

Franklin Bialystok

**Introduction**

I am honoured to be the Guest Editor of this edition of *Canadian Jewish Studies/ Études juives canadiennes*. The articles and responses within are based on talks given by contributors to a Symposium on Canadian Jewish Studies in honour of Professor Emeritus Gerald Tulchinsky of Queen's University, called *Ofyn Veg* (On The Road), the title of Tulchinsky's epilogue in *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey*. The Symposium was organized by myself, Randal Schnoor and David Koffman of York University, and was hosted by the Centre of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto. It took place at the Jackman Humanities Building on November 17, 2013.

The sponsors of the Symposium were:

The Harry and Sylvia Rosen Memorial Fund, Jewish Studies, Queen's University  
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Gerald Tulchinsky is the foremost scholar of Canada's Jews. From his research and writing on Canadian immigration, labour, business and urban history, Professor Tulchinsky took the ambitious route of writing a two-volume history in the 1990s, *Taking Root: The Origins Of The Canadian Jewish Community* followed by *Branching Out: The Transformation Of The Canadian Jewish Community*. He edited and condensed these volumes, and incorporated new research in his magisterial work, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* in 2008.

Jerry, as known to his colleagues and friends, represents the first generation of academic scholarship on Jewish life in Canada. Beginning with the publication of *The Jew in Canada* edited by a lawyer, Arthur Hart in 1926, the extensive research and publications about Canadian Jews was in the purvey of what we describe as amateurs. We do not use this term as one of condescension. In fact, these non-academics were diligent, thoughtful, and serious scholars. Some wrote in Yiddish, including Benjamin Sack who wrote *History of the Jews in Canada*. Sack, a journalist, was in league with other journalists, notably A. M. Klein, and in the second half of the Twentieth Century, Abraham Arnold. In this period, the research by civil servants in Jewish organizations, notably The Canadian Jewish Congress, amplified these efforts. The list of luminaries is extensive, but special consideration is reserved for Simon Belkin, Ben Kayfetz, Joseph Kage and especially David Rome and Louis Rosenberg. In addition, local Jewish historical societies sprang up producing newsletters and journals that added to our knowledge. The point here is that Jerry stands on the shoulders of those who did not have the privilege of doing research for a living.

The “professionalization” of the field began in the 1970s and 80s, with books such as Stephen Speisman’s *The Jews of Toronto* and Michael Brown’s *Jew or Juif*. Jerry moved from the study of Canadian Business to Jewish Studies, while his contemporaries, Irving Abella and Harold Troper, transitioned from the fields of Immigration and Labour. Their research underscores the fact that the history of Canada’s Jews cannot be divorced from Canadian History, and that their transition was not leaving one field for another, but rather an integration of their initial and adopted interests. From Rosenberg to Rome to Tulchinsky, a generation of scholars emerged, from the ones already mentioned, accompanied by scholars such as Seymour Mayne, Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil, Richard Menkis, William Shaffir, and Morton Weinfeld. Since then, Norman Ravvin, Jack Lipinsky, Rebecca Margolis, Alan Levine, Henry Srbrnik, Randal Schnoor, David Koffman, Chantal Ringuet are among those who have picked up the torch and are passing it on to the next generation.

This special issue in honour of Jerry brings together scholars whose work is primarily in Canadian Jewish Studies with those who come from other fields of Canadian research, demonstrating that the Canadian Jewish experience is integral to the national one. The former group includes Morton Weinfeld of McGill University, Jack Lipinsky of the Robbins Hebrew Academy, Michael Brown of York University, Ira Robinson of Concordia University, Pierre Anctil and Rebecca Margolis of The University of Ottawa, and Professor Tulchinsky. The latter group is composed of formidable scholars in diverse fields, from labour, gender studies, military and defense history, to business, political and medical history. We thank Ian Mackay of Queen’s University, Carmela Patrias of Brock University, Ruth Frager of McMaster University, Jennifer Stephen of York University, Michael Bliss of The University of Toronto, and Jack Granatstein of The Canadian Defence and Foreign Institute – an impressive array of scholars who have a strong link to Jerry as academics and as colleagues.

We are indebted to Jerry’s former students, Jennifer Stephen and Gordon Dueck, who spoke of the inspiration that they received from Jerry as part of their process in becoming historians. The Symposium consisted of four sessions. They were chaired by Emily Gilbert, the Chair of Canadian Studies, Jeff Kopstein, the Chair of Jewish Studies, both at The University of Toronto, Howard Adelman, Chair of Jewish Studies at Queen’s University, and Carl Ehrlich, the Chair of Jewish Studies at York University. We thank them and their institutes for their contribution. Finally, the day’s proceedings were graced with three generations of the Tulchinsky family in the audience.

