

Steven Lapidus

**Memoirs of a Refugee:
The Travels and Travails of Rabbi Pinchas
Hirschprung**

In October of 1941, twenty-nine rabbis and rabbinical students left Shanghai and eventually arrived in Montreal, under an unusual Canadian government visa program to help Orthodox rabbis. Among these refugees were the future chief rabbi of Montreal, Pinchas Hirschprung, as well as nine shlichim of the Lubavitcher rebbe. This article offers a detailed account of Hirschprung's journey from his hometown of Dukla, Poland, through Lithuania, Latvia, the Soviet Union, Japan, Shanghai, and the United States, until his arrival in Montreal. Through Hirschprung's personal experience, the article highlights the complexities and difficulties of searching for refuge during this particular period of the war, prior to the US entry after Pearl Harbor. As well, this article brings together previously untranslated archival and biographical information on the other rabbinical refugees who travelled with Hirschprung including students and teachers from some of the best-known prewar yeshivot of Lithuania and Poland. The article also addresses the tensions between the Orthodox and secular rescue organizations during the Holocaust.

In Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung's memoirs, *Fun Natsishen Yomertol: Zikhroynes fun a Polit*, the author provides little detail on his trip from the Far East to Canada. In fact, his coverage of that episode in his life is the briefest of his memoirs. It is the purpose of this paper to illuminate that part of Hirschprung's travels to Canada and to reconstruct the historic events that brought him to safety.

Born in 1912 in Dukla, a small Subcarpathian shtetl in Galicia, Rabbi Hirschprung describes his town as:

A peaceful town with three hundred Jewish families and one hundred Christian ones. One and all were faithful and pious – no one desecrated the Shabbos in public. The girls attended the Bais Yaakov school while the boys sported beards, learned until they were married, and wore gartels and attended the mikve.¹

It is not surprising to find many Hasidim in the shtetl, since Dukla is located within that part of Galicia that was dominated by Zanter Hasidim. Not only was Dukla near Nowy Sacz (Zanz), the hometown of the Divrei Chaim, founder of the dynasty, but the latter's sons had also established courts in nearby Rudnick, Bobov, Gorlice, and Shinewa. Hirschprung, however, was not a Zanter, but a Chortkover Hasid. Chortkov, located over the border in Ukraine, was the base of Rabbi Israel Friedman, grandson of the Ruzhiner Rebbe, although he had moved to Vienna after the First World War, like many other rebbes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His court was taken over by his son, Rabbi Nachum Mordechai in 1934, who moved it to Israel in 1939, where he died in 1946.²

Not surprisingly, Rabbi Hirschprung eventually set off for Yeshivath Chachmei Lublin, the largest and first large-scale Hasidic yeshiva in Europe, founded by the renowned Rabbi Meir Shapiro, also a Hasid of Chortkov. Chachmei Lublin was famous for several reasons. It boasted contemporaneous luxuries such as central heating, virtually unknown in other dormitories. Its genesis was in Rabbi Shapiro's concerns about the destruction and dislocations of the First World War. Rather than rebuild small yeshivot, Shapiro dreamed of a large international institution. After six years of extensive fundraising, ground was broken for the building at 68 Lubartowska Street in Lublin on May 30, 1924, with 50,000 people in attendance. Among the one hundred rabbis in attendance were the rebbes of Ger and Chortkov. The grand opening took place in 1930 and was so impressive that it was filmed and screened in the Regent Theater in Stamford Hill, London, on December 19, 1930.³

Admission was highly competitive and students were required to know 1,000 pages (2,000 leaves) of Talmud by heart. Hagiographical lore has it that Rabbi Shapiro once remarked that if he had built the entire building for one student, Pinchas from Dukla, it would have been worth the expense. Rabbi Hirschprung was ordained in 1932,⁴ and he began to teach and test prospective students at the yeshiva.

The fate of Chachmei Lublin, like so many other Polish Jewish institutions, was tragic. Out of a prewar student population of approximately 500, only forty-two are known to have survived the war. One survivor who escaped, Rabbi Moshe Rottenberg, re-established the yeshiva in Detroit in 1942.⁵ He was joined in 1946 by nine other surviving alumni.⁶ In the 1960s, the school relocated to Bnei Brak under the leadership of Rabbi Shmuel Wosner, a former student and renowned rabbi, where it remains. The building itself, located in the heart of Jewish Lublin and later the location of the ghetto, was an especial target of the Nazis:

It was a matter of special pride to destroy the Talmudic Academy, which was known as the greatest in Poland...We threw the huge Talmudic library out of the building and carried the books to the market place, where we set fire to them. The fire lasted twenty hours. The Lublin Jews were assembled around and wept bitterly, almost silencing us with their cries. We summoned the military band, and with joyful shouts the soldiers drowned out the sounds of the Jewish cries.⁷

Subsequently, the building served as a Gestapo office or possibly headquarters. In 2003, the original building was repatriated to the Jewish community and reopened as a synagogue in 2007.

