

**Aspirations and Adaptations  
Immigrant Synagogues of Montreal, 1880s-1945**

Sara Ferdman Tauben

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## **Abstract**

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### **Aspirations and Adaptations: Immigrant Synagogues of Montreal, 1880s-1945** Sara Tauben

“Aspirations and Adaptations” traces the development of the Jewish community of Montreal by tracking the growth, location, and movement of its early synagogues focusing on those established by the Eastern European immigrants from the 1880s until 1945. This is a study of material culture, a study of synagogues and the congregations who created and inhabited them. It is a story which considers these buildings as a reflection of the aspirations of the congregations and their adaptation to a new environment both architecturally and socially.

Organized chronologically and geographically, the paper focuses on four consecutive and adjacent areas of settlement which formed the areas of greatest concentration of the Jewish community of Montreal during the period under study. As immigration intensified in the first decades of the twentieth century, the number of congregations swelled. The plethora of synagogues served not only the needs of a growing population, but also the varying expressions of communal identity.

It was the more veteran immigrant congregations which aspired to obtain larger and more prominent synagogues. As the enterprise of synagogue building in nineteenth century Europe signaled a process of acculturation, so too, the building of larger synagogues by an immigrant community indicated a process of integration. As traditionalists in Europe resisted change and continued to worship in small houses of prayer and study, the more recent immigrants, seeking to remain connected to familiar practices, founded smaller synagogues, which, nevertheless, served not only a religious but also a social function.

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Irwin Tauben,  
to the city that adopted me,  
and to the community that embraced me.

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Note: All photos not credited were taken by the author.

Abbreviations:

UdM – Université de Montréal  
 CJCA – Canadian Jewish Congress Archives  
 JPL – Jewish Public Library



## Introduction

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The decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century marked the era of mass migration of the Jews of Eastern Europe. Fleeing poverty and persecution, the largest numbers made their way from Russia to the United States, joining other groups of immigrants in forming the most densely populated neighborhoods in the world on New York's Lower East Side.<sup>1</sup> Some came to Montreal. Leaving places with names like Minsk, Pinsk, Morosh, Galicia, and Dinovitz, they settled on streets with names like St. Urbain, St. Dominique and St. Laurent. So as to retain familiar traditions and familial connections, they established small congregations which recalled the homes they left behind. The Pinsker Shul, Anshei Morosh, Anshei Ukraina, and Anshei Ozeroff were not only places of worship but also places where friends and family, *landsleit* from the same country, area or town could meet, exchange concerns, lend support to each other and resolve to help those left behind. This is a story about the buildings which served as synagogues in the old Jewish neighborhoods and about the people who made up their congregations. It is a story of mostly ordinary things and people.

This is the story that I have composed as a consequence of a process of research and documentation of a particular physical world. As a study of material culture, the physical product of a cultural group has been utilized to describe and define social, religious, economic and existential aspects of the group in general. As in any archeological study, the physical remains of the past were first located, identified, and described and then their meaning and function interpreted within the context of a particular cultural setting and historic time. On a descriptive level, the study has mapped the movement and development of the Jewish community by tracking the location of

synagogues over a period of time. And on an interpretive level, the story seeks to explore the process of adaptation of the immigrant community to its new environment both socially and architecturally as well as to interpret the buildings as reflections of the congregations' identity and a measure of their aspirations.

### **Theoretical Framework-Musings on the Study of Material Culture**

The contemporary study of material culture can perhaps be seen within the post-modern context of interest in the history, beliefs, thoughts, and values of cultures previously marginalized. This interest in "the other" includes not only other cultures but other classes and the other gender, and has inspired alternate field of academic inquiry. The study of Jewish material culture poses particular challenges and confronts certain pre-conceptions. Judaism is associated with word; Christianity with image. It may be assumed that Jewish art, due to biblical injunction, does not even exist and that any Jewish material products are irrelevant in defining "authentic" Jewish culture as they are merely copies of that produced by Gentile culture.

