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Cover Image:
Oberlander Residence II, Vancouver

Peter Oberlander and Barry Downs, Architects, 1969

Photograph by Selwyn Pullan, 1970

Courtesy of West Vancouver Museum
President’s Message

In 1971, the Jewish Historical Society was founded by Cyril Leonoff, who has been at our side ever since. Forty-five years later, 2016 has already been and promises to continue to be a remarkable year for us. Our knowledge of the history of the Jewish presence in British Columbia continues to be updated with engaging and well-attended events and thought-provoking initiatives that are ongoing or planned for the near future:

- In late January, 200 people were at Inform Interiors in Gastown to attend the launch of the exhibit, New Ways of Living: Jewish Architects in Vancouver, 1955-1975.
- In the past month, web traffic to our new site has tripled.
- The Seidelman collection is making its way online – a very rare and complete record of the experience of a Jewish soldier in WWI.
- Tours of our Archives continue to amaze attendees with our vast collection and the professional manner in which they are organized. Please contact our office if you wish to join a tour.
- Work has begun on the Canadian Jewish Congress collection, specifically the file on Soviet Jewry.
- The records of the Mountain View Cemetery Restoration Committee have been donated to the archives and processing has begun.
- We look forward to the launch of our upcoming Scribe, focussing on local Jewish clothes. The highlight of this event will be a vintage fashion show hosted by costume historian Ivan Sayers.
- Sacred Sites, one of our new online exhibits, launched in Vancouver in December and at Congregation Emanu-El in Victoria in January. Kaitlin Findlay, one of its curators presented the exhibit at York University’s graduate conference in late February.
- On These Shores, an exhibit about the Jewish pioneers of Victoria launched February 18th.
- Last summer, we hosted ten Strathcona walking tours with 122 participants; and,
- Six Mountain View Cemetery walking tours with 73 participants.

This year, we were delighted by the recognition of Irene Dodek by the Jewish Seniors Alliance for her 44 years of extraordinary volunteer work with us, including her exceptional contributions to our oral history program, recording over 100 interviews with early builders of our community.

Consistently behind all of our success are our three staff members. The transition from our excellent archivist, Jennifer Yuhasz to her successor Alysa Routtenberg has been smooth and eventful only in the continuation of a high quality of work. Of course, we also have our wonderful Coordinator for Programming and Development Michael Schwartz and, our wonderful administrator, Marcy Babins. None of what we do could be done without them.

At last November’s AGM, we said goodbye to two board members: Lani Levine, an extraordinary board member for nine years and Andy Krieger, who continued his mother’s wonderful JMABC legacy. In their place we welcomed four new people:

- Samara Bordan, born in Vancouver, has always been intrigued by stories of the growth and prosperity of the Vancouver Jewish community. While living in Toronto for a number of years Samara was the Director of Public Relations for the Consulate General of Israel. Upon moving back to Vancouver with her family, she worked at Jewish Federation in the Community Relations department and was involved with Canadian Hadassah-Wizo. Samara lives in Vancouver with her husband Jeff and their two children.
- Jory Levitt was also born and raised in Vancouver. After studying Financial Management at BCIT and completing a Bachelor of Commerce at Royal Roads University, Jory published a national cultural magazine for several years. Currently, he is an accountant at a commercial interior design firm, where he has been for the past 12 years. Jory lives in Vancouver with his wife Stacy and two small children.
- Ronnie Tessler has returned to our board after a short hiatus. Ronnie began her career as a Registered Medical Laboratory Technologist in Winnipeg and not long after switched to her first love, art. An accomplished fine art photographer from 1976-1990, Ronnie was the inaugural executive director of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre from 1990-1996. She has had a long involvement with the JMABC, at times chairing special projects.

Jennifer Yuhasz. We lost her but we have now found her. After spending the last six years as the JMABC Archivist, Jennifer was recently appointed as Archivist for the City of Richmond. Her previous experience includes the City of Vancouver Archives and the Vancouver Maritime Museum. Jennifer has a Master of Archival Studies from UBC.

So, how important is all of this? How can we decide what to do next – how to live – if we can’t remember who we are and where we come from? Being a member of JMABC can be a great help for our memory and is accompanied by complimentary issues of the Chronicle and Scribe.

The annual Scribe has become a much-in-demand journal. The last two issues profiled local Jewish families who established themselves as furniture merchants or scrap metal dealers in the mid-20th Century. The next issue of The Scribe is in production and is scheduled for impending release. This issue will chronicle the history of Jewish retail clothes dealers in BC, told largely in their own words. We consider ourselves exceptionally fortunate to have the very talented Cynthia Ramsey, owner and publisher of the Jewish Independent as our editor.

As a registered non-profit, the JMABC receives support from the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver and other local foundations. However, we still depend on the generous support of our members and supporters to enable us to complete our important work. We are grateful for member support for more than 45 years and count on membership renewals, new members and ongoing contributions.

Perry Seidelman
President
On this, the forty-fifth anniversary of the Jewish Museum and Archives of BC, we take a look back at the origins of our organization. In 2011, our then archivist, Jennifer Yuhasz, sat down with Cyril Leonoff, founder of the Jewish Historical Society of BC and Irene Dodek, one of the earliest and most prolific contributors to the JMABC's Oral History program. From the humble beginnings described below, the oral history collection has grown to over 750 interviews.

Note: Remarks herein have been edited for clarity and brevity.

Cyril E. Leonoff: It started by chance, a chance meeting that I had with three Barish brothers at the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre. These three brothers were retired farmers from Saskatchewan. Their family had spent some three quarters of the century on the Wapella Jewish farm settlement, really the first real Jewish farm settlement on the Prairies, Northeast of Wapella Saskatchewan. The eldest brother, Eli, had seen my daughter Anita among a bunch of other kids [at a Purim carnival at the JCC]. He looked at Anita and said ‘she looks like my old girlfriend on the farm…, Rose Brotman.’