Rabbi Shapiro was perhaps the greatest attraction for Rabbi Hirschprung. A native of Suceava, Bukovina (Shotz in Yiddish), Shapiro served as rabbi in several locales

before settling in Lublin. He was renowned in his youth as the *Shotzer Ilui* (brilliant one from Shotz) and emerged as an important rabbi, educator, and activist, and he was employed in Galicia before he moved to Piotrkow, Poland. He served as Galician delegate to the founding convention of Agudath Israel at Kattowitz (Katowice) in 1912, and ten years later he was named national president of the Polish branch. He was also elected to the *Sejm* (Polish parliament) that same year, and he served until 1927. At the 1923 world gathering of the Agudath Israel in Vienna, Shapiro introduced a novel learning strategy called *daf yomi* (daily page) that revitalized Talmud study. In 1931, he was named Chief Rabbi of Lublin and was known as the Lubliner Rav.

Of course this life centered on Hasidism and rabbinic study was devastated by the Nazi invasion of Poland. Rabbi Hirschprung was in Dukla when it fell to the Nazis while areas further east came under Soviet control on September 17, 1939. Hirschprung was trapped in Nazi territory and wanted to escape. His family – especially his mother – objected, but eventually – after arrests, beatings, and life-threatening persecution – Hirschprung smuggled himself through Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland into Lithuania and eventually made his way to Vilna.⁸ Occupied by Poland since 1919, Vilna had been recaptured by the Lithuanians in October 1939. Although caught between the two behemoths – the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany – while independent, Vilna became a refugee destination. However, it seemed unlikely that Vilna's independence would last long, and on June 15, 1940, according to a codicil in the secret Molotov-von-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, Vilna was annexed by the Soviet Union and religious suppression began. During its short-lived independence, Vilna harboured refugees from Eastern Poland and Belarus (the Kresy region) who had fled Soviet oppression. Others, like Hirschprung, smuggled themselves to Vilna from Nazi-occupied territory, although they were the exceptions. Among the tens of thousands who sought shelter in Vilna were close to two thousand rabbinical students and their teachers from the most renowned yeshivas in the Kresy region, such as Mir, Slabodka, Telz, Bialystok, Kamenetz, Kletzk, and Radun, among others.

As Ephraim Zuroff notes, the displacement of the yeshivas took place at the instigation of the students, who – in some cases – informed their leaders what they were doing rather than consult them, contrary to standard yeshiva procedure. Many deans were reluctant and only left upon insistence of their protégés. Of course, many of the former were older and married with children, making flight a harder choice. Nevertheless, thousands fled and tried to reorganize themselves in Vilna with aid from overseas, primarily the Va'ad Hatzalah (Rescue Committee of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the US and Canada).⁹

Even before the Soviet occupation, many prepared for further flight. In the early summer of 1940, two Dutch yeshiva students, Nathan Gutwirth and Leo Sternheim, approached Jan Zwartendyk, the Dutch Honorary Consul in Kovno, Lithuania,

requesting entry permits to the Dutch colony at Curaçao in the Caribbean. His superior, L. P. Decker, informed the boys that no such visa exists. Permission to enter the country is at the discretion of the governor and is received only upon arrival. Knowing that the yeshiva students needed formal documentation, as their plan was to pass through the Soviet Union, Zwartendyk designed a false entry permit for Curaçao. With a destination, the assumption was that getting transit visas to pass through the countries necessary to get to Curaçao would be easier to come by and indeed such was the case. Having reported their experience to Zerach Warhaftig, head of the Palestine Office for Polish Refugees, Gutwirth and Sternheim were told to find out if Zwartendyk would be willing to do the same for non-Dutch citizens, which he did until his departure at the end of August 1940.

Soon it was discovered that the Japanese consul in Kovno, Chiune Sugihara, would provide transit visas to pass through Japan. Finally, with all this paperwork, the request was made of the Soviets to permit the refugees to travel across the USSR to Japan. For a fluctuating fee, the Soviets agreed to provide transit visas permitting the refugees to travel through, but not remain in, the country. Both Sugihara and Zwartendyk understood the danger facing these Jewish refugees. Sugihara gave visas to people who did not meet the necessary criteria, directly against his government's orders, and Zwartendyk provided paperwork to non-Dutch citizens. Lore has it that Sugihara was writing and signing visas from the window of his train compartment until the very last minute, throwing them out to whomever might catch one.¹⁰

Once in Vilna, Rabbi Hirschprung's focus was on obtaining the proper documentation to reach Japan. For weeks, along with countless others, Hirschprung travelled throughout Lithuania and eventually found himself in Latvia, still seeking funds. It seemed that he was gathering money for others as well, which might explain why it took him weeks to gather the 150 US dollars for each visa. Eventually, he returned to Kovno and received further financial support from Dr. Chaim Nachman Shapiro, the son of Rabbi Dov Ber Shapiro,¹¹ with which he returned to Vilna to purchase his exit visa.