Joseph Gutman seeks to debunk such myths in *No Graven Images*, by examining references and attitudes to figurative imagery in the Bible and throughout various historic periods.

An oft-repeated scholarly opinion has it, that Judaism has always denied the Image, this negation being firmly rooted in Israel's formative period and solidly implanted in Israel's psyche. Prevailing opinion holds that all Jewish participation in the arts was circumscribed by anti-iconic biblical strictures, in particular by the so-called ["So-called" because historians such as Gutman have attributed the redaction of this commandment to different times and different authors.] Second Commandment (Exodus 20.4-5):

*You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above or on the earth below, or in the waters below the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them...*<sup>2</sup>

However, the Bible recounts that the house of God itself, Solomon's Temple, contained sculpted images of cherubim, oxen, and lions. In the same chapter in which the Second Commandment is pronounced, the artistry of Bezalel is extolled:

[He is] *endowed...with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft: to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones, for setting and to carve wood-to work in every kind of craft. (Exodus 31.3-5)*<sup>3</sup>

Not only Judaism, but Christianity and Islam as well had to contend with the implications of the Second Commandment. Gutman concludes that “no uniform, unchanging attitude toward images has prevailed within Jewish history-or for that matter, within Christian or Muslim societies.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the scholastic understanding of the role of imagery, art, aesthetics, and material culture in general, should constitute a prevalent concern of academic curiosity in cultures that have inherited these traditions. Yet, notwithstanding the prodigious contribution of Christianity to the pictorial and architectural heritage of Western culture, scholars of both architectural and art history find a need to assert their role in the task of writing history and defining cultures, claiming that the investigation of the built environment and of aesthetics is as valid an endeavour of academic inquiry as is the study of the record of ideas and intellectual discourse embedded in texts. If the disciplines of art and architectural history, which seek mostly to examine significant artistic development and monumental structures cry out for attention, how much more so for those who delve into material culture which ponders mostly the mundane and the ordinary.

In the preface to a collection of essays entitled *Cultures of the Jews*, editor David Biale describes a small fifteenth century silver box, a wedding gift within which the new Jewish homemaker could store the keys to her linen chest. It includes a series of dials,

labeled in Hebrew numbers that serve to keep track of the pieces of linen in the household storage. Surprisingly perhaps, in the context of a presumably traditional community, it features both clothed and nude women. This poses questions about the Jewish culture of the time which might not be evident in or might even be contradicted by textual evidence. Was there a different standard of acceptability for private versus public expression? Were Jewish sensibilities influenced by the aesthetics of the Italian Renaissance culture? Biale proposes that “culture is the practice of everyday life. It is what people do, what they say about what they do, and finally, how they understand both of these activities. If Jewish culture is broadly conceived along these lines, objects like the silver casket are as precious repositories of meaning as learned texts.”<sup>5</sup> But, Biale also cautions that the objects of everyday life are not to be seen in isolation. The task of the cultural historians is to recognize the relationship between the mundane and the intellectual.

Those who produce cultural objects, whether written visual, or material, can never be isolated from the larger social context, the everyday world, in which they live, just as those who belong to this larger world are not immune to the ideas and symbolic meanings that may be articulated by the intellectuals.<sup>6</sup>

Architectural historian, John Gloag, has written a history of Western civilization by tracing the development of the built environment from antiquity to modern times, examining the development of building technology and building functions, describing not only monumental public structures serving kings, priests, and aristocracy but the humble abodes of slaves, peasants and labourers; he explores not only the growth and development of cities but the layout of towns and villages. Throughout, Gloag asserts “the interpretive quality of architecture.” “Buildings can not lie,” he wrote, “they tell the truth directly or by implication about those who made and used them and provide

veracious records of the character and quality of past and present civilizations...No building is dumb; a disused air-raid shelter cries *fear* as harshly as a city wall; a street of slums shouts *greed*; a modern office block asserts the economic facts of commercial life with the dry precision of an accountant. Irrespective of time or place, the interpretative quality in architecture persists...”<sup>7</sup>

