

Janice Rosen

## **Documenting the Education of Jewish Children in Quebec and Canada**

The Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives holds a considerable amount of material relating to the subject of education. In this aspect of our collecting mandate, we overlap somewhat with the Archives of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal. However, the Canadian Jewish Archives holdings are oriented primarily towards the legal aspects surrounding the subject of Jewish education in the context of Quebec, and of Canada as a whole.



Baron Byng High School's 1948 boys graduating class photo detail, with future author Mordechai Richler as class president, shows how this Protestant school's largely Jewish student population was almost always taught by teachers of Anglo-Saxon heritage. Source: Detail view of Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives (ADCJA) PC01 Photo collection, item PF-07.)

The education of Canadian Jewish children is a subject of particular fascination in the Quebec context due to the traditionally religiously based nature of public schools in this province. In parallel to the issues that arose for Jewish students who were

accepted as “guests” in the mainly anglophone Protestant system, an alternative network of Jewish community-run private day schools was developed in the first half of the twentieth century. Various collections housed at the ADCJA document how by 1930 this option was accepted by the Quebec government as an alternative to attendance in a Christian-run institution.

During his decades as historian-archivist at what was then called the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, David Rome wrote four monographs about education for his “Canadian Jewish Archives” series: *On the Jewish School Question in Montreal, 1903-1931* (1975), *The Drama of Our Early Education* (1991), *The Education Legend of the Migration* (1991), and *The Heroes of Montreal Jewish Education* (1992). While compiling these detailed, inventory-like narratives Rome organized and saved for the use of future researchers a mixture of originals and rare printed documents that now form part of the Canadian Jewish Congress Series ZC Subject files.

Another early twentieth century set of documents of particular note at the Canadian Jewish Archives includes photocopies of handwritten board minutes from the Scotland Protestant School of Ste-Sophie, Quebec, between 1914 and 1937. From the time of its founding circa 1914, the Scotland Protestant school was attended primarily by the children of Jewish immigrants, and the three members of its board of trustees were Jewish. This unusual situation accounts for the extraordinary fact that prior to 1937 the minutes of the school were mostly written in Yiddish. The collection includes a typed transcription of the Yiddish and English minutes pages, with the Yiddish translated by Dr. Louis Rosenberg around 1959. A perusal of the entries from the late 1920s and early 1930s shows the board’s preoccupation with the kosher slaughter of chickens, a sign of how it also acted as a general administrative organization for the Ste-Sophie Jewish community. These documents, along with additional correspondence and notes about public education in Quebec, were donated by McGill professor Mary Anne Poutanen on behalf of the late E. Gault Finley, who wrote a 1959 thesis on the bi-religious basis of Quebec’s public school system. Poutanen and Rod Macleod made use of the minutes in the writing of their book, *A Meeting of the People: School Boards and Protestant Communities in Quebec 1801-1998*, as did David Fraser in his book “Honorary Protestants”: *The Jewish School Question in Montreal, 1867-1997*.



Much of Canadian Jewish Congress collection's education-related material emphasizes the legal issues that arose around the presence of Jews in Protestant schools, in a context where Jews were initially barred from serving on the board or in any significant administrative capacity. Papers collected under the auspices of Canadian Jewish Congress also document the movements to establish independent Jewish-run schools, as well as the negative reaction these efforts inspired from the right-wing fringe press in Quebec.



This antisemitic cartoon referencing the perceived threat posed by the Jewish Schools Bill appeared in *Le Goglu* on April 25, 1930. Source: ADCJA Fonds C0001 Canadian Jewish Congress collection, L14 Le Goglu 1930.

An as-yet unmined trove of information can be found in the records donated by Morton Bessner, a barrister in general and commercial law and a member of the Conseil Scolaire de l'île de Montréal. Among his many volunteer commitments Bessner served as a vice-president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Quebec Region, in which capacity he drafted several briefs relating to education. His donated

records relating to education in Quebec include transcripts from the famous “Hirsch versus the Protestant school Board of School Commissioners” case of 1927, a box of audiocassettes about the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, a thesis on the school question written by one Rabbi Halpern, and other documents pertaining to education, the PSBGM, and Bill 40.

Another notable private donation related to the legal struggles of the Jewish community within a Christian school structure is a scrapbook compiled between 1965–1973 by lawyer Samuel Godinsky, whose lobbying efforts led to him to become one of the first Jewish members allowed to serve on the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal. The progress of this case can also be followed in detail through the recent meticulous re-indexing of the Canadian Jewish Congress publication *Inter-Office Information* (IOI). All issues of this publication are now available in digital form.

Among the Canadian Jewish Congress organizational records, the most direct interventions in the area of education can be traced through a series of Submissions to Government between 1952 and 1999 on matters of school organization, religious instruction, taxation, and language of instruction. The background discussion to these submissions can be found in the staff records of the associated periods.