Documentation in hand, on or about February 10, 1941, he boarded a train to Moscow, where he remained for only one day, long enough for Rabbi Hirschprung to be impressed. He noted that "he did not see even one horse in Moscow" (*keyn ferd hob ich in Moskva nisht gezehn*), and he commented on the "beautiful subway." During the seventeen-day journey to Vladivostok, they travelled through Birobidjan, the autonomous Jewish oblast in Siberia, where he noticed the Yiddish signs in the train station.¹²

Arriving in Vladivostok, Rabbi Hirschprung sailed to Japan, arriving in Tsuruga on Sabbath afternoon.¹³ Unable to leave the ship until after Sabbath, he noted that he

was overcome by the warm reception from the refugee committee representatives, and he quoted the verse, “Who is like you, Israel, one people all over the earth” (1 Chronicles 17:21). After Sabbath, they were taken to Kobe where they remained for nine months until late in the fall of 1941, when the Japanese sent them onto Shanghai where, “with the help of the ‘Federation of Polish Jews’ in Montreal, we came to Canada.”¹⁴ There ends Hirschprung’s recollections. This article will illuminate the subsequent events of Hirschprung’s story.

The visa to Canada which enabled Rabbi Hirschprung to escape was part of an unusual and atypical Canadian plan. Canadian immigration practices overtly advantaged Americans and Britons, especially farmers. Northern European peoples were at the second tier, followed by southern and eastern Europeans, respectively. The lowest rungs were reserved for Jews, Asians, and Blacks. Further exacerbating the drama of Jewish refugees was Canada’s director of immigration, Frederick Charles Blair, an overt and outspoken anti-Semite, who actively discouraged the immigration of “unwanted” elements, namely Jews, whom he argued would not work the land but would become an urban burden.¹⁵ In a memorandum with reference to a conversation about admitting eighty rabbinical students, Blair opines that the “eighty were merely getting the door open,” because, “it was an old habit on the part of these people to ask for a number which they knew was far below the number they hoped to get and once they got the door open they would never be content until they got the whole group in...” and he concluded by wondering why the refugees could not simply return to Vladivostok.¹⁶ A delegation travelled to Ottawa to pressure Thomas Crerar, the Minister of the Department of Mines and Resources, to overturn a previous negative ruling and permit the rabbis entry. Among those in attendance were Saul Hayes and Michael Garber of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), H. Wolofsky of the Federation of Polish Jews, and Peter Bercovitch, Liberal MP from Montreal.¹⁷

Nevertheless, pressure to admit several thousand Polish nationals currently in neutral or Allied countries came from multiple sources, including the British and Polish governments, as well as Canadian and American Jewish groups. All potential immigrants had to be Jews of Polish citizenship, currently living in the Far East, known to be pro-Ally, anti-fascist, and without intention of returning to Poland or trying to travel onto the United States. Unmoved, Blair suspected that a majority of the Polish refugees would be Jews and warned against the plan. The war cabinet, however, overrode his objections, and agreed to allow one thousand Polish immigrants into Canada, but gave Blair authority to distribute the visas. Engaging in delaying techniques, it would take a full year of negotiating before seventy-nine visas would be proffered to Jews of Polish citizenship, currently living in the Far East.

The next phase was equally painful: deciding who would receive the life-saving documents, and by default, who wouldn’t. Plagued with requests from relatives,

friends, and compatriots of overseas refugees, the CJC was truly overwhelmed. In an historic decision, they decided to offer all seventy-nine visas to rabbis and their students in the Far East. Despite lobbying from Zionist, secular, and Yiddishist circles, the strongest argument came from the Orthodox leaders who argued that these rabbinical scholars represent not just their own lives, but the past and future of traditional Judaism. Not only did Rabbi Avraham Kalmonowitz, of the Mir Yeshiva and the Va'ad Hatzalah (then residing in New York City), lobby the CJC, but many Canadian rabbis did as well. So eloquent was their argument that even secular leaders were won over and both Saul Hayes and Sam Bronfman argued for the immigration of these Torah scholars. The most moving appeal came from Rabbi Oscar Fasman of the Ottawa Va'ad ha-'Ir in a letter he penned to Saul Hayes on May 18, 1941:

Here we are not dealing with only seventy individuals. These seventy embody a wealth of Jewish sacred learning, the like [sic] of which can no longer be duplicated, now that the European Yeshivoh [sic] are closed. In these people we have that intensive tradition of Torah which buoyed up the spirit of Israel. Thus, we are saving not merely people, but a holy culture which cannot be otherwise preserved. When the U.S. admitted Einstein, and not a million other very honest and good people who asked for admission, the principle was the same. It is certainly horrible to save only a few, but when one is faced with a problem of so ghastly a nature, he must find the courage to rescue what is most irreplaceable.¹⁸

Finally, by August 1941, the visas were ready and the seventy-nine recipients had been identified, including Rabbi Hirschprung.¹⁹ But passage to North America was hard to find, for as Fasman so presciently wrote in the above-quoted letter, "the other point is that strained American-Japanese relations may stop boats from crossing the Pacific at any time." Finally, news came that an American ship, the *SS President Pierce* was set to sail from Shanghai to San Francisco on September 30, 1941, and had forty-one open berths.²⁰ Passage was booked for forty-one people, the others hoping for a later sailing.