Rose was my mother. She was also raised on the Wapella settlement and had been [Eli’s] sweetheart on the farm.

There really was no recorded history of the settlement – nothing – and these brothers had such vivid memories of the pioneer life on the farm and their subsequent life as successful farmers. So I got very interested in their stories, I really felt that this was an unknown story that really should be brought to the Jewish community in general.

[In 1968 or ‘69,] I bought an old reel to reel tape recorder which wasn’t a very high fidelity and it was a big thing, very awkward and I started to interview these brothers. In the summer of 1969, they said, ‘Well, you want to know all about the farm life where your family started, why don’t you [come] visit the farm [with us]?’

So as a result of this, I started writing up this history based on these taped interviews, [and] started interviewing… many other people from the Jewish colonies on the Prairies.

While they were quiet men, their memories were so vivid in an age where their whole life was involved in the farm.

Irene Dodek: Cyril asked me to sit in on interviews with my mother and her brothers, my uncles. Since they were either in or approaching their 80’s, Cyril felt I could jog their memories because I had heard the stories a zillion times. It was while listening to Cyril’s interviews that suddenly a light went on in my head: if these stories are of so much interest, surely other people’s stories would be equally so. And so began my interviewing saga.

As Editor of the Jewish Western Bulletin from 1949 to 1960, Abe Arnold developed an interest in the community’s history. In 1958, the centennial of British Columbia, he prepared a special issue documenting a century of Jewish life in the province. For this project, he sought the assistance of David Rome, who had written a masters’ thesis on the topic while a student at UBC in the 1930’s. At that time, Cyril recounts, there was a great deal of material documenting the early Jewish community of Victoria, which had been very integrated - some had been politicians and civic leaders, but there was almost nothing on the Jews of Vancouver.

In 1960, Arnold left his post at the JWB to become Executive Director of Canadian Jewish Congress in Winnipeg. In this position, he launched the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada.

CEL: Canadian Jewish Congress at that time had the Canadian Jewish Archives [in Montreal]. But it really wasn’t representative of all of Canada and there was great impetus to establish Jewish historical societies across Canada because so little was known about many other areas in Canada other than Toronto and Montreal and maybe Ottawa.
So through Arnold and through Congress the pressure was on to develop a Canadian Jewish Historical Society and local Jewish Historical Societies. So, sponsored by Canadian Jewish Congress and the National Council of Jewish Women – which was a very strong organization, both of them were strong organizations in the Jewish community at the time, interested in the arts and interested in the history – they called a meeting together [on] November 26, 1970..., the first meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia. And because of the work I had already done I was prevailed upon to become the president of the association, which I don’t know why I accepted but I did. Neither did I imagine it would fill all my spare time over the next 35 years.

So, that’s how the Jewish Historical Society started. We were very naive at that time... We had no other hard data, no archives or anything. Our first program we start is oral history. Many of these pioneers or certainly their children were around so our very first job was to start interviewing those pioneers and their children while they were still around. And that of course paid enormous dividends and it would have been largely lost had we not started that program, kind of in the nick of time.

In 1978, I published our first book which was called *Pioneers, Pedlars and Prayer Shawls of the Jewish Communities in British Columbia and the Yukon*. Again much of it came from the impetus of this, of our taped interviews.

**ID:** We also collected photographs too that you used in that book.

**CEL:** We collected photographs and started collecting an archives, whatever we could find, and the early Jewish synagogues because they were Yiddish speaking and were not really that fluent in the English language, they didn’t keep any minutes. In fact we never found a synagogue minute until Beth Israel was founded in the early 30’s.

Now, oral history was a relatively new phenomenon in Canada, although its origins were, I suppose, way back in history... certainly our Native history was all oral history. But it wasn’t until the 70’s that it really became popular as a historical medium. It was originally eschewed by classical academic historians who only relied on written and documentary materials. But when they invented modern technology, portable cassette and now digital recorders, it became popular, really a popular media and really came into its own... [Oral History] gave human voices and impressions. But what people mostly say and think, people who lived and participated in this history, which is far more interesting than just stark cold black and white documentary history. It created really a new element...

It created source material where really none existed before. Who knew anything about women’s history for example or Native history or much of the early ethnic history in Canada, particularly in Western Canada. It was particularly apropos to Vancouver’s early Jewish community who had neither the means nor the language skill to represent themselves in written records. They were unknown.

And it was increasingly important in the technological age where documentary history has really been much replaced by impermanent electronic methods such as emails and iphones. People don’t write letters anymore. And much of this history just disappears, it’s here today, thrown away tomorrow.

**ID:** Yes.

**CEL:** And of course personal records were the same thing.

**ID:** Yes. People died and their family threw out their [belongings]. But I think we’re trying very hard to educate people that they don’t throw anything out.

**Jennifer Yuhasz:** People are getting better.

**ID:** Yes, they know that we exist and what we do and how important it is. So we’ve accomplished something Cyril, a little bit.

I went on to become an interviewer for the Shoah Foundation, the Steven Spielberg foundation who was interviewing Holocaust survivors, [but] that came much later... I learned through just doing. Each interview I did I learned something more.

**CEL:** Looking back at these tapes, [Irene] interviewed, in-depth interviews – often with many sessions – [with] key people in the community. And I’ll just mention a few: Ben Wosk; Morris Saltzman was an early, senior Jewish community worker in Vancouver; Jessie Allman with the Jewish Family Service Agency, a very important organization; Justice Nathan Nemetz; Jack Diamond; an extensive interview with Sophie Waldman...

**ID:** She told me that she had never told these stories to anyone else. She felt comfortably enough to talk to me. And the one thing I can say about it, being an interviewer is that you develop a bond with the people who you interview. They’re telling you stories that they’ve never told to anybody else.