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Guest Editor of *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études juives canadiennes*

Centre for Canadian Studies, University College

University of Toronto

## ***The Road Ahead***

### **Opening Lecture, *Oyfn Veg: A Symposium on Canadian Jewish Studies in Honour of Gerald Tulchinsky***

**November 17, 2013**

**Jackman Humanities Building, University of Toronto**

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As I've been reflecting on Gerald Tulchinsky's prodigious contribution to Canadian Jewish Studies, I considered what Jerry may be reading and thinking about the state of the field, and more interesting, the condition of Canadian Jewry, since the publication of *Canada's Jews* was completed in 2008. With regard to the former a host seminal studies are providing us with a deeper insight and perspective into this history and culture. With regard to the latter, we are witness to the sharpening of trends in the changes in Jewish organizational life that, in part, are responsive to the changes in the identity adopted by Canadian Jews. I will comment on each in turn.

Since the release of *Canada's Jews*, a comprehensive collection of twenty-six entries representing the most recent scholarship appeared earlier this year: *Canada's Jews: In Time, Space and Spirit*, edited by Ira Robinson. Twelve chapters are the work of contributors to this Symposium. I'm most impressed by those on English and French literatures, and on art. They begin to fill the gap that will hopefully result in a comprehensive study that addresses the contribution of Jewish artists, writers, dramatists, and filmmakers to Canadian culture.

Jerry would find new perspectives on Jewish life in Montreal with such works as *Les communautés juives de Montreal*, edited by Pierre Anctil and Ira Robinson, Anctil's biography of Jacob-Isaac Segal, Chantal Ringuet's *A la decouverte du Montreal Yiddish*, and *New Readings in Yiddish*, edited by Norman Ravvin, Pierre Anctil and Sherry Simon. Rebecca Margolis' masterful study of Yiddish in Montreal, *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil* consolidates a half-century of culture, education and identity. Denis Vaugeois' *Les Premiers Juifs d'Amerique, 1760-1860*, provides a fresh look at the community's origins. We are grateful for this output, but we await a scholarly study of the history of the Jews of Montreal to provide perspective on the descriptive works by Joe King.

Jerry would have much to incorporate into his new edition about the interwar years in Jewish Toronto from Jack Lipinsky's important study of organizational history, *Imposing Their Will*. The publication this year of *Only Yesterday* brings us forgotten perspectives on life in Toronto written by Benjamin Kayfetz and Stephen A. Speisman, and from the same publishing house, Bill Gladstone's *Then And Now Books*, that resurrected Shmuel Mayer Shapiro's 1950 publication, *The Rise of the Toronto Jewish Community*. There is a much deeper and comprehensive story still to tell, however,

about Canada's largest Jewish community. Jerry's interest in public Jewish education is enriched by Alex Pomson and Randal Schnoor's work on adult education in *Back to School*.

Jerry has written extensively about antisemitism in Canada. He would profit from the chapters by scholars of Canadian, Canadian Jewish, and European History that are compiled in *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses*, a volume that illuminates and deepens our understanding of the milieu that prompted Canada's leaders to reject the admission of European Jews. Chapters by Michael Brown on antisemitism on the campus, James Walker on the early struggle for human rights, and Richard Menkis and Harold Troper's research on the decision to participate in the '36 Olympics (and their upcoming book on this topic), do much to provide the context for Abella and Troper's ground breaking *None Is too Many*. Adding to our understanding of the Anglo elite's quiet antisemitism is Alan Mendleson's volume, *Exiles from Nowhere*, which sheds more light on Vincent Massey and Goldwin Smith, and provides an appraisal of George Grant's views of Jews.

Jerry's work on the impact of Zionism in Canada is embedded in Henry Srebrnik's early history of the movement in *Creating the Chupah*, and in the popular overview in David Azrieli's *Rekindling the Torch*.

Jerry writes about small town Jews, in part because his roots are in Brantford and most of his life has been in Kingston, but also because that part of the story is little known today. He would welcome the popular works by Bill Gladstone in his *History of the Jewish Community of London* and Alan Levine's *A History of the Jewish People of Manitoba*.

Jerry's passion for the study of labour and radical politics converges in his most recent work, *Joe Salsberg: A Life of Commitment*. It's a colourful biography that merges the history of radical politics, labour struggle, ethno-community development and social history. It's indicative of Jerry's ability to articulate the spirit of Toronto's Jewish community via a representation of Salsberg's remarkable life.

