paid), the services of the *shochet* and Hebrew teacher were subsidized by the JCA. Initially, the JCA paid half the salaries and the Ste-Sophie residents were responsible for the remainder, but during the Depression the JCA paid four-fifths.³⁴ The trustees also supervised the cemetery fund. In most other respects, the school functioned like any one-room school house, and the trustees' role was that of a typical rural board.

The Ste-Sophie trustees maintained the school, hired the teachers, and provided textbooks, blackboards, and maps. They met regularly at the school, and the secretary-treasurer kept minutes in the accepted style, although some entries were in Yiddish. The minutes of the first meeting in July 1914 reflect the limits of the immigrants' command of English:

A joint general miting of the Jewish Farmers helld this Date for the porpus of Electing a bord of Trostes for The School, the folowing gentelmen wery present... Mr Shapochnik wer appontet as Chermen. The Cherman opend the

miting and declerd the namonashin for the Bord
of Trostis opend.³⁵

After the election of Simon Cliff as secretary-treasurer the English improved, but the number of entries made in Yiddish suggests that subsequent secretaries decided that this was a liberty they could take in the interests of clarity.

Most of the English teachers came from Montreal; often it was someone with no more than a high school education, but sometimes a Jewish graduate of the (Protestant) Macdonald School for Teachers in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue was hired. Teachers were recruited by word of mouth, but occasionally the trustees had to advertise in one of the Jewish newspapers.³⁶ Despite the large number of Jewish children attending Montreal Protestant schools and the many Jewish graduates from the Protestant School for Teachers (close to a third of the class of 1932), the Montreal Protestant board was generally disinclined to hire Jewish teachers.³⁷ Mary Frank (later Zaritsky) is an example. Graduating from the Macdonald School in 1932 and entering the job market at the height of the Depression, Mary discovered that there were few teaching positions open and virtually none for Jews. Mary's father knew a farmer in Ste-Sophie who agreed to speak to the board about her, since the current English teacher, Miss Lagenov, was leaving to get married. The trustees welcomed the idea of hiring a Macdonald graduate. Mary recalled her mother's horror at the prospect of her living in a house with no electricity and no indoor plumbing, but she was determined to make the most of this opportunity. The new teacher boarded at the house of school board chair Harry Kahansky, sharing a room with one of his daughters. For this she paid \$3 a week, out of a salary of \$40 a month. Mary walked 3/4 of a mile to school every day, where her first duty was to light the stove—a task she found so daunting at first, that she was obliged to ask one of the pupils to help.³⁸

Half a day of instruction in English meant that the Ste-Sophie children, like all immigrant children, quickly outshone their parents. Sarah Tyndale, a private-school teacher

from Montreal who was invited to visit the school after it had been open a year, was greatly impressed by the pupils' progress, especially their ability to speak grammatical, properly-accented English. She urged the trustees to rehire Miss Shaner before she was enticed elsewhere by the offer of a higher salary.³⁹ Tyndale did point to the need for an English-language library in the school and promised to begin a collection of books if the trustees would supply a bookcase. She also recommended the purchase of a more up-to-date map of Canada, a globe for geography lessons, and lower desks to prevent injury to the pupils' eyes.⁴⁰ The Protestant school inspector, J.W. McOuat, was also impressed: in the school's first year, he recommended a bonus for the teacher in recognition of the students' progress, and the following year a Strathcona Trust prize in books for the school.⁴¹ McOuat was succeeded as inspector by Lewis King, whose twice yearly visits were also pleasant occasions, as Mary Zaritsky remembered them.⁴² The inspectors seemed to admire the Jewish community for taking pains to educate their children within the public school system. The trustees also established their own system of inspection: two members were appointed to examine the Jewish studies classes and the others followed developments on the secular side. Not surprising for a farming community, the trustees encouraged agricultural endeavours. During the First World War, they helped the children establish a victory garden at the school and offered prizes to the most successful "cultivators."⁴³