A segment of Jewish law deals with the location of, and crossing, the international dateline. Many rabbis rule that the halakhic dateline is different from the conventional one, as it must be centralized in Jerusalem and not Greenwich. Among them there are disagreements, although the majority of opinions seem to agree that it runs somewhere through China, putting Japan and Shanghai east of the halakhic dateline. There are three major positions on how Jews on the other side of the dateline are to behave. One opinion says that one should observe the Shabbat and holidays on the same day as the rest of the Jewish world. Another opinion avers that one should observe Shabbat on the Saturday of wherever they are located. A third opinion combined the stringencies of both the above and required that Shabbat be observed

for two full days, on Saturday and Sunday, to be sure not to violate the holy day. Anecdotally, it would seem that among the Jews, some held one or another of these opinions. However, when Yom Kippur rolled around, more were inclined to observe two days rather than just one, since it is the holiest day of the year. While some did fast for two full days, many others fasted for one, but continued to treat the second day with Sabbath restrictions.

As complicated as the issue might have been on land, sailing across the dateline on a holy day is even more complex. Yom Kippur in 1941 fell on Wednesday, October 1, the day after the President Pierce was to depart, adding halakhic complexity to the flight for safety. In fact, multiple responses to the question were considered, including fasting aboard the ship for two full days. This resulted in a schism among the refugees and eleven Mirrer students refused to board the ship that was to cross the dateline on Yom Kippur, which is why only twenty-nine of the forty spaces were ultimately filled and eleven remained unused.²¹

As Table 1 shows, among the refugees were a number of renowned personages, including the widow (second marriage) and son of the famed Chafetz Chaim of Radun, who travelled to Shanghai on August 20.²² There was a group of nine Lubavitcher rabbis who were sent by their rebbe, at this time in New York, to establish a Lubavitcher yeshiva in Canada. Two of them, Kramer and Gerlicki, left Japan with Rabbi Hirschprung, while the other seven arrived in Shanghai in August.²³

Nineteen of the twenty-nine left Japan in August and presumably were living in Shanghai when they left for Canada. The other ten, including Hirschprung, left Japan on September 20 aboard the *Taia Maru* to Shanghai where they were to embark on the *SS President Pierce*.²⁴ The ship manifesto, however, notes that the refugees, “in transit under Immigration Guard paid by the aliens,” were denied shore leave as they did not have valid documentation. This would mean that Hirschprung left Kobe on September 20, sailed for no more than two or three days, arrived in Shanghai on September 23 at the latest, and was not allowed off the ship until he boarded the President Pierce six days later.

The refusal to board the ship by the Mir group is a puzzling one, but there is little documentation and the information available is inconsistent and contradictory. Many sources note that the Mir students had developed especially strong fraternal bonds and a shared sense of destiny, ever more so since their exile and flight from Belarus. They seemed to have agreed to move as a unit and not separate.²⁵ Meir Birman, head of HICEM (HIAS) Shanghai, added that unlike all other groups, Mir had strong support and financial assistance from overseas, primarily through the efforts of Rabbi Avraham Kalmonowitz, giving them a sense of greater security.²⁶ At times, this security may have also led to a sense of superiority. As many have noted,

millions of people in the world went without food for forty-eight hours and longer on a regular basis without release, including fellow Jews in their own community in Shanghai, and the Mir refusal was a subject of minor controversy. Nevertheless, “[...] students from Telz, Kletzk, Lublin, Lubavitch, and Slabodka, on the other hand, ... eagerly seized the opportunity to leave our city, deciding at the same time to keep two days Yom Kippur on the steamer.”²⁷

Another view on the decision of the Mirrer students comes from a communication of Mrs. Henrietta Buchman, assistant executive secretary, JDC, to Saul Hayes on October 28, 1941. In the records of a telephone conversation, Hayes notes that Buchman informed him that rumours of another ship leaving Shanghai on November 2 were false. In Hayes’s record of the phone call, Buchman continued:

She explained to me why the eleven, which were supposed to go on the ship which had come and which brought the twenty-nine, did not leave Shanghai. It appeared that the balance of the group of the Mir Yeshiva, numbering some thirty, wanted to go as a unit, therefore they wouldn’t break up, and as there was room for only eleven more, they decided not to go. The result was that it was too late to make different arrangements, and the eleven stayed behind instead of completing the group of forty. She said that she had received the utmost of cooperation from the Hicem in Shanghai, but Mr. Berelman, their representative of the Hicem Committee, was unable to do anything to get these eleven to move. From correspondence in her possession and from statement made by others, it would appear that this group were attempting to be holier than the others and decided to fast the second day so that they were unable to meet the boat.²⁸

There are two important points here. One point, surely, is that to be holier than the others in this context was to fast two days, or not refuse to do so, thus making this comment unclear. However, she also noted that the Mirrer *bokhurim* “decided to fast the second day,” meaning that they indeed fasted for two days, even though they did not sail. This is difficult to interpret. If they were prepared to fast for forty-eight hours, then why not do so on the ship as the others did? One may spend Yom Kippur at sea if one boarded before the holiday, but it is prohibited to embark once the holiday has begun. Buchman’s claim is countered by Schaeffer’s belief that the Mirrer *bokhurim* did not want to fast for two straight days, and for that reason they remained behind.²⁹

Buchman’s letter is also problematic, because as she states, the Mirrer students could not board because they were fasting, which makes no sense since going east across the dateline means to lose a day; hence, if one fasted for two days of Yom Kippur in 1941, it would be October 1 and 2, and not September 30. After all, twenty-nine rabbis

and rabbinical students did board the ship on the day of departure – it could not have been seen as part of Yom Kippur.