We look forward to the publications by the newest batch of scholars including Adara Goldberg's work on survivor adaptation and Barry Stiefel and Hernan Tesler-Mabe's edition of a comparative study of the Jewish experience in Canada and the United States. I have taken on the unenviable task of writing an undergraduate text on Canada's Jews, and in so doing, relying heavily on the output by Tulchinsky and his predecessors.

A major lacuna in the field is a comprehensive study of Canada's Jews since World War II. This has been partially filled in Troper's superlative work on the 1960s, *The Defining Decade*. Troper reveals how the transition from an identity as immigrants to one as Canadians played itself out in the heady politics and culture of the time. He argues that the suppressed memory of the Holocaust was instrumental in creating

a grass roots politicization that manifested itself in a more muscular approach to combating the proliferation of racist speech and print, a communal tidal wave of support for Israel, and for the liberation of Soviet Jews. In so doing, Troper provides the context for the evolution of a new collective identity.

I'll now turn to the second consideration – what Jerry might be considering regarding the state of Canadian Jewry today. In the 1960s, Canada's Jews became more attuned to the destruction of Jewish civilization in Europe even though they had little memory, and aside from the survivors, no experience of the calamity. This delayed impact, which disturbed the relative calm of the immediate postwar period, was marked by the transition of the collective identity of Canadian Jews from one of immigrants to one of Canadians. The central events in the decade were the Eichmann trial, lurid anti-Semitic pamphlets, graffiti and hate speech, and the Six Day War. In the next two decades the impact was exacerbated by popular and scholarly books, media presentations, the revelation of suspected war criminals resident in Canada, the publication of *None Is Too Many* and the appropriation of this title as the signal statement about Canada's immigration policies prior to the 1950s. In addition, the politicization of survivors, and the inflammatory publications and rhetoric of Holocaust deniers, both at home and abroad were significant markers in raising public awareness and contributed to the changing identity of Canadian Jewry. Tarring Zionism with the racist epithet and the growth of anti-Israeli sentiment from the anti-colonialist critics and from sectors in the Islamic world added fuel to the fear that another and perhaps tragic final chapter would be added to the sordid history of antisemitism. Hence, it is no accident that Canadian Jewry appropriated the legacy of the Holocaust by perceiving that its echo was being played out in real time. This appropriation, by a generation that had almost no memory and certainly no experience of the Holocaust, was a confluence of what had been lost, the legacy of that loss, and the melding of history and memory. In seeming contradiction, this new pillar of ethnic identity was concurrent with Jewish ascendance into the Canadian mainstream.

In the last thirty years, this dialectic between the fear of another calamity and the comfort of material well-being and the acceptance of Jews into the Canadian mainstream has shaped Jewish communal organization, political orientation, education and culture. In popular parlance, it's the old story: "If things are so good for the Jews, why are they so bad?" Were Jerry to consider how this collective identity has evolved since *Canada's Jews* came out, he may highlight two interconnected developments: the reorientation of advocacy on behalf of Canada's Jews and for Israel, and the rightward move on the political spectrum by the Jewish mainstream. Specifically, he would analyze the erasure of The Canadian Jewish Congress and The Canada Israel Committee in 2011, and support given by a majority of Jews to the Conservative Party in the election in the same year.

Let's examine the two sides of this dialectic. Canada's Jews are more than ensconced in the mainstream, more comfortable and secure in the Diaspora than at any time in history. No longer stepchildren of the immigrants who couldn't budge Mackenzie King's "thou shall not enter" edict, today Jews are disproportionately represented in business, the arts and letters, scholarship, the professions and the media. Jewish concerns are Canadian concerns – justice, pluralism, democracy. Yet there is a gnawing unease that this comfort is in jeopardy. Not to be crude, it's because Jews carry the DNA of the Holocaust. Although antisemitism has been a central feature of the Jewish experience in Canada, it has precipitously declined since the War. Yet, the communal angst about antisemitism today unites many Canadian Jews. Hence, there are myriad Jewish organizations that purport to speak in the name of the community by playing on this deep seated insecurity, exaggerating the impact of, for example Israel Apartheid Week on some campuses, and that vie with one another to uncover the demons hiding in Jewish closets. This perception is given further voice by some religious leaders. As Michael Brown pointedly puts it in his chapter on the Jews of Toronto in *Canada's Jews: In Time, Space and Spirit*, in writing about the supposed furor at York University in recent years, "the 'battle of York University' should raise questions about the wisdom of viewing antisemitism as the central focus of the community and most certainly about the tactics employed to fight it?"