Despite praise from education officials, the school and its teachers were subject to criticism from the community. Like their counterparts elsewhere, the Ste-Sophie trustees received complaints from parents about the skills or behaviour of particular teachers, and they had to mediate among parents if there was a dispute among children.⁴⁴ Good teachers were respected, and parents normally defended teachers' authority when their children complained about homework or discipline.⁴⁵ But the trustees were inclined to side with parents, not teachers, since parents were taxpayers as well as neighbours. If complaints

warranted, a member of the board, usually the chair, would investigate. The trustees disciplined teachers who, they felt, were not carrying out their responsibilities properly. In January 1922, for example, they fined the Hebrew teacher \$27.50 for sending the children outdoors in dangerously cold weather.⁴⁶

The trustees set the mill rate and monthly school fees. Like all poor rural school boards in Quebec, the Ste-Sophie trustees had to work from an inadequate tax base, and they searched for creative measures to overcome deficient government funding and rural poverty.⁴⁷ They used the cemetery fund to purchase schoolbooks and levies from the *shochet's* services to repair the school. Often they looked after the school's day-to-day needs themselves. This sense of economy, typical of small rural boards, resulted from the prohibitive cost of hiring a janitor but also from the close-knit nature of the community. One of the trustees supplied wood for the school and, in the early years, another went in to light the stove in winter, although both tasks were rewarded with a small stipend. At one point, Harry Kahansky was voted "\$25 for having the honour of cleaning out the toilet since he was chairman."⁴⁸

Some of the "creative" measures were questionable. In 1922, the Hebrew teacher, S. Shoichet, who was also the *shochet*, complained to the JCA that he was receiving only \$45 per month of its \$55 subsidy. Apparently, the trustees were using the difference to subsidize "the English school." Since financing the English curriculum was the responsibility of the community, the JCA decided to pay Mr. Shoichet directly and insisted that the trustees reimburse him out of their own pockets.⁴⁹ The JCA decided to stop its subsidy until the situation was resolved. Rather than risk having to close the school, the trustees agreed to have \$10 deducted from the school stipend until the full amount had been repaid. Simon Belkin, secretary of the JCA, urged the trustees to enforce the payment of taxes rather than trying to secure income by dubious means. He accused them of retaining \$200 of the JCA subsidy to support the secular curriculum and of forcing the government to increase its grants.⁵⁰

Although the trustees' actions were not strictly legal, Belkin showed little appreciation for the difficulties that the board experienced trying to provide service on a very tight budget.

Like their counterparts elsewhere, the trustees had to cajole and threaten derelict ratepayers and occasionally take them to court. Although land ownership was complicated by the involvement of the JCA, in 1933, trustees unanimously agreed to put the farms of Dr. Budyk and Miss Lyndale up for sale in order to collect taxes.⁵¹ Sometimes ratepayers threatened to pay their taxes to the Catholic board whose mill rate was lower, although, as secretary-treasurer Charles Yarosky pointed out, "they cannot do so unless they profess the Catholic religion."⁵² Some families refused to pay the tuition fees for Hebrew instruction, arguing that they did not want this service. The trustees replied that all children who attended the school must receive Hebraic education to ensure that the school could keep a Hebrew teacher; if parents refused to pay, they would be deprived of the *shochet's* services.⁵³ The Ste-Sophie trustees had some means of exerting pressure that other rural school boards would have envied.

On the other hand, they had more problems because of their communal and religious responsibilities. As the community's only official public body, the trustees faced issues that often had little to do with the school, such as the management of the cemetery and the hiring of a rabbi and *shochet*. Trustees were, in their own words, "authorized to act in all matters affecting our community, whether financial or moral..."⁵⁴ As Ste-Sophie's hospitality industry expanded during the late 1930s, non-Jewish families in the area also started taking in Jewish vacationers from the city; many of them required the services of the *shochet*, and the board insisted that such families pay a \$10 tax for this privilege.⁵⁵ And if any Jewish family allowed someone other than the *shochet* to kill their poultry or other farm animals, then their children could be barred from school.⁵⁶ The *shochet's* services could also be withdrawn in the interests of enforcing regulations. When the Starkman family

allegedly sold non-kosher meat and publicly insulted a member of the community, the trustees prohibited the *shochet* from killing any of Henry Starkman's animals and threatened to banish anyone who brought Starkman chickens to the *shochet* for slaughter. In the end, Starkman agreed to pay a fine of \$15 to the school, and the trustees gave the *shochet* permission to resume slaughtering the Starkman chickens.⁵⁷ It was important to the community that decisions were made by consensus to avoid any ill will. In this case, the school board minutes recorded

that most of the members were present [at this meeting], and everything was agreed upon and although some of the members were excited they all departed as good friends and everything was forgiven.⁵⁸