Gloag’s work is cited as theoretical reference in Robert Tittler’s *Architecture and Power-The Town Hall and the English Urban Community, c.1500-1640*. Tittler’s interest in his topic arose when, in the course of research in English political history, he came upon a work of architectural history exploring the development of English towns,<sup>8</sup> prompting him to consider how the tangible could be used to understand the intangible. He refers to the anthropological notion of “thick description,”<sup>9</sup> whereby the material is understood as having symbolic meaning reflecting common values of the community that created it. Theoretically and methodologically, this study of English town halls bears considerable similarity to my study of Montreal immigrant synagogues. The context of both studies describes communities in historical transition. The town halls emerged as symbols of the new found local autonomy following the dissolution of the ecclesiastic power located in the abbeys. As institutions of an immigrant community, the synagogues of Montreal represent the transitory process of changing identity and integration. Tittler begins his study, as I have, by defining, locating, and mapping town halls over a given geographic area and within a particular time frame. He analyzes function, form, and furnishings in determining the town hall’s role in promotion of “social cohesion” and the creation of a new “civic identity.”<sup>10</sup> The town halls, which represented sizable expenditures on the part of emerging urban political entities, were not, as I will also

suggest regarding the sizable synagogues, indicators of prosperity but a measure of the aspiration of the civic leadership. The town halls served as “doorways” between town and country, mediators between order and disorder, regulators of “cultural expression,” and symbols of the “legitimization of contemporary leadership.”<sup>11</sup>

Of considerable influence in the formation of a theoretic framework for my study, was Richard I Cohen’s *Jewish Icons-Art and Society in Modern Europe*. It is surprising in today’s multi-layered world that, in a work written as recently as 1998, Cohen still finds it necessary to remark on the reluctance among academics to accept an interdisciplinary approach. Referring to himself as a social-historian, Cohen articulates his position. “Open to all types of visual material and without differentiating between high and low culture, I am convinced that visual arts talk history and constitute history.”<sup>12</sup> Not only that which may be defined as art, but also the “stuff” of daily-life, “clothes, food, furniture, souvenirs, knickknacks, photographs, monuments, [as well as] established masterpieces become part of the historian’s terrain.”<sup>13</sup> Cohen’s work focuses on the material world created by European Jewry confronting modernity.

The scope of the visual material includes images of Jews, printed books, ceremonial art, portraits of Jews, modern Jewish painting and sculpture, synagogue architecture, Jewish monuments and memorabilia, commemorative medals, and political broadsides. A world of associations and messages are communicated in these themes and objects in their style and content, and they constitute an integral part of the modern Jew’s terrain.<sup>14</sup>

The category of “portraiture of Jews” serves as an interesting example, debunking the myth that Jews, even the most traditional, did not portray the human image. In exploring the theme of “Rabbi as Icon,”<sup>15</sup> Cohen describes the proliferation of rabbinic portraiture during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. In the context of the challenge of modernizing trends and reform, rabbinic portraiture became an important means of signifying status and reinforcing rabbinic authority. With apparently little hesitation on

the part of the rabbis, and aided by new production technologies, portraits of rabbis became cherished household objects as “icons” of authority and “amulets” of protective power, transforming the rabbis into “folk heroes.” Often crafted by women or within the woman’s household realm, rabbinic images appeared on such mundane objects as embroidery and dishware. That the rabbis themselves were often not only conscious of but solicitous of the opportunity of popularizing their images is evidenced by a portrait of Rabbi Zevi Hirsch Chajes illustrating his commentary on the Talmud published in 1843. Rabbi Chajes wrote the inscription on his own portrait: “Now he will be joyful and happy and find pleasure/ That his picture will be seen for his face shines light.”<sup>16</sup>



הסופר האגוד, צבי הירש חיות יצא .