This unease is reflected in the unqualified support, by mainstream organizations and synagogues, for the government of Israel and disapproval of those who are critical of its policies. Hence, another platform has been to change the perception of anti-Israeli public opinion in Canada. To this end, mainstream Jewry has been at odds with the Liberals, from Trudeau *père* to Trudeau *fils*, and have become increasingly beholden to the Conservative Party. We need to underscore that the support for Harper's unvarnished alliance with the Netanyahu administration yielded three seats in Toronto in 2011 that had been ironclad Liberal bastions, and greatly narrowed the large gap between the Tories and the opposition in "Jewish seats" in Montreal and Winnipeg. This shift of political allegiance to the right fractured historic ties between Canadian Jews and the Liberal and NDP parties.

Intertwined with these developments has been the growth and dominance of Jewish federations, notably in Toronto and Montreal. In large part, this is tied to a climate of uncertainty regarding the future of the Diaspora. The recent PEW report on American Jewry underscores the rising level of intermarriage, and that growing numbers of self-proclaimed Jews are distancing themselves from observance and concern for Jewish issues. These tremours have been reverberating in Canada since the 1960s. In response, Federations have charged themselves with the mandate of the maintenance of Jewish continuity by determining that the greatest antidote to self-destruction is Jewish education, pouring resources into both formal and informal structures. To a degree, as Weinfeld points out in his seminal work, *Like Everyone Else ... But Different*, this directive produced the highest participation in Jewish education in memory and

slowing the rate of assimilation in comparison to the rest of the Diaspora. Given the responsibility of raising funds from, and providing services for its constituents, the power and influence of the Federations clawed away at the viability of the traditional advocacy organizations, Canadian Jewish Congress and the Canada Israel Committee. About a decade ago, the perception that growing antisemitism and anti-Israeli public opinion was the product of ineffective advocacy, a decision was made by a small coterie of influential donors to fold CJC and CIC into a larger superstructure that included new campus organizations. This produced CIJA – the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy in 2005. When that colossus proved to be too cumbersome, the constituent organizations were excised and a uniform structure, also called CIJA, but now standing for The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (note: no mention of Canada) was created in 2011. Its mandate is to provide a unified Jewish voice.

This reminds me of a story told by Irving Abella. As I recall it, his father and three uncles couldn't finish their weekly pinochle games as the Abella brothers would argue as to what was the true path for the Jewish people. (I presume that this would have taken place in the late 1940s). One was a Bundist, the second a Revisionist, the third a Stalinist, and the fourth a Zionist (I don't know which stream: Right Worker, Left Worker, General or Socialist.) Since when have Jews spoken with a unified voice? This is echoed in the response from a Zionist representative given to Louis Greenspan who was volunteering to go to Israel in the uncertain spring of 1967. As related by Troper in *The Defining Decade*, Louis was asked, "What can you contribute"? Louis replied, "I'm a philosopher". The Israeli retorted, "We already have two million philosophers". Indeed, the attempt to speak on behalf of a unified community belies the diversity of Canada's Jews. On any measure – economic, social, cultural, religious, sexual orientation, political, engagement with Jewish issues – one finds a broad range of opinion, debate and occasionally opprobrium. Diversity has been a hallmark of the Jewish experience since time immemorial.

The road ahead for our knowledge of the Jewish experience in Canada is a promising one. Canadian Jewish studies are ensconced on many campuses, while the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies and this journal, *Canadian Jewish Studies* and regional societies provide voices for new research. We continue to profit from the output of Jerry, his contemporaries, and from two generations scholars since then. As this Symposium demonstrates, Canada's Jews have a fertile history that continues to be explored. As Jerry stands on the shoulders of the amateur forerunners, we stand on his.

The road ahead for Canada's Jews is, as it has been for some two hundred years, uncertain. In many respects they are the most successful ethno-cultural minority in Canada, a central stone in our mosaic in the most cosmopolitan country in the world. Jews continue to come here and remain, albeit in smaller numbers, because they are afforded security and opportunity. Yet, in their collective memory, many live with



their psychological bags packed in a corner, fearful and vigilant. Were it ever thus – a people that has contributed to all fields of human endeavour, yet a people marked by condemnation and tragedy. This is the Jewish experience. This is the Jewish road.

**1**

Michael Brown, "Toronto Jewry At the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century" in Ira Robinson (ed.) *Canada's Jews: In Time, space and Spirit*. (Brighton, Mass: Academic Studies Press, 2013).