**CEL:** Now Ann Krieger was another principal early interviewer.

**ID:** In the beginning I didn’t have the confidence to do an interview by myself, and neither did she, so we would go together. And in those years we used tapes that we had to turn over, so one of us would ask the questions, the other one would watch the clock to make sure that we didn’t overrun our time.

Other interviewers soon came on board. Naomi Pellen Katz had written about the history of Jewish women for the centennial edition of the Jewish Western Bulletin and was interested in continuing research into the topic. Myer Freedman had grown up in Vancouver since arriving here at four years old in 1914. “He interviewed old-timers,” Cyril remarks, including Dave Nemetz, an early leader in the Zionist movement, Harry Toban, President of Schara Tzedeck during the congregation’s move from Strathcona to its current location in 1948, David Rome, mentioned above, and Kiva Katzenelson, first principal of the Vancouver Talmud Torah, 1920-1945. Sally Tobe, Jean Gerber, Barry Dunner, Hannah Hirt, and Charna Plottel were also foundational early interviewers. Drs. Isaac Stoffman and Victor Hertzman became involved, interviewing early doctors in the community.
In March 1979, the Jewish Historical Society published the first issue of The Scribe, which at the time served as a one-page newsletter. The two-paragraph Editorial makes an appeal for community members to volunteer. A brief article reports on the efforts underway in Victoria to refurbish Congregation Emanu-El, at the time in its 116th year:

“The most recent idea is to build an addition on the adjacent lot to house a museum, archives, and library with necessary study rooms and other facilities. It is hoped to have a nation-wide drive for funds to restore this most historic Building.”

Adjacent is an order form for the newly published Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls.

The Scribe was published 3-4 times a year in its early days and quickly grew to 6-8 pages in length. Over the subsequent decades, the publication developed into a 24 and then 40 page bifold before settling into its current form, a 200 page bound journal. The inaugural edition of this format, published in 2008, comprised a single essay recounting the first hundred years of Jewish life in BC, 1848 - 1948, from the first pioneers to the community’s post-war migration from Strathcona to the Oak Street Corridor.

To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the JHS in 1997, an exhibit was developed, titled, “Creating Community: Images of Vancouver’s Jewish History.” Housed at the Sidney and Gertrude Zack Gallery at the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver, this exhibit ran from February 13 through March 12, 1997. Throughout the 1990s, the JHS had played host to touring exhibits about Jewish history in other regions of Canada, but this was the first exhibit developed locally on exclusively local content.

Dorothy Grad, JHS President at the time, remarks that the community response to this exhibit was “fabulous,” and that it helped to increase broad community awareness of the organization. Membership rose significantly that year.

Another exhibit, “Hindsight: Recollections of Vancouver from the 1950s by Jack Diamond, Shirley Margolus Kort, Claire Klein Osipov, and Dave Shafraian,” followed in 2001 to a similar reception.

In March 2007, the JMABC opened a permanent exhibit space on the third floor of the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver. Building on the material developed for “Creating Community,” this exhibit provided a survey of Jewish history in BC alongside a series of temporary exhibits. Over time, it became clear that this model was unsustainable. In 2011, the JMABC relocated once again, to a small office in the Peretz Centre, where operations continue today, with exhibits and programs hosted throughout the region.

In summer 2014, the JMABC launched a new website made possible through an avalanche of community support. It is home to an ever-growing roster of innovative online exhibits.
The Jewish Museum and Archives of BC is pleased to announce the establishment of a new annual Essay Prize to be awarded to new scholarly work that makes substantial use of the BC Jewish Community Archives.

Such work enhances our understanding of our community’s history, and of the place of this history in the broader context of Canadian Jewish History. For these reasons, we are pleased to offer this opportunity to researchers working to expand understanding of our collective past.

Essays of up to 10,000 words will be considered by an anonymous evaluation committee appointed by the board of the JMABC. As much as possible, awards will alternate between faculty/graduate students in one year, and undergraduate students in the other.

The award will be for $500. If the evaluation committee decides that there are no papers of sufficient quality, then no prize will be awarded that year. The first call for papers will be in 2016, with a prize announced in early March 2017. Whenever feasible, the prize winning author will be asked to deliver a public lecture.

For more information, and to request the full application criteria, please contact the JMABC office: 604.257.5199 or info@jewishmuseum.ca
The JMABC is pleased to announce four new online exhibits: Sacred Sites, New Ways of Living, On These Shores, and Letters Home. All four can be found on our new website at: jewishmuseum.ca/exhibits/online-exhibits

These exhibits cover a wide cross-section of topics from our community history, and are the result of months of research completed by an impressive group of curators. Additional online exhibits are currently underway, and new ones will commence in the coming months. Sign up for our email newsletter to receive notification of upcoming exhibit launch events.

**Sacred Sites**

Alissa Cartwright and Kaitlin Findlay, two students of history at the University of Victoria, completed Sacred Sites as their major project for a course on public history.

Taking the 2011 desecration of Emanu-El Cemetery as their starting point, Cartwright and Findlay investigated how Victoria citizens - Jewish and non - responded to this event. From there, they undertook comparative analysis of similar incidents in other cities, including the near destruction of a Musqueam burial ground in south Vancouver in 2013. The similarities and differences in these responses are instructive and we encourage you to view the exhibit for a more complete picture.

Sacred Sites was launched here in Vancouver in December with a reception and discussion at the JMABC. A second launch event followed in mid-January with a presentation and discussion at Congregation Emanu-El. Following remarks from the president of Jewish Federation of Vancouver Island, University of Victoria professor Jordan Stanger-Ross, Rabbi Harry Brechner, and representatives from the University of Victoria I-Witness Field School, the gathered crowd of over 40 engaged the curators in a rich discussion sparked by the issues raised by the exhibit.
New Ways of Living

Less than two weeks later, 200 people gathered at Inform Interiors in Gastown Vancouver for the launch of New Ways of Living: Jewish Architects in Vancouver, 1955-1975. This exhibit, developed over the past nine months by Young Canada Works Museum Assistant Chanel Blouin, investigates the role played by four members of our community in Vancouver’s post-war boom in modern architecture.