*Rabbi as Icon*

To diverge again from the field of Jewish studies in order to reference a study whose context may be far removed but whose methodology and approach are entirely relevant, I mention Joanne Punzo Waghorne’s intriguing work, *The Raja’s Magic Clothes*. In this study, Waghorne explores and interweaves two themes: the power of the transformation of “the material” into “the spiritual” and the transformative power of the

“confluence of cultures.” She established the durbar ceremony, in which the raja sits in state surrounded by his courtiers, as the focus of her analysis. The durbar came to be a space of “shared common culture,” between the Indians and the British colonizers who were invited into it. The experience of sharing the space was mutually transformative. Waghorne embarks on an examination of “things” as “texts.”<sup>17</sup> She delves into the richly textured “...world of surface display, photos, paintings, books, and even persons [who] were concretized into icons, into valued things.”<sup>18</sup> She proposes to “read between the lines of official discourse, in the corners of official photographs and commissioned paintings, in the folds of folktales, and in the subtext of orthodox scripture.”<sup>19</sup> She thus also seems to suggest that “texts” themselves are “things,” the material product of a certain time and culture.

There is possibly no one who understood and expressed the process of concretization of persons and things into icons better than twentieth century artist Andy Warhol. In the rapidly expanding market of mass production and mass media of the sixties, the extraordinary and the ordinary became equally visible. The face of Marilyn Monroe was no more or less prominent than the image of a Campbell soup can label and both were equally attainable at your local supermarket or newsstand. Jackie Kennedy, an icon of grace and culture, was as present in our world, her face reprinted in multiple monochromatic images, as stacks of boxes of Brillo soap pads. In an exhibit at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Warhol’s over-sized soap pad boxes are installed next to a Lucite tower encasing and entitled “Warhol’s Garbage.”<sup>20</sup> Though of rather dubious artistic value in its own right, the tower takes on meaning as an homage to Warhol’s appreciation of material culture. During the cleaning of Warhol’s residence following his



death, boxes of refuse, though not garbage, were found in storage. Magazines, newspapers, playbills, invitations, letters, event tickets, etc. were causally tossed into boxes creating chronological strata of things representing Warhol's daily life, the everyday world which he inhabited, perhaps not as ordinary but yet not so different from others who shared it.

### **Methodology-Retrieving the Refuse of the Past**

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This is the sort of "stuff" that makes up my study and the material upon which I have constructed my story. Traces of former synagogues dot the urban landscape of the neighborhoods they once inhabited as Jewish houses of worship. Their previous function is revealed by markings chiseled away by weather, time, and subsequent inhabitants. Those buildings which have disappeared entirely or which bear no indication of their past function are identified as having been synagogues by notations in archival city maps and directories. From the considerable files of communal archives, two or three boxes in storerooms of today's synagogues, and the recesses of chests of drawers of former congregants, a history can be pieced together. Thus it is not only the buildings and their furnishings which comprise the material evidence. Sepia coloured photos, brittle newspaper articles, anniversary publications, congregational constitutions, even something as incidental as announcements of meetings, are considered material remnants of the past. To this study of the material, I have added the element of memory. Oral histories have provided rich, colorful, and important elements of testimony. Finally, the story, written within the context of the social history of the Montreal Jewish immigrant community of the time, considers the traditions the immigrants brought with them, the

realities they left behind, and the extent to which these were conserved or transformed in the context of their new environment.

The study began with research in the archives of Canadian Jewish Congress. The initial objective was to identify and locate all synagogues established in Montreal up to 1945 and to compose a brief history. Largely from the records of the Jewish Yearbook, whose compilation began in 1936 by the Jewish chronicle of London, England, I was able to establish a preliminary list of addresses. A summer of field work, locating addresses and photographing buildings, produced many questions. Some addresses were questionable; many buildings were triplexes or duplexes in residential row houses or lofts of commercial buildings; and some buildings appeared to have been recently constructed.