Disputes were not always resolvable, however, as board chairman Harry Kahansky discovered in July 1937. Already angry at the special tax the board had levied to cover the community's proportion of the Hebrew teacher's salary, property owners were furious at Kahansky, who refused to pay his share of this tax on the grounds that he had paid in kind. Many approached the school board election determined to "throw out Kahansky" and elect Harry Yarosky. Although the JCA had recommended "for the sake of peace all old debts or claims which the *Kehillah* may have against Mr. Kahansky or Mr. Simkin should be wiped out,"⁵⁹ the community was not in a benevolent state of mind. As noted earlier, criticism of the trustees' decisions could also come from above: in 1937, the JCA refused to recognize Isaac Galitsky as the Ste-Sophie Hebrew teacher and *shochet*, because he had not obtained proper certification from the Montreal rabbis.⁶⁰ Until he became certified or the school board engaged a qualified *shochet*, the JCA refused to subsidize the position; the trustees were obliged to acquiesce. Tension between the JCA and the Canadian colonies was widespread, largely owing to the JCA's unawareness of the realities of life in rural communities and of familial, ideological, and religious rivalries.⁶¹

The variety and complexity of the board's responsibilities compounded an already complicated set of relationships with the community. But board meetings constituted a form of democracy at work, one that had no real parallel anywhere else in Quebec. As Jewish families had very little contact with local officials, the Jewish school board in Ste-Sophie served its constituency as a kind of municipal government. By the 1930s, the municipal council of Ste-Sophie was dominated by French-speaking Catholics whose interests were very different from those of the Jewish farmers. It was to this council that the Jewish property owners paid their municipal (as opposed to school) taxes, and during the Depression it began to appear to them that the council was levying unusually high taxes on Jewish properties for very little return: most roads in the area were not paved, nor was there much in the way of water, sewage, or electricity services. Relations between Jews and Catholics, which had never been warm, deteriorated over the course of the 1930s and early 1940s. By 1945, a local farmer, Willie Rudy, attempted to effect change by running for a seat on the council, but the Catholic mayor declared that he would never allow a Jew to serve under him.⁶² Undeterred, Rudy persisted and was elected to council. He served as alderman for over two decades, and as mayor of Ste-Sophie for eight years in the 1960s.

Conclusion

The postwar years took their toll on the Ste-Sophie community. Young people were attracted to Montreal where they could earn a living or receive higher education.⁶³ By the 1940s, the heyday of the kosher hotels had passed; they fell victim to undercapitalization and changing tastes. Increasing numbers of Montreal vacationers preferred the more sophisticated facilities farther north in Ste-Agathe, where Jewish businesspeople had established resorts for their co-religionists who were still not welcome in hotels run by non-Jews. During the following

decades, Ste-Sophie's economy was increasingly focused on agricultural production for sale to urban markets. Gradually, Jewish farmers moved away, and even those continuing to farm often lived only part time in the Ste-Sophie area.⁶⁴ Today there is a mere handful of elderly Jewish residents. Ste-Sophie has become part of the hinterland of St-Jérôme, now a substantial French-Canadian city linked by highway to both Montreal and the Laurentians. Although the synagogue remains, the community is mostly unaware of its Jewish past.⁶⁵

In 1949, the board closed the Scotland school and sent local Jewish pupils to New Glasgow where the school population had diminished so that the school's two rooms were more than sufficient for all. The teacher, Irene Smith, was paid by both boards. Although the New Glasgow school board lacked the specific Jewish designation of its counterpart in Ste-Sophie, many of its trustees were Jewish by this time. Within three years, the boards merged with another in St-Jérôme to form the Laurentia Protestant School Board, which built a modern school in St-Jérôme to which all the Jewish and Protestant children in the area were bussed. To this new school board, the Jewish ratepayers of Ste-Sophie now paid their school taxes, along with the Protestants and Jews of New Glasgow, St-Lin, and the rest of the region.⁶⁶ Willie Rudy served as a commissioner on this board, and later as chairman.