Featuring never-before-seen documents from the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal and phenomenal images by photographers Fred Schiffer, Selwyn Pullan, and Michael Perlmutter, New Ways of Living celebrates the legacy of architects Wolfgang Gerson, Peter Oberlander, and Judah Shumiatcher, and landscape architect Cornelia Hahn-Oberlander. In addition to remarks from Blouin, guests at this launch had the privilege of hearing responses from architect Judah Shumiatcher and architectural historian Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe.

In their coverage of the event, CTV News quoted project supervisor, Michael Schwartz, saying, “These architects responded to the environment in a way that no one was doing previously. They were developing a local style for Vancouver. This exhibit examines how these architects drew inspiration from what was happening in California and along the West Coast and adapted it to our local environment.”
The merchants of Victoria comprised a wide range of characters, yet they shared similar stories of fleeing Europe or migrating northward from below the 49th parallel. Those coming from San Francisco were at an advantage as they were already familiar with the cadence of frontier life, with experience in supporting an otherwise volatile industry during their time spent in America. Merchants had found a niche far more reliable and transferable than on the front lines panning and mining for gold... They had specialized skills and experience and had access to stock and capital that enabled them to hit the ground running.

Typically, the Jews had not arrived as refugees from their original homes in Europe but rather were economic migrants travelling north from San Francisco. But, they arrived as individuals rather than a community; they had Jewish ties that were loose at best, coming only with business connections. In a sense, the Jewish merchant was but one of many in a group of disparate immigrants whose shared characteristic was difference...

One such migrant was Frank Sylvester, whose arrival to Victoria is among the first recorded among the Jews. He disembarked July 17, 1858, arriving from San Francisco after having lived in New York. He struggled to find his niche in the frontier town, first opening a small store, and then moving on to gold mining. His travel journals reveal challenges common to many prospectors of the time. Although the landscape was majestic and bountiful, it was harsh and unforgiving in comparison to California’s temperate climate and industrialized centers. There must have been a difficult period of adjustment and acclimatization mixed with the excitement of building a new life.

Yet Sylvester found friendship and is said to have been a popular character within a heterogeneous group of friends and business associates. While he identified as Jewish, his orthodoxy was necessarily loosened by circumstances. Observances like Shabbat and the law of kashrut were impractical. Survival meant a pragmatic relaxation of Jewish tradition. In his journals, Sylvester reveals how far he had strayed as he describes his meals of pork and beans, which he enjoyed three times a day.

On These Shores

Our third online exhibit to launch this year is On These Shores: Jewish Pioneers of Victoria. Developed by independent researcher Erika Balcombe, this exhibit delves into the surprisingly multicultural early days of Victoria’s history. Under the governance of Sir James Douglas, Jews, gentiles, Chinese, and escaped Black American slaves put their prejudices aside in the interest of commerce and the dream of hitting paydirt.

Balcombe examines the rise of organized Jewish society leading up to the opening of Congregation Emanu-El in 1863, just five years after the first Jews arrived in Victoria. The exhibit notes how well Jews were able to integrate while other ethnic groups, particularly First Nations, were highly marginalized.
Letters Home

In mid-1916, Joseph Seidelman enlisted to serve in the Canadian military’s campaign in France and Belgium. As he made his way through training in Manitoba and England, then arrived at the frontlines in France, Seidelman wrote and received frequent letters to and from his family back home, here in Vancouver. This collection was recently donated to the BC Jewish Community Archives, and, thanks to a grant from Library and Archives Canada, we have been able to hire an archives assistant to catalogue and digitize this collection. Letters Home gathers a selection of this correspondence, providing an arc of Seidelman’s experience in the war. For a deeper look into the process of developing this exhibit, read our archive assistant, Junie Chow’s article on page 12.

Coming Soon...

These four exhibits are part of an ongoing series of exhibits that we will continue to add to the JMABC website in the coming years. With every archival collection that we complete the cataloguing and digitization of, a wealth of material is made available for research. Online exhibits are just one result of such research, an opportunity to widely share the treasures of our archives. Additional exhibits are currently in progress, including one based on the courtship of Morris Soskin and Rose Hyams, which transpired through correspondence during 1920-21, while she was in Montreal and he was in Vancouver.
Before we jump into what the archives have been doing for the past few months, we need to cover the “who” of the archives. In September 2015, JMABC archivist of 6 years Jennifer Yuhasz moved on to a new position at the City of Richmond Archives, but not before installing me in her place. Who am I? My name is Alysa Routtenberg, I’m a life-long Vancouverite and a lover of all things historical. After completing my B.A. at UBC (majoring in Art History and Canadian History) I moved to Montreal to pursue a Masters of Library and Information Studies at McGill University, where I eventually focused my course work on archives and information literacy, before moving back to Vancouver.

I’m not a completely new face in the JMABC offices though: in summer 2014, while on summer break from my master’s program, I was hired as an archives assistant and worked on the Fred Schiffer photography collection for three months. Is there any better job for an art history major turned archives major than working on digitizing a photography collection for the archives? The answer is probably no, and I left the JMABC offices at the end of the summer having a much better idea of my own career goals.

Flash forward to September 2015 when I was offered the amazing opportunity to take over from my once-mentor, Jennifer. Special thanks to Marcy Babins, Michael Schwartz, Perry Seidelman, and Cynthia Ramsay who were tasked with orienting me to new tasks on not just a daily but often hourly basis, as well as the Board of Directors for support throughout my transition.