It was clear that I could benefit from the assistance of those who were trained to research historic landscapes and examine heritage buildings. It is with immeasurable gratitude that I acknowledge the research project that ensued in cooperation with the program of conservation of the built environment of the School of Architecture of the University of Montreal. Over the course of the summer, two graduate students, Gabriel Malo and Isabelle Bouchard, under the direction of Professor Susan Bronson, completed an inventory of all buildings in the area of Plateau Mont Royal which served as synagogues over the course of the twentieth century. Though the parameters of their study, geographically and historically, did not entirely overlap the boundaries of my research, the resulting inventory addressed and responded to most of the questions I could not have answered on my own. Additionally, I gained some insights into the knowledge base and methods of the field of heritage architecture. Most significantly, as they confirmed that the majority of synagogues were indeed housed in former residences, I

became convinced that my story would encompass not only buildings of architectural significance but also those of humble and or little architectural value.

To accompany the inventory, the heritage architects produced a small exhibit and project brochure. With these tools we mounted a few exhibits and several public programs. It was in the context of this public exposure that I was able to reach out to the community, offering them something of interest and receiving something in return, willing subjects for the recording of oral histories. Aside from sharing their memories, some of which proved to be beautifully illustrative, humorous, and even poignant, a few individuals had saved rare photographs and precious documents. Unaware even of the content of the documents, written mostly in Yiddish, they had held on to them for sentimental reasons of intimate familial connections to the synagogues. Visits to several amalgamated congregations, the heirs of the synagogues of yesterday, proved to be much less fruitful. In the course of time and the process of several moves, almost all evidence of past connections had been discarded. To further my research I relied again on the model of mutually beneficial collaboration. Congregation Shomrim Laboker, Beth Yehuda, Shaarei Tefilah, Beth Hamidrash Hagadol Tifereth Israel (and Tifereth Joseph whose amalgamated status is revealed as the name of the daily chapel) was planning its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The event was inspired more by the occasion of the turning of the century than any accurate record of the founding of any of its original congregations. In exchange for solicitation of potential interviewees, I offered to write their history and in the process, established the beginnings of an archive for the congregation.

Further archival research continued in the Jewish Public Library, almost as rich a repository of communal raw history as that Canadian Jewish Congress. To a lesser

extent, I have also visited the archives of The Bibliothèque national de Quebec, in order to consult city maps. But there are many potential areas of evidence which I have not pursued. I have not consulted municipal or provincial archives which house records of the English and French press. As the year, and even the exact date, of the inauguration of some synagogues are known, it might be possible to learn something of their reception in the general community from press coverage. The records of Jewish cemeteries could also prove to be important sources of information as the imperative of securing burial plots would often proceed that of establishing a synagogue in the life of a congregation.

I also did not attempt to research the architects, to locate plans, or any record of the architects' conceptualization during the design process. It is interesting to note, however, that the initial study at the Université de Montreal has inspired others. Students of Susan Bronson have completed detailed heritage studies on several buildings which have served as synagogues and it was through their research that I have accessed plans of one synagogue. I have also not looked into the obvious architectural similarities between the synagogues and churches of Montreal. I have only rather casually accessed information on similar immigrant communities in Canada or the United States.

Finally, I have made no effort to track the rabbis associated with these congregations. However, the name and thoughts of Rabbi Yehoshua Halevi Herschorn emerged significantly and coincidentally in the context of documentation relative to the congregations. Professor Ira Robinson, who is studying the rabbis of Montreal of the twenties and thirties, has confirmed that his research as well suggests that Rabbi Herschorn may have had a particularly keen interest in Montreal synagogue life and an astute understanding of their sociological implications. This was not a study of either

architects or religious leaders, or of the perceptions of broader society. It was a microcosmic study of the synagogues and their congregations, and is, therefore, a story of buildings and of the Jewish community which inhabited them and invested them with meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Wolfe. *Synagogues of the Lower East Side of New York* (Washington Mews Books, Division of NYU Press, New York, 1978) p.28

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Gutman. *No Graven Images-Studies in Art and the Hebrew Bible* (KTAV Publishing House, Inc., New York, 1971) pp. XIII-IV