It is difficult to determine what actually happened on board, especially as hagiography creeps into what little information there is. Zuroff implies that Birman believed that all twenty-nine aboard the ship fasted for forty-eight hours. Anecdotal evidence is rife with multiple versions, including building a *sukkah* aboard ship. An elder of the Lubavitch community who had been incarcerated at the Ile-aux-Noix, Quebec, internment camp along with several other refugee rabbis, claimed that he heard from several of the nine original Lubavitcher rabbis aboard the ship that the rebbe in New York had ruled that the Lubavitchers had only to observe one day of Yom Kippur.³⁰ Thus, it is impossible to know how they observed that fateful Yom Kippur of 5702 aboard the *President Pierce*.

Aside from the halakhic complications, the sailing was without incident and the ship docked in San Francisco on October 20, 1941. Buchman informed Hayes that she had just received a call from San Francisco confirming the arrival of the *President Pierce* with all twenty-nine aboard. Mrs. Poupko-Kagan underwent surgery at sea and would be hospitalized in the city, while the others were given kosher food prior to boarding a Chicago-bound train, on their way to Canada. Taking the Southern Pacific Railroad to Chicago for a four-and-a-half day trip, they were to be assured sufficient fruit, vegetables, and eggs, as well as money for incidentals. They were to be accompanied by two US immigration guards, presumably to prevent anyone from smuggling themselves into the country. After a warm reception in Chicago, the group transferred to the Canadian National Railway to their final destination, accompanied by Rabbi Kalmanowitz. The group finally crossed into Canada at Sarnia, Ontario, on Thursday, October 23, 1941.³¹ Buchman went on further to forewarn Hayes that “he [Kalmanowitz] will probably call on you to make his usual representations and requests in their behalf. It would not be unlike Rabbi Kalmanowitz to visit other Canadian organizations and use his usual high-pressure methods.”³² The arrivals were greeted in San Francisco and Chicago by large crowds and again in Montreal, where they were met at the station by hundreds, led by Montreal’s Chief Rabbi, Hirsch Cohen.³³ A celebratory breakfast was served in the Talmud Torah School.³⁴

Prior to their arrival, in October 1941, Hirsch Wolofsky, publisher of the *Keneder Adler*, announced the establishment of a new academy, Yeshiva Mercaz Hatorah, which will educate and employ the soon-to-arrive immigrants. The yeshiva was to be housed – at least initially – in the Montefiore Orphan’s Home at 4650 Jeanne Mance.³⁵ As well, Rabbi Elya Chazan, of Telz, Slabodka, Kaminetz, and most recently Mir, came to head the new yeshiva. By January 1942, the elementary division had been opened.³⁶

Rabbi Hirschprung was hired to teach at Mercaz Hatorah. Unfortunately, the yeshiva itself did not have a successful history. In 1954, the yeshiva was located at 201 St-Joseph Boulevard, and counted 140 students, mostly adolescents and older students who were capable of independent Talmudic study – a classic *yeshiva gedola*.³⁷ However, by 1957, the situation had deteriorated significantly and there were few students remaining; by the mid-1980s, Mercaz Hatorah finally merged with the more recently founded Yeshiva Gedola.³⁸ In comparison, the Yeshiva Tomche Temimim Lubavitch, founded by the nine Lubavitcher rabbis who came to Montreal in 1941, remains a central institution in Montreal to this day.

After arriving in Montreal, Rabbi Hirschprung was hired as Rosh Yeshiva at Mercaz Hatorah. He also studied with ten yeshiva boys in the Adath Jeshurun synagogue, where he was spiritual leader.³⁹ In 1950, he was listed as the Dean of the Hebrew Talmudical College Reishith Chachma, at 5400 Jeanne Mance Street.⁴⁰ Not long afterwards, he was invited to sit on the Rabbinical Council of the Va'ad ha-'Ir, where an interesting controversy over kosher slaughter erupted in the 1960s that gives evidence of his leadership style.

A 1960 change in agricultural law that demanded the animal be completely restrained before slaughter required Canadian rabbis to fashion a new method for pre-slaughter restraint that would comply with halakha and Canadian law. The first adapted design – the Sling Method – involved suspending the animal with people and straps. Although initially approved by Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik by telephone,⁴¹ before the Montreal Va'ad was able to observe the sling method in action, the Agudath ha-Rabbonim in New York had intervened and prohibited its use.⁴² Rabbi Hirschprung disagreed, but as to not challenge the Agudath ha-Rabbonim, he set out to find a better method, but he repeated: “I say again that this method is perfectly acceptable within halakha.”⁴³ The next alternative, encasing the animal in padded buffers to restrain the live animal and raise the carcass from the bloody floor immediately after slaughter, was eventually approved by Rabbis Soloveitchik and Silver in July 1960.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, there were murmurs that Rabbi Kotler did not approve and that he wanted to send Rabbis Teitz and Yaacov Kamentzky to come to Montreal to view the new system before making a decision. Standing his ground, Hirschprung told Teitz: “We in Montreal have no doubts or questions about the Kashrut of the new slaughtering system. We need invite no one [to approve our work]. But, if someone wishes to come here, we will welcome them with great respect.”⁴⁵

In 1965 Rabbi Hirschprung was named Rosh Yeshiva of the Lubavitch yeshiva. In 1969, upon the death of Rabbi Sheea Herschorn, Hirschprung was named Chief Rabbi of Montreal, a position he held until his death in 1998. Active in promoting women's education through the local Bais Yaakov (Beth Jacob), it was renamed Bais Yaakov d'Rabbi Hirschprung in his honour.