The archives have had a busy end to 2015 and beginning of 2016. But that’s what we always say, isn’t it? That’s because it’s true! Contrary to what some people may think, archives these days are a far cry from a dusty basement full of boxes, where everything smells like mildew and you wouldn’t want to look at anything even if you needed to. Every year we receive dozens of donations, taking in everything from a handful of family photos from the 1940’s, to organizational records for local institutions, to pins, stamps, and letters from Vancouver’s past movers and shakers.

Some of the best examples we have from the past six months include:

- The travelling optometry kit of Dr Robert Wenner, who worked throughout the province in the 1950’s through 80’s, bringing eye care to the underserved in the farthest reaches of BC. Comprising of 3 boxes, this kit features many tools you’d recognize in the optometrist’s office today, you just might have to take a second look. With one box full just of corrective lens for testing vision we can’t wait for the opportunity to show this great collection off soon.

- The Murray Goldman collection here has also continued to grow through the winter, and these materials are even better than the last set (at least we think so). A leading menswear retailer through the mid-century right to today, Murray Goldman and family’s businesses (including Murray Goldman, Ivy Room, and Boys’ Co) have produced a treasure trove of advertising materials, many featuring the man himself as a model!

- And one last one just to show off the diversity of businesses that Jews have been involved with in Vancouver: from Appleton Galleries, a long-time local leader in Aboriginal and Inuit art, we have a cross section of materials, cataloguing the business’ successes and endeavours, while showing off beautiful pieces of art and sculpture.

The Oral History program has been especially busy through the winter, as we partnered with students at both University of British Columbia and University of Victoria. Through a graduate level course on oral history taught by the School of Library, Archives, and Information Studies we received a total of 14 new interviews done with community members from Vancouver including: Ronald Appleton, Esther and Jed Blumes, Cathy Bregman, Sally Falder, Reita Goldberg, Lois Gumprich, Walter Gumprich, Barbara Halparin, Nancy Halpern, Henry and Irene King, Alex Kliner, Anne Melul, Muriel Morris, and Jeff Zilberman.

Over on Vancouver Island, two University of Victoria Students interviewed 11 community members for their online exhibit Sacred Sites: Dishonour and Healing including: Sarah Adams, Rabbi Harry Brechner, Ed Fitch, Michael Goldstein, Don MacGregor, Brigitte McKenzie, Isa Milman, Geoff Perkins, Susan Roy, Jordan Stanger-Ross, Charlayne Thorton-Joe, and Joy Wilkins.

Other people interviewed since September 2015 include: Myer Goldberg, Marni Tritt, Eva Swartz, and David Zacks.

Projects currently on the go:

- Canadian Jewish Congress Pacific Region fonds – Soviet Jewry collection
- Mountain View Cemetery Restoration Committee fonds
- Morris Soskin and Rose Hyams collection
- Seidelman Family fonds
- Temple Sholom fonds

Alysa Routtenberg
Archivist
I recently graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce from UBC and am taking some time to figure out what my next step will be, career-wise. I knew from the past that I’ve often found history-related topics to be particularly interesting, though I never really thought about historical work as a career option.

While on my post-graduation break, I noticed that many of the TV shows, documentaries and movies that I’ve been watching and the books that I’m drawn to are often related to history. This led me to a moment of realization that perhaps I’ve always had a stronger interest in history than I had originally thought. Thus began my search for volunteer opportunities in the history field, and the humanities in general, in order to gain a better knowledge of the possible careers in these areas.

Through this process, I discovered the Jewish Museum and Archives of BC (JMABC), and started volunteering here in the spring of 2015 as an archives assistant. While volunteering at the JMABC I got the chance to learn many new things. Not only did I learn about archival procedures and how to properly transcribe oral histories, but I also became more familiar with Jewish culture and aspects of my city’s history of which I hadn’t known much before.

I really enjoyed hearing the various stories from the oral histories as I got to take a glimpse at what life in Vancouver was like for people, say, in the 1930s or 1950s. I remember in one story a woman was saying when she was a young adult in the ‘50s, people got all dressed up in their fancy clothes whenever they went downtown. She also said that her guy friend refused to go with her downtown if she didn’t change into something fancy. I thought that was surprising and rather funny. Thinking of how people are dressed nowadays on Vancouver’s downtown streets, I find the styles are much more relaxed and casual since the ‘50s. I definitely know I have seen a fair amount of folks walking around lately in their pyjamas and flip-flops; a horrific sight, I’m sure, for that woman’s guy friend from the oral history story.

As I’ve always been interested on the subject of the World Wars, it was fascinating to read a first-hand account of some of the experiences of being a soldier in World War I, including accounts of daily life in that particular era.

It was also really great to be able to work with the Seidelman family’s old black and white photographs, which gave me more of a description of Vancouver life in the early 20th Century. Though I’m sad that the contract is coming to a close, I have really enjoyed my time working on this project and working with the awesome people at the JMABC. I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to do so.

Junie Chow
Archives Assistant
The latest edition of *The Scribe* is in final editing and printing stages, and should be hitting mailboxes later this spring. For this issue we actually took inspiration from the 2013 edition because many of the families who worked in the furniture industry in the early years would later branch out into the clothing industry.

Covering retailers, manufacturers, and managers, this year’s *Scribe* hopscotches around Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. We’ll see stories from retailers in Oakridge mall, 4th Avenue on the west side, Granville Street downtown, West Vancouver, New Westminster and more! The unique part of this year’s *Scribe* is that some of these businesses are still open and thriving today, being managed by second and even third generation clothiers around the city.

We’re looking forward to presenting a very special launch event for this issue: an historic fashion show featuring designs from many of the stores included in *The Scribe*, hosted by fashion historian Ivan Sayers.

Join us Sunday, May 15th for this special event!