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. XXI-XXII

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. XVI

<sup>5</sup> David Biale. *Cultures of the Jews* ( Schocken Books, New York, 2002) p.xvii

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.xxvi

<sup>7</sup> John Gloag. *The Architectural Interpretation of History* ( St. Martin's Press, New York, 1975) p.1 and p.22

<sup>8</sup> Robert Tittler. *The Architecture of Power-The Town Hall and the English Urban community,c1500-1640* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991) p.vii

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.21

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp130-33

<sup>12</sup> Richard I. Cohen. *Jewish Icons-Art and Society in Modern Europe* ( University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1998) p.8

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.2

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Chapter 3, "Rabbi as Icon," pp.115-153

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.141

<sup>17</sup> Joanne Punzo Waghorne. *The Raja's Magic Clothes* (Universtiy Park: Pennsylvania University Press,1994) p.4

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. xix

<sup>20</sup> "The 60s-The Global Village" at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, fall 2003-winter 2004. "Warhol's Garbage" by Armand Pierre Fernandez, 1969



## Chapter I: The Early Enclave - Harbingers of Great Institutions

### “Uptown-Downtown” synagogues-circa 1910<sup>1</sup>



To become acquainted with the life of the Jewish immigrants in the not too distant past, with their problems, their aspirations, their ambitions, we must revisit the old Jewish neighborhood and take a stroll through Montreal of yesterday.

The corner of St. Urbain and Dorchester was the very heart of the Jewish neighbourhood. Nearby was Dufferin Park, then a “Jewish Park” where Jewish immigrants went to breathe the fresh air, meet their *landslayt*, hear the latest news, look for work and read the newspapers.

Continuing our walk, we approach Craig Street where all the side streets and lanes such as St. Urbain, Clark (then St. Charles-Borromée), St. George, Coté, Hermine, St. Dominique, and Cadieux [now De Bullion], were inhabited exclusively by Jews.<sup>2</sup>

Israel Medres

When the early Eastern European immigrants began arriving in Montreal in the 1880's they found a small Jewish community of about 800,<sup>3</sup> largely concentrated in an area of several blocks known today as old Montreal and Chinatown. Socially and economically well established, the community already had an institutional base of several

philanthropic societies and three synagogues. The Shearith Israel, or the Spanish and Portuguese congregation, the first Jewish congregation established in Canada in 1768, built its second synagogue in 1838 at the corner of Dufferin Park on Chenneville. Only blocks away, the Corporation of English, German and Polish Jews built their first synagogue in 1859. This Ashkenazi congregation, later known as the Shaar Hashomayim, had been formed by former members of the Shearith Israel in 1846. Liberally minded members of the Ashkenazi congregation, under the influence of their rabbi who “was imbued with the current enlightenment,” broke away to establish Montreal’s first Reform congregation in 1882 following a conflict over women’s participation in the Simchat Torah celebration.<sup>4</sup> Initially renting premises in a hall and later constructing their own synagogue, Temple Emmanuel was the first congregation outside the early enclave.<sup>5</sup> In the eighties and nineties the Shearith Israel and Shaar Hashomayim re-established themselves “uptown,” following the improving economic and social standing of their congregants, into Montreal’s “Golden Mile,” today’s downtown or *centre ville*. This westward move, while representing a migration of not more than one kilometer, marked the beginning of a divide that was to characterize the community until after World War II. Though representing differing liturgical practices and orientations, these three congregations had much in common socially and economically and were viewed by the increasing numbers of immigrants, filling the downtown neighborhoods, as the “rich uptowners.” This “uptown-downtown” dichotomy represented as well a significant ideological and cultural division. While the guttural sounds and sing-song intonations of Yiddish filled the streets, shops, and shuls of the downtown neighborhoods, English was the language of daily life in the businesses, social



clubs, country clubs<sup>6</sup>, and synagogue meeting rooms of the “uptowners.” To highlight the contrast between the uptown and downtown congregations and their synagogues, a brief analysis of the uptown congregations will serve as a counterpoint before pursuing our primary interest, the “downtowners.”