Table 1: Names and Biographical Information on the Twenty-Nine Canada-bound Refugees ⁴⁶

Name	Title/School	Birthdate	Birthplace	Residence	Arr. Japan	Dep. Japan
HaRav Perec Jogiel	Ab"d Horodziej near Mir ⁴⁷	18.10.1894	Piaski	Horodziej	24.2	20.9
HaRav Chaim B. Ginsberg	Ab"d in Dohlina	15.3.1890	Zdunski Wola	Dolhunowo	26.1	20.9
HaRav Boruch Soroczkin	Son of Zalman, Lutsker rav ⁴⁸	23.1.18	Zdziecol	Lutsk	23.2	20.9
lcchok Hendel	Tomchei Tmemim	20.11.17	Komarow	Otwock	14.2	30.8
Josef Rodal	Tomchei Tmemim	1914	Przedborz	Otwock	14.2	30.8
Lejb Kramer	Tomchei Tmemim	17.1.18	Chelm	Warsaw	5.3	20.9
Josef Mendel Tenenbaum	Tomchei Tmemim	22.7.17	Kock	Otwock	14.2	30.8
Josef Wajnberg ⁴⁹	Tomchei Tmemim	1917	Janow	Otwock	14.2	30.8
Moszek Eljasz Gerlicki	Tomchei Tmemim	24.5.15	Konskie	Konskie	14.2	20.9
Samuel Szejn	Tomchei Tmemim	15.3.14	Wiazn	Wiazn	14.2	30.8
Mendel Wolf Grynglaz	Tomchei Tmemim	1917	Lodz	Lodz	14.2	30.8
Hersz Josef Kotlarski ⁵⁰	Tomchei Tmemim	20.10.17	Adamow	Otwock	14.2	30.8
Rabbi Dawid Sztulman	Kletzk	5.9.11	Wolomin	Wolomin	24.1	20.9

Elezer Icchok Gotlib	Kletzk	21.10.18	Kolno	Opatow	13.2	30.8
Icek Jacob Pietruszka	Kletzk	8.10.20	Makow	Wolomin	5.3	30.8
Mojzesz Kohen ⁵¹	Kletzk	19 years	Warsaw		24.2	
Josel Arja Lew	Kletzk	10.3.24	Kodin	Brzesc	13.2	30.8
Leszer Portnoj	Mir	1.3.08	Brzesc	Brzesc	24.1	30.8
Nojach Icek Borensztejn	Mir	10.1.09	Kadzidto	Kadzidto	24.1	30.8
Zelik Epsztejn	Mir	25 years	Slonim		20.9	
HaRav Abram-Mordko Herszberg ⁵²	Chachmei Lublin	24 years	Warsaw		20.9	
HaRav Pinkas Hirschprung	Chachmei Lublin	13.7.10	Dukla	Dukla	14.3	20.9
Rabbi Hirsz Rotenberg	Chachmei Lublin	7.7.11	Miedzyrzec	Warsaw	16.3	30.8
Szmuel Lichtiger	Kamenetz	26 years	Kobrin		20.9	
Rabbi Boruch Faskowicz	Bialystok	31.8.16	Pultusk	Pultusk	5.3	20.9
HaRav Samuel David Lewin		11.10.11	Sambor	Rzeszow	14.3	20.9
HaRav Markus Lewin ⁵³		11.10.11	Sambor	Rzeszow	14.3	20.9
HaRav Aron Pupko-Kagan	Radun (son of Chofetz Chaim)	29.10.10	Radun	Radun	24.2	20.8
Frejda Pupko-Kagan	Radun (2 nd wife of Chofetz-Chaim)	3.1.1880	Lapy	Radun	24.2	20.8