The experience of having created and maintained a Jewish school board in Ste-Sophie brought the Jews of the Laurentians into the provincial educational structure quite naturally—in contrast to the situation in Montreal where the Jewish community had to wait until the Quiet Revolution before they could be represented on the Protestant school board. In places like Ste-Sophie and New Glasgow, the notion that Jews and Protestants were equal for school purposes had real meaning, albeit largely because the Protestants in the area were few in number and because in 1914 the Jews of Ste-Sophie were willing to press their case. The Protestant school system proved remarkably flexible, when it came to meeting

the requirements of the Ste-Sophie community. As a case study, Ste-Sophie provides a significant exception to the norm of Jews' being victims of prejudice in unaccommodating institutions.

Notes

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²See for example, Leon David Crestohl, *The Jewish School Problem in the Province of Quebec: From its Origins to the Present Day* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing Co., 1926); Harold Ross, "The Jew in the Educational System in the Province of Quebec," MA Thesis (McGill University, 1947); Gault E. Finley, "The Bi-Religious Basis of Québec's Public School System: Its Origins and Subsequent Development," Ed.D. Dissertation Columbia University, 1959; David Rome, *On the Jewish School Question in Montreal, 1903-1931* (Montreal: National Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1975); David Rome, *The Three Heroes of Montreal Jewish Education* (Montreal: National Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1992); and Arlette Corcos, *Montréal, les juifs et l'école* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1997).

³Montreal's Protestant school board was officially called the Protestant Board of School Commissioners for the City of Montreal. In 1925, it joined the umbrella Montreal Central School Board, along with several other smaller Protestant boards. By the 1950s, the central board had been restructured and renamed the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, whose ten members representing the city of Montreal were required by law to be Protestant. Because this arrangement all but excluded Jewish representation, five extra seats were added (making a total of 25)

allowing five Jews to be appointed to the board by the provincial government. See Andrew Sancton, *Governing the Island of Montreal: Language Differences and Metropolitan Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 49.

⁴Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, (hereafter CJCA), Ste-Sophie File: Letter from Mrs. Max Goldberg to an unidentified newspaper, 1963.

⁵Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 95, 98.

⁶Simon Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates: A Review of Jewish Immigration, Colonization and Immigrant Aid Work in Canada, 1840-1940* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1966), p. 29.

⁷Ira Robinson and Mervin Butovsky, eds., *Renewing our Days: Montreal Jews in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1995), p. 13.

⁸No Jews appear in the 1901 Census for any of these communities.

⁹Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates*, p. 52.

¹⁰Norman, *An Outstretched Arm*, p. 17.

¹¹Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates*, p. 71.

¹²Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1983), p. 105.

¹³CJCA, File L126, Ste-Sophie Colony, Quebec, 1932-1973, 11 December 1939.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Interview with Mary Zaritsky, 25 July 2002.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates*, p. 73. A *shochet* slaughters animals according to kosher rules.

¹⁸Many rural boards were not specifically designated “Protestant” or “Catholic,” if there was no minority to create an official alternative. In practice, however, the curriculum determined everything. From the 1870s, education was overseen by the government-appointed Council of Public Instruction, which was divided into two independent committees representing the province’s two largest religious groups and setting its own curriculum.

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¹⁹An additional complication in Montreal was that most Jews lived in rented accommodations and the landlord paid the taxes. School boards ignored the fact that tenants paid indirectly and argued that Jewish pupils were an undue burden.

²⁰ l'Archives Nationales de Québec (hereafter, ANQ)—Q, Fonds E13, No.2065, Letter, E. Guilaroff to George Parmalee, 26 December 1913.

²¹*Keneder Odler*, 7 November 1929 (translation from the Yiddish by Abe Bonder).

²²B. G. Sack, *The History of the Jews in Canada* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1965), pp. 230-32.