**Scribe Launch Fashion Show**

Sunday, May 15, 2016
2pm

King David High School Atrium
5718 Willow Street
Vancouver, BC

Tickets available through our website: 
jewishmuseum.ca/calendar

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**Boris Chenkis**

“The interesting thing about having an After Five store, a social occasion store, [is that] you have very loyal customers but sometimes you only see them every five years, when another son or daughter is getting married, or a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah, or they’re going on a cruise. That’s one thing I always envied about the ready-to-wear daytime business: every new season, you’d see people, [they would want to know] what’s new for fall, what’s new for spring.”

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**Louis Eisman**

*Eisman recalls that his parents knew a family who ran a raincoat factory:*

“They were friends of my parents and I called him up. And he said, look, can you sell? And I said, ‘I’m an amazing salesman!’ I was young, I was like 19, and I went and started selling raincoats for this guy and I did fantastic. Now, it hardly rains in South Africa, but anyway, I did really, really well.”
Murray Goldman

In the 1950s, suits “were $25, $55, $65 max…. We had a payment plan, every week they come in with $1 or $2 or whatever. There was one person [who] came in and he says, I love the suit, Murray, but I can't get used to not having pockets in my jackets. I knew what he was talking about, so, while he was talking, I took out a little knife.” When retailers receive a suit, the pockets are sewn up, because “the potential buyer of the suit always puts his hands in the pocket. After 10 such tries. The pockets would get baggy.” So, while this customer was talking, “[I] pulled the thread out. I got the edge, pulled it out. I just made pockets for you, put your hands in. He put on a smile. So, those were the things, it was nice. With payments, we got to know their families and, when their sons grew up, they brought them in. It’s like I said earlier, if you love what you’re doing, you’ll be successful and you look forward to going to work in the morning.”

Marlene Cohen

“My father-in-law [Sam Cohen] was a real retail genius. [He] was born in San Francisco and moved up to Vancouver and thought that he would open up a little Army & Navy Surplus Store after the First World War. And that’s what it was – it was strictly surplus…. Then it became more of a small department store. Then there was a second store and a third store, and it was bigger stores. The merchandising was always the same. It didn’t matter whether it was a $5 shirt ... it only looks good if you throw it on a table and they know they’re getting a bargain. Don’t stack them in colors, it looks too fancy, it’ll look too expensive, they won’t touch it. The same with shoes. Everything looked like a surplus. That’s the formative years of the development of the chain. My father-in-law had an eye for merchandising that would catch the consumer’s eye and think he was getting a bargain – he was.”

Irving Goldenberg

When people “walk in the door, they’re there for a reason. They’re wanting to buy a suit or they’re wanting to look around, make up their mind where they’re going to buy their suit. So, I taught this to the people working for me. I said ...you have a very short time to make an impression that they want to buy from you. I figured that, within a minute’s time, it takes place. The people start to trust you, they’re listening to you and, if they’re not.... Don’t wait until it’s too late. By the time that minute is approaching, at the end of the minute, if you’re not happy with the way things are going, turn it over to one of the other salesmen and let them have a crack at it.”
A Modern Day Exodus

In 1999, Canadian Jewish Congress, Pacific Region, transferred 160 boxes of its records to the Jewish Historical Society of BC. These boxes were put in storage for future cataloguing. Recently, eight of those boxes pertaining to one subject, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry*, were brought forth and sorted by Jana Abramson and myself.

This worldwide movement, which lasted 22 years, from 1967 – 1989, was an amazing enterprise that began with nary a hope and ended up with a truly happy ending.

It began quietly in the USSR in 1967 when some Russian Jews heard of the victory of the Six Day War in Israel. The pride that this news evoked empowered them to demand from the Soviet government their basic human and civil rights denied to them since the time of Stalin. These Jews wanted to be able to practice their religion and teach and learn their history and traditions. If these rights continued to be denied, they insisted, they should be granted the right to emigrate to Israel. The Russian authorities – who had broken off diplomatic relations with Israel in the aftermath of the Six Day War – refused to accede to these demands and clamped down even harder on these people who became known as “refusniks”.

The struggle escalated in 1970 when 14 Jews and two sympathizers hijacked a plane in Leningrad, with plans to flee to Sweden and eventually freedom in Israel. They were caught, accused of treason and put on trial. Two were condemned to death while the rest were given lengthy prison sentences.

The trial caught the world’s attention and an international campaign began not only to free the prisoners but to put pressure on the Soviets to either improve the lives of all Russian Jews or let them leave the country.

The campaign took many forms. There were protests in front of parliaments, court houses and Russian embassies and consulates. There were demonstrations on streets and special fundraising benefits. Petitions were signed by thousands of people and sent to Moscow politicians. World leaders, important scientists, as well as clergy and academics, held meetings and international conferences.

The most imaginative tactics were used by the women groups called “The 35”, the age of the only woman hijacker from the Leningrad incident. These women were brilliant in attracting publicity for their stunts. They dressed in prison garb while demonstrating on streets; they chained themselves to fences; they interrupted performances of Russian ballets and orchestras visiting abroad. Some made clandestine visits to the USSR, bringing with them not only moral support but also smuggling in medicines, Hebrew text books, and Levi’s jeans (a hot commodity on the black market).

In Canada, the Canadian Jewish Congress took the struggle for Soviet Jewry under its wing and committees were formed in all the major cities. Vancouver was one of those cities. Sorting through the eight boxes of material, we found evidence of what was done locally.

The files contain detailed case histories of refusniks names, addresses and phone numbers, and descriptions of family circumstances, many from Odessa.* Vancouver activists were urged to phone these people, write letters and send telegrams, even when only a small number actually got through, because a constant barrage on the international phone operators or postal services in Russia was found to be effective. Synagogue members adopted refusnik families and developed personal relationships with them. Children were twinned for Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies.