In contrast to the Archives of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal, the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives does not have extensive original records produced and donated by Jewish educational establishments. However, an exception to this rule is found in the fonds of the United Jewish Teachers Seminary of Canada (UJTS). Subsidized for many years by the Canadian Jewish Congress, the UJTS was established in Montreal in 1949 as the result of a merger of two seminaries founded immediately after World War II. Its aim was to train Jewish teachers so that they could provide their Canadian students with a relevant Jewish education. The seminary provided student loans, asked no tuition, and tried to place its students after graduation. With teachers such as Shimon Dunsky, Melech Ravich, Shlomo Wiseman, Irving Layton, and Joseph Kage, the UJTS produced many well-known Montreal Jewish school educators and administrators, including David August, Hanna Eliashiv, Zave Ettinger, and Nachum Wilchesky. The UJTS records are consulted by former students, and taken as a whole the collection provides a glimpse into Montreal Jewish culture during the years of increased Jewish immigration by Holocaust survivors in the postwar period.



Among the faculty of the United Jewish Teachers Seminary circa 1948 one notes poet Irving Layton (second row at right) and the future director of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, Joseph Kage (second row at left, using his original last name of Kagedan). Source: ADCJA Fonds 10037 Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, Series QK Joseph Kage visual materials, file L71 2A.

A few decades later, the issues around educating the primarily Francophone influx of Jews from North Africa became a pressing concern. Unwelcome in the Catholic school system and not always equipped or eager to blend into English Protestant schools, these students became the impetus for the eventual founding of the École Maïmonide, a process which is documented in the Canadian Jewish Congress records. The school was created in 1969 as a joint initiative of Congress and the Association Sépharade Francophone, with the cooperation of the CECM, Montreal's Catholic (and francophone) School Board.

Although almost all of the education-themed records at the Canadian Jewish Archives mentioned thus far pertain to Quebec, we also hold some materials from other provinces. The Canadian Jewish Congress collection includes reports and correspondence with the Central or Ontario region of the organization, and the aforementioned indexed and digitized *IOI* bulletin includes hundreds of mentions of school-related developments from Ontario, the Maritimes, and Western Canada, as well as Quebec, in the years 1946 to 1980.



Students outside the Sonnenfeld Colony school in 1918. Source: ADCJA Fonds 10032 JCA collection, photo album PC12-OC-A1, 64.

The establishment and running of small schools in the Jewish settlements in the prairie provinces, southern Ontario, and rural Quebec are documented in the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) collection, as well as among the Canadian Jewish Congress papers of Louis Rosenberg that pre-date his employment at Congress. The latter include several files of Hebrew teacher reports from 1914, a period when he taught at the Tiferes Israel School in Lipton, Saskatchewan, and was field inspector for the JCA's western farm colonies.

Although the education-related collections of the Canadian Jewish Archives have frequently been consulted in the past, it is clear that much remains to be analysed for future studies.



**MONTHLY REPORT OF CANADIAN HEBREW SCHOOLS**  
UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE J.C.A.

LOCATION *Sonnenfeld* CLASS *I* MONTH OF *October* 1914

No.	NAMES OF PUPILS	AGE	Attendance		Jewish History and Religion	Hebrew Translation	Hebrew Grammar			
			Time	Days Present						
	<i>Osias Feuce</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>0-0</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Suzk Braunstine</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Mora Braunstine</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Ebe Braunstine</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Shaye Altman</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Lea Altman</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>			
	<i>Seda Kobelinski</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Et. Rebecca " "</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>			
	<i>Phlom " "</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1-10</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>			
	<i>David " "</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>1-10</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>			
	<i>Cheli Singer</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>1-5</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>			
	<i>Henl Singer</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>			
	<i>Est Singer</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>1-30</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>			

A perfect pupil should be credited with 100%. Total Attendance: Average Attendance: No. of Hours:

Curriculum:

REMARKS: *S. Kobelinski removed from his place 7 miles from me, otherwise i went 3 times to him weekly now i's too far for me to go. Bozeman live 3 miles from me i cannot go far go thither. Please to send me blandet of monthly reports*

Signed  
*Ab. Feuce*

This 1914 teacher's report from the Hebrew school in the Sonnenfeld JCA colony lists the students' names, ages, and attendance records, as well as their Jewish studies grades. It is clear from the notes that English was not the teacher's first language. (Some of the JCA colony school reports of the period were filled out in Yiddish.) Source: ADCJA Fonds C0001 Canadian Jewish Congress, Series DA2 Louis Rosenberg, box 8, file 5.

**Janice Rosen** has been the Archives Director since 1989 of the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, formerly known as the Canadian Jewish Congress CC National Archives. She has edited the Archives Matter section of Canadian Jewish Studies / Études juives canadiennes since the inauguration of this feature in 2013. She is a co-creator of the Canadian Jewish Heritage Network (<http://cjhn.ca>), a database-driven website showcasing the holdings of several partner archives and museums.