- 1**
Pinchas Hirschprung, *Fun Natsishen Yomertol: Zikhroynes fun a Polit* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1944) 7.
- 2**
Yitzchak Alfasi, *Haḥasidut Midor Ledor*, Vol. 1, *Me-ha-Besht ve-ad Ledor Haḥamishi* (Jerusalem: Machon Da'at Yosef, 1995) 38 and 40.
- 3**
Sponsored by the Breakfast Fund Committee of the Yeshiva Etz Chaim, *London Jewish Chronicle*, December 1930.
- 4**
Eli Gottesman, *Who's Who in Canadian Jewry* (Montreal: Jewish Institute of Higher Research, Central Rabbinical Seminary of Canada, 1965) 94.
- 5**
Sidney M. Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance: Voices of Jewish Identity in Detroit, 1914-1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991) 401.
- 6**
Detroit Jewish News, 11 October 1946.
- 7**
As reported in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 28 March 1941. Cited in Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Harper-Collins, 1986) 101.
- 8**
Pinchas Hirschprung, *The Vale of Tears*, translated into English by Vivian Felsen (Toronto and Montreal: Azrieli Foundation, 2016).
- 9**
Efraim Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust: The Activities of the Va'ad Hatzala Rescue Committee, 1939 – 1945* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2000).
- 10**
Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust*, 83-85. Both have been honoured as "Righteous among the Nations" by Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust institute.
- 11**
Chief rabbi of Kovno and Lithuania who returned from Switzerland to Lithuania at the outbreak of war, arguing that the captain is the last to leave. He died in the Kovno ghetto in 1943. He also coincidentally visited Montreal on a fundraising tour in 1924 along with Rabbi Mordechai Epstein of Slabodka and Rabbi Kook, Chief Rabbi of Palestine. See Aaron Rothkoff, *Masmid* (1959): 122-25.
- 12**
Hirschprung, *Fun Natsishen Yomertol*, 243.
- 13**
A HICEM memo notes that Hirschprung arrived in Japan on Friday, March 14, 1941, and departed for Shanghai on September 20, 1941. It also lists four relatives in the US: Rabbi Hirschprung, 568 South 16th St., Columbus, Ohio; Lea Hirschprung, 66 Ross St., Brooklyn; Rabbi J.M. Baumhol, 421 Crown St., Brooklyn; and an unnamed cousin at State Normal Place in Jersey City. See "European Refugees Receiving JDC Aid in Japan, Including Information on Overseas Relatives, 1941," List # 4, p. 5, lists from the JDC online archives http://search.archives.jdc.org/multimedia%2FDocuments%2FNames%20Databank%2FJapan%20Emigration%20Lists%2FSet%20II%2FAR33-44_00053_00824.pdf (22 June 2017).
- 14**
Hirschprung, *Fun Natsishen Yomertol*, 239-244.
- 15**
See Irving Abella & Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester Orpen & Dennys, 1983).
- 16**
Memorandum by F.C. Blair, Department of Mines and Resources, Ottawa, 5 August 1941. See Paula Draper and Harold Troper, *Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents*, Vol. 15, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 79-80.
- 17**
Israel Medres, *Between the Wars: Canadian Jews in Transition*, translated into English by Vivian Felsen (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2003), 124.

18

Letter to Saul Hayes from Rabbi Oscar Fasman, Ottawa, 18 May 1941; *Archives of the Holocaust*, 70-75.

19

Rabbi Shmuelwitz, Rosh Yeshiva of Mir was also among the eighty. See the letter from Mordechai Peters to Rabbi Eliezer Silver, 21 February 1946; CJC/VAAD/JPL/MB/17/16/Personalia Correspondence/Cohen, Hirsch/1940s.

20

Passenger manifest of the SS President Pierce, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-95GN-W1F?i=325&wc=M6B9-BZ9%3A202257601%3Fcc%3D1916078&cc=1916078> (22 June 2017). Zuroff cites the JDC Abschrift that lists the ship as leaving Shanghai on September 29, 1941.

21

Unfortunately, the attack on Pearl Harbor came days later, and those remaining 51 visas to Canada would remain unused until 1946, when the balance arrived in Canada after five years' incarceration in Shanghai.

22

Aron, the son, never married. The two eventually left for the US where they died and were buried.

23

Other Montreal-bound rabbis were also in Shanghai at the time, such as Rabbis Baron and Niznik, listed as students of the Mir who would both teach at Mercaz Hatorah.

24

Canadian Jewish Congress, United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies (UJRWRA), and War Efforts Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress, undated press release (CJC/ZA/1946/1/12/Refugee Rabbis Shanghai).

25

Eric Shaffer, *From Poland to Shanghai: The Story of the Mir Yeshiva's Survival of World War II*, <http://history.emory.edu/home/documents/endeavors/volume2/EricSchaffer.pdf> (24 March, 2016).

26

Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust*, 185. Many other yeshivas had fundraising arms

in America, but no strong personality like Kalmanowitz. The New York office of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva was founded in 1925, Mir's was founded in 1926, and Kaminetz's and Kletzk's were founded in 1927; both the Slonim and Bialystok offices were opened in 1936.

27

Zuroff, *idem*.

28

Memo (record of telephone call) by Saul Hayes of the UJRWRA with Mrs. Buchman, 28 October 1941 (CJC/ZC/23/200/Refugee Rabbis and Yeshiva Students).

29

Schaffer, *From Poland to Shanghai*.

30

Telephone conversation with H.F., 14 March 2017.

31

Letter to Saul Hayes, director of UJRWRA, from Henrietta Buchman, Secretary, Committee on Poland and Eastern Europe, AJDC, NY, 11 October 1941 (CJC/ZC/23/200/Refugee Rabbis and Yeshiva Students).

32

Letter to Saul Hayes, director of UJRWRA, from Henrietta Buchman, Secretary, Committee on Poland and Eastern Europe, AJDC, NY, 20 October 1941 (CJC/ZC/23/200/Refugee Rabbis and Yeshiva Students).

33

Hapardes, 3-4. [note from Yosef: Vol. 15, no. 8 (November 1941), pp. 3-4?] Ironically, Mrs. Buchman's stereotype of pushy Orthodox Jews matches F.C. Blair's stated opinions as well.

34

As noted in *Fifty Years: Yearbook of Tomche Temimim Lubavitcher Rabbinical College* (Va'ad Tomche Temimim, 1991), 19. This publication also claims that the eighty visas were obtained through the intervention of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, without credit to any other organization.