The committee also organized solidarity rallies and published a wide array of publications and newsletters, many on educational topics to acquaint Russians with Jewish religious customs and holidays. Some members made trips to Russia and visited the dissidents. Barbara Shumiatcher was the chairperson of the Vancouver committee in the early 1980s. She remembers travelling to Israel to meet with the daughter of well-known refusnik, Lev Ovischer. She then flew to Madrid in November, 1980, to lobby Canadian parliamentarians attending the Conference on Security and Cooperation happening there.

This conference was an outcome of the 1975 Helsinki human right accords, in which the Soviet Union delegation refused any concessions regarding Russian Jews. Shumiatcher later met Nathan Sharansky during his visit to Vancouver. He expressed deep gratitude for all the work that was done on his behalf.

All this activity came to an end in 1989 when politics in the USSR were radically changed by the fall of the Iron Curtain. There are several post-1989 records about the resettlement of Russian Jews, and some problem cases that were followed up in Russia, but the main thrust was over.

The campaign on behalf of Russian Jews was a model of non violent civil disobedience that managed to attract the attention of a wildly disparate audience. It resulted in a modern day exodus. One million Russian Jews ended up in Israel while half a million settled elsewhere.

Naomi Caruso was the Director of Library Services at the Jewish Public Library of Montreal from 1973-1989. Since 2010, she has been a volunteer with the JMABC Archives, working on numerous collections.

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*Note: Odessa and Vancouver have been sister cities since 1944. - ed.*
Memory, history and pride can be fragile things. I saw this firsthand while visiting the Iolani Palace in Honolulu last week. I was struck, not just by the incredible sadness of the history of the indigenous population of the Hawaiian Islands, but also the obvious pride of the current generation in the restoration and preservation of the palace. It was here that Queen Liliuokalani, the last monarch of Hawaii was placed under house arrest while her kingdom was seized. One of the most poignant displays we saw featured the quilt she made while imprisoned in the palace.

As members of the Jewish Museum and Archives of BC, you share with me an understanding of just how important it is to protect the history and memories of our own community.

The BC Jewish Community Archives

I hope we no longer need to convince you of the immense value of our community archives; I also hope you realize that it takes effort and resources to protect and preserve them. To this end, we have launched a campaign which we are calling, “Sustainers of the Archives” with the goal of raising sufficient funds to sustain the archives for the next three years. We run a very fiscally responsible organization; the cost of keeping and maintaining the archives is just $130,000 per year. This does not take into account the valuable programming and educational work we do, merely the core functioning of the archives itself.

The Campaign Goals

By committing to an annual contribution for the next three years, you can help us establish a stable funding base that will allow us to concentrate on cataloguing, digitizing, and uploading our invaluable, diverse and rich material documenting the history of our community. This stability will enable us to pursue other funding opportunities to increase the capacity of our organization and continue to develop innovative public programs and exhibits.

Please consider making an annual commitment at one of the following levels:

- Patron: $15,000 or more per year
- Sustainer: $5,000 - $14,999 per year
- Guardian: $2,500 - $4,999 per year
- Advocate: $1,000 - $2,499 per year
- Friend: $500 - $999 per year
- Supporter: $50 - $499 per year

How can you help?

There are a number of ways you can help. The first way is by making a pledge at whatever level you feel comfortable. We are also recruiting a corps of volunteers for a phone campaign which will start in May. If you are willing to speak or write about the campaign to your synagogue or community group, please contact us and we will provide you with campaign material and training. We will be pleased to give a presentation about the archives and its treasures to any interested groups.

Finally, please speak to your friends and tell them about the archives and about the importance of this campaign.

With your help, we can ensure the preservation of our BC Jewish Community Archives

Michael Levy
Campaign Chair
Public Programs Calendar

INTERSECTIONS

Tracking the History of Eight Scrolls
with Evelyn Lazare

In July 2015, Evelyn Lazare, a long-time member of Temple Sholom, volunteered to document the provenance of the eight Sifrei Torah housed in the synagogue’s ark, believing the process would take a few weeks at best. She submitted the final document to Rabbi Dan Moskowitz, Temple Sholom’s Senior Rabbi, in February 2016, and still maintains that it is a work in progress.

Evelyn’s presentation describes how she approached her role as Torah detective and includes the back-stories omitted from the more formal, written document.

MAR 31
7-9 PM

A Transcontinental Love
with Cristen Polley

Morris Soskin met Rose Hyams on a trip to Montreal in 1921, and fell madly in love. Though he had to return home to Vancouver after just a few days, they maintained contact through post, sometimes writing multiple letters in a single day. Before the year was through, the two were married.

Two hundred and seventy six letters from this correspondence were donated to the JMABC by Morris and Rose’s daughter, Helen Coleman in 2014.

Cristen Polley, who digitized the collection in summer 2015 as our archives assistant, has returned to develop an online exhibit based on the collection. Join us May 19th for a curator’s talk about the process of developing this exhibit.

MAY 19
7-9 PM

WALKING TOURS

Meet the pioneers who layed the foundations of our community and helped build Vancouver. Join one of the Jewish Museum and Archives of BC’s knowledgeable tour guides for an informative and highly entertaining walk.

2 HOURS

Book a spot in advance through our website: jewishmuseum.ca

REMINDER: If you received walking tour passes as one of your Indiegogo perks, why not use them this spring?

Gastown & Strathcona

Meet at 700 East Pender at the corner of Heatley.
Sunday, March 20, 11am
Sunday, April 10, 11 am
Sunday, May 8, 11am

Mountain View Cemetery

Meet at the gates to the Old Jewish Cemetery at the northwest corner of 37th and Fraser.
Sunday, April 17, 11 am
Sunday, May 8, 11 am

SPECIAL EVENT

Join us Sunday, May 15 for the launch of the latest issue of our annual journal, The Scribe.