²³ Interview with Solomon Goodz, 12 November 2000.

²⁴ANQ-Q, Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, E. Guilaroff to George Parmalee, 14 July 1913.

²⁵ANQ-Q, Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, George Parmalee to E. Guilaroff, 16 July 1913.

²⁶ANQ-Q, Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, E. Guilaroff to George Parmalee, 26 December 1913.

²⁷ANQ-Q. Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, J.W. McOuat to George Parmalee, 11 December 1913.

²⁸ANQ-Q. Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, E. Guilaroff to George Parmalee, 26 December 1913.

²⁹ANQ-Q. Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, George Parmalee to E. Guilaroff, 31 December 1913.

³⁰ANQ-Q. Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, George Parmalee to E. Guilaroff, 9 January 1914.

³¹ANQ-Q. Fonds E13, No. 2065, Letter, J. E. Parent to George Parmalee, 13 May 1914; No. 1170, Petition, May 1914.

³²McGill University Archives (hereafter, MUA), *Minutes of the Ste-Sophie Protestant School Board* (hereafter, MSSB), 11 July 1914.

³³Zaritsky interview.

³⁴ACJC, L126, Ste-Sophie Colony, Quebec, 1932-1973, 19 May 1937.

³⁵MSSB, 11 July 1914.

³⁶MSSB, 25 August 1924.

³⁷Rome, *Jewish School Question*, p. 34.

³⁸Zaritsky interview.

³⁹ACJC, File L126, 17 August 1914.

⁴⁰Ibid., 21 August 1914.

⁴¹*Report of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1914-1915*, p. 212.

⁴²Zaritsky interview.

⁴³MSSB, 13 May 1916.

⁴⁴Ibid., 19 April 1923.

⁴⁵Zaritsky interview.

⁴⁶MSSB, 30 February 1922.

⁴⁷For a discussion of this practice in a different sort of rural community, see J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants* (Monreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), p. 235.

⁴⁸MSSB, 5 February 1922.

⁴⁹ACJC, File L126, *Inspection Report on Jewish Farming Groups in the Province of Quebec*, August 1922, pp. 24-31.

⁵⁰Ibid., 31 January 1923.

⁵¹MSSB, 30 December 1933.

⁵²ACJC, L126, Ste-Sophie Colony, Quebec, 1932-1973, 14 January 1929.

⁵³Private Papers of Gault Finley, translation of the minutes from Yiddish by Louis Rosenberg, 11 June 1928.

⁵⁴MSSB, 21 April 1930.

⁵⁵Ibid., 12 April 1933.

⁵⁶Ibid., 6 March 1921.

⁵⁷Ibid., 19 February 1922.

⁵⁸Ibid., 5 February 1922.

⁵⁹ACJC, L126, Ste-Sophie Colony, Quebec, 1932-1973, 23 June 1937.

⁶⁰Ibid., 5 and 23 July 1937.

⁶¹Colonists in Hirsch, Saskatchewan, for example, clashed over who the Hebrew teacher and *shochet* would be. See Anthony W. Rasporich, "Early Twentieth-Century Jewish Farm Settlement in Saskatchewan: A Utopian Perspective," *Saskatchewan History* 42,1 (1989): 31-34.

⁶²CJCA, Ste-Sophie File: Article on Rudy by Lou Seligson.

⁶³Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddard, 1998), pp. 11-16.

⁶⁴Interview with Sarah Fremeth, 28 April 2002.

⁶⁵When we went to Ste-Sophie in November 2000 in an attempt to locate the synagogue which, according to one source, was still standing, we had difficulty finding anyone who knew that there had once been a Jewish community in the area. The pharmacist, however, remembered an elderly customer whom she believed to be Jewish. Solomon Goodz turned out to live in an old house right across the street from one of the stores where no one had known there had ever been Jews in Ste-Sophie. Goodz led us to the synagogue, located less than a kilometer from the centre of town. It was still in use, albeit only on the High Holy Days when a rabbi from New York leads services for the few locals and some former residents now living Montreal.

⁶⁶Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board Archive, Information Sheet: "History of Development of Laurentian School Board," n.d.