35

Letter to Saul Hayes, 22 October 1941 (CJC/ZC/23/200/Refugee Rabbis and Yeshiva Students).

36

Eliezer Portnoy & Zelig Epstein, *Yarchon Mercaz Hatorah - Rabbinic Monthly Journal*, 1, no. 1 (Shevat 1942), np. In an historic twist, Chazan had already been to Montreal. On July 24, 1941, after arriving from Japan, Chazan was in transit to the US via Montreal when Mordechai Peters (of the Va'ad ha-'Ir of Montreal and the Federation of Polish Jews in Canada) brought him to Ottawa to meet Dr. Keenleyside, the Assistant Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, as an example of a "Torah scholar." The Canadian diplomat was so impressed that he told Peters that both he and the Acting Undersecretary of State for External Affairs, Norman Robertson, opposed Blair's attitude and would work toward facilitating Jewish immigration (Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust*, 181 – 82).

37

Report from Louis Rosenberg, Research director, CJC, to Louis Kurman, Executive Director of United Jewish Welfare Fund, 18 January 1954 (CJC/ZC/Maor Hagola).

38

Visit of Solomon Tarashansky of the Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, 11 March 1957 (CJC/CA/64/598/Yeshivoth(CJMCAG)/1957).

39

Letter to Rabbi Cohen from Peters, 28 October 1941, (CJC/VAAD/17/17/Personalia Correspondence/Cohen Hirsch, Rabbi/1940s).

40

Memo from Executive Director of the Va'ad ha'lr, 23 November 1950 (CJC/VAAD/4/11/Assistance).

41

Minutes, Rabbinat, 25 January 1960 (CJC/JPL/VAAD/MB 09/19/5/Rabbinat/1960-62).

42

Telegram, CJC/JPL/VAAD/MB 09/16/195/Kashrut – Shechita/1959-60.

43

Minutes, Va'ad ha-Rabbanim, 9 May 1960 (CJC/JPL/VAAD/MB 09/19/5/Rabbinat/1960-62).

44

Letter from Soloveitchik and Silver to A. Evans, Canada Packers, 19 July 1960 (CJC/JPL/VAAD/MB 09/16/195/Kashrut – Shechita/1959-90).

45

Minutes, Rabbinat, 31 July 1961 (CJC/JPL/VAAD/MB 09/19/5/Rabbinat/1960-62).

46

The information is culled from *Hapardes* 15, no. 8 (November 1941): 3-4; a HICEM-JDC Memo of September 1941 (Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust*, photo section following p. 128); the ships manifest; and an unsourced list from the Canadian Jewish Archives in the file on the yeshivot in Japan (CJC/ZA/1941/4/45/Yeshivot-Japan) entitled "Names of Refugees, Polish Citizens, of Jewish Faith Stranded in Japan."

47

Ab"ד (*av bet din*) is the head of the rabbinical court. Jogiell taught at the yeshiva of Slonim before escaping with the yeshiva to China. He then served as rabbi at Congregation Adath Israel in Montreal until 1945 when he left to teach at the New York-based Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and to serve at the Anshei Slonim synagogue, a one-time Reform congregation on the Lower East Side. See Oscar Z. Rand, *Toldoth Anshe Shem, Volume I* (New York: Toldoth Anshe Shem, Inc., 1950), 63.

48

He lived from 1917 to 1979. He married Rochel Bloch (daughter of Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, Telzer Rav), and by 1943 he served as Rosh Yeshiva in Telz, near Cleveland, Ohio.

49

Wajnberg was in Otwock with the Lubavitcher rebbe on September 1, and he accompanied him to Warsaw on September 4; he remained with him there until his escape to Lithuania. See Bryan Mark Rigg, *Rescued from the Reich: How One of Hitler's Soldiers Saved the Lubavitcher Rebbe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 38-44.

50

Kotlarski was the only Lubavitcher student deemed fit enough to serve and was conscripted into a Polish cavalry battalion. See Rigg, *Rescued from the Reich*, 39.

51

According to the manifest, Kohen was readmitted at Rouses Point for permanent residence in the US.

52

Authored *Machsheves Hakodesh*, Volumes I & II. After arriving in Montreal he served at Congregation Zerei Dath Ve'Daath and then onto Chicago's Congregation Shaarei Tefilah Bnei Reuven. He also served as Rosh Yeshiva of Chachmei Lublin in Detroit. See Rand, *Toldoth Anshe Shem, Volume I*, 39.

53

Both were sons of Rabbi Aaron Lewin, Ab"ד of Rzeszow (Yiddish: Reyshe). He was also a member of the Polish Sejm and was present at the groundbreaking for the Yeshivath Chachmei Lublin. He was killed in Lvov on July 1, 1941 (Rand, 77-78). Zuroff (p. 60) notes that Dr. Samuel Schmidt, active in Po'alei Zion, sent by the Va'ad Hatzalah to Lithuania on a relief mission, was able to obtain an entry permit to Lithuania for Lewin. The YIVO Encyclopedia notes that Lewin tried unsuccessfully to escape to Romania and Lithuania but was unable to do so before the Nazi invasion; see http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Lewin_Brothers (6 October 2017).