To celebrate the history of clothiers in our community - the subject of this year’s edition of The Scribe - we’re pleased to present an historic fashion show curated by the incomparable local fashion historian, Ivan Sayers. Come see the glamourous dresses and dapper suits from this timeless era in the airy atrium of King David High School.

MAY 15
2-4 PM

Tickets are available at jewishmuseum.ca/calendar

ARCHIVES TOURS

The BC Jewish Community Archives are the heart of the JMABC, the place where the treasures of our community’s history are housed. This impressive facility is truly a sight to behold and we are very pleased to share it with you. Join archivist Alysa Routtenberg for a tour of some of the highlights of our collection.

By appointment only.
call 604.257.5199
MAZEL TOV
Irene Dodek, on being honoured by Jewish Seniors Alliance.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal, Cyril Leonoff, Pat and Harold Laimon, JMABC board and staff
Irene and Mort Dodek, in honour of their 64th anniversary.
From all of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren
Cissie Eppel, on being honoured by Jewish Seniors Alliance.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal, JMABC board and staff
Leonor Etkin, Happy Birthday.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal
Carole Fader, Happy 80th Birthday.
ZLC Financial
Doreen Globman, on her special birthday.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal
Shanie Levin, on being honoured by Jewish Seniors Alliance.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal, JMABC board and staff
Debra Slavin and Jason Gertner, on your marriage.
Fay and Morley Shafron
Sheila Smith, on her special birthday.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal
Gail and Richard Wenner, in honour of their newest grandson, Elijah.
Fay and Morley Shafron
Esther Weinstein, in honour of her special birthday.
Fay and Bud Riback, Shelley and Perry Seidelman

WITH SYMPATHY
Fred Berman, in memory of his mother, Sophie.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal
Esther Caldes, in memory of her aunt.
Joice Myers, JMABC staff
Valerie Diamond, in memory of her husband, Isadore.
Shelley and Perry Seidelman
Dale Fratkin and Alan Hitelman, in memory of her mother, Priscilla.
Marcy and Steve Babins
Effie Gordon, in memory of her husband, Harry.
KRG Insurance – Bill Gruenthal
Bill Gruenthal and his family, in memory of his brother, Martin.
JMABC board and staff, Marcy and Steve Babins, Sara Ciacci, Kara Mintzberg and Josh Gibbons, Betty and Irv Nitzkin, Fay and Bud Riback, Sheila and Lenny Smith, Ronnie Tessler
Tannis Lank, in memory of her husband, Morris.
Fay and Morley Shafron
Josephine Nadel, in memory of her mother, Marian Margolis.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal
Barbara Raphael, in memory of her father, Les.
Alysa Routtenberg, Irene Dodek, and JMABC staff
Dori and Steve Whiteside and family, in memory of Mary Gofsky.
Marcy and Steve Babins
David Zacks, in memory of Susan.
Noemi and Bill Gruenthal

WITH APPRECIATION
Irene Dodek.
Sally Tobe

DONATIONS
Jana and Ken Abramson, Byron Aceman, Jack Austin, Helen Aqua, Hildy and Jeffrey Barnett, Sally Berry, David Bogoch, Esther Caldes, Jane Cherry, Jack Chivo, Jody and Harvey Dales, Jill Diamond, Irene and Mort Dodek, Marie Doduck, Enid Edwards, Janet York and Sam Feldman, Sharon and Ed Fitch, Felicia Folk, Marlene and Norman Franks, Barbara Freedman, Debby Freiman, Chris Friedrichs, Corinne Gelfer, Kara Mintzberg and Josh Gibbons, Dora Golden, Richard Goldenberg, Tanis and David Goldman, Mark Goodman Personal Real Estate Corp, Zoe Gropper, Noemi and Bill Gruenthal, Glenda and Arthur Guttmann, Chela and David Herman, Anne Hudson, Rosalind and Howard Karby, John Keenleyside, Marilyn and Robert Krell, Kay Kevey, Norm Levi, Risa and Bill Levine, Michael Levy, The Lutsky Families, Robert Markin, Cyndi and Max Mintzberg, Florence Morris, Tyla and Larry Myer, Joice Myers, Betty and Irv Nitzkin, Nadia Ognistoff, Lola and Norm Pawer, Matthew Ross, Eleanor Boyle and Harley Rothstein, Beverley and Fred Schaeffer, David Schwartz, Rosalie and Joe Segeal, Cecil Sigal, Anita and Arnold Silber, Sonjan Enterprises, Rosa Stenberg, Ronnie and Barry Tessler, Aron Tischler, Sally Tobe, Bill Weaver, Rita and Marvin Weintraub, Gail Dodek and Richard Wenner, Judy Oberlander and Mark Wexler, Christine Wisenthal, Phil Yacht, Elilan and Barrie Yackness, Susie and David Zacks, Zacks Family Charitable Foundation

NEW MEMBERS
Ruth and David Berger, Samara Bordan, Nadia Danay, Jory Levitt, Wanda Ratcliffe-Smith, Cynthia and Aubrey Schwartz, Connie Sinkler-Thomas, Fred Swartz, Jennifer Yuhasz

Tribute Cards
Mark your next milestone with a JMABC tribute card! What better way to send a note of mazel tov or consolation than with a contribution to an essential community organization and a beautiful image from our collection? With a selection of 20 different cards, we have one for every occasion: from bris to bar mitzvah, wedding to yartzheit.

Contact the office to send one today: 604.257.5199
Mystery Photo

Were you ever a member of the Beth Israel Choir? Perhaps you recognize some of the faces in the photo above, taken circa 1943. We know that Soloman “Pucky” Pelman is front and centre; we’d appreciate any help you can offer in identifying anyone else. You can reach us at 604.257.5199 or info@jewishmuseum.ca

We are still seeking names for the members of the Concordia Club in the photo at left. Sadly, none of them have been identified. The photo is from March, 1928.