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### The “Uptowners”

The Shearith Israel, marked its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1918 with a publication honouring its history and its illustrious founding members and acknowledging its imposing edifice.

In the early minutes of the congregation we find the names of a number of men who were familiar figures in Montreal society a hundred and fifty years ago: men who by their energy and initiative were helping, even in those early days, to lay the foundations of Canada’s future greatness.<sup>7</sup>

Names of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries like Hart, Joseph, David, Solomon, Frank, Levy, Samuels, and Hays were prominent not only in the Jewish community but in the economic and political development of the city. Special tribute was paid to Abraham de Sola, the spiritual leader of the congregation from 1847-1882.

“No man did more to reflect lustre on the Hebrew community in Canada than Dr. Abraham de Sola. A profound oriental scholar, and eloquent preacher, a distinguished theologian and a voluminous author, he ranked among the foremost Jewish savants of his day and acquired a reputation that was well-nigh world-wide...”<sup>8</sup>



*Shaar Hashomayim, 1922*

De Sola was a highly regarded and well known intellectual in the English as well as the Jewish community. He joined the faculty of McGill College and was a member of various Anglophone intellectual societies. Abraham de Sola's sons succeeded him as foremost leaders of the Jewish community. Meldola de Sola served as spiritual leader of the congregation after his father's death. Clarence de Sola was credited as a leading force behind the building of the new synagogue in 1890 where he served as *parnas* for many years. He filled a historic role as first president of the Canadian Zionist Federation from 1898 until shortly before his death in 1919.

Such a distinguished history deserved a fitting architectural statement, one that was both Jewish and cosmopolitan. The building which they had left behind on Chenneville was a small neo-classic structure with nothing to distinguish it as a synagogue. But the neo-classic façade of the new synagogue, built in 1890, expressed orientaling features, a reference to Judaism's eastern origins. The framework and proportions of the window and doors and particularly the lotus flower columns evoke Egyptian architecture. This same feature appeared on the interior decorating the capitals of the columns supporting the women's gallery and the carved wood detailing on the aron *hakodesh*.

The Stanley Street building is of Judeo-Egyptian style and is of most attractive design, presenting an imposing interior with colonnades of Egyptian pillars, between which are suspended oriental lamps...The architecture and ornamentation throughout are pervaded by Jewish characteristics, every detail being studied to that effect.<sup>9</sup>

The neo-classical and neo-Egyptian styles originated in the early period of the Emancipation of European Jewry. The neo-classical revival in architecture generally is associated with the era of the Enlightenment whose ideals of rational philosophy,

scientific inquiry, and humanistic values found artistic expression in the art of antiquity and the Renaissance. Architectural influences also arose from archeological discoveries of the nineteenth century including ancient synagogues. Egyptian influences appeared in architecture following Napoleon's expedition of 1798 and remained popular in Europe and America until the middle of the nineteenth century. Despite the negative reminder of the enslavement of the Jews, architectural references to Egypt were incorporated in synagogue architecture as indicative of strength and longevity, both historically and architecturally. For the Jews of Europe, the style served as an expression of support for Napoleon and the ideals of the French Revolution.<sup>10</sup> The reference to the architectural styles of antiquity was also expressed in the neo-Roman synagogue of the Shearith Israel of New York built in 1897 which continued the use of classical styles expressed in the congregation's two earlier buildings.<sup>11</sup> Like its Montreal namesake, the New York congregation followed the Spanish and Portuguese tradition and was the first synagogue established in the United States in 1654. In many respects, the building resembles the Shearith Israel of Montreal but unlike the Montreal building, whose distinctive lotus columns provided a Judaic reference, and despite the architect's intention to reflect the synagogues of ancient Galilee, New York's Shearith Israel was indistinguishable from any neo-classic American bank or federal building. Perhaps we can conclude that it was with a certain sense of self-confidence that the Montreal congregation chose to articulate its ethnicity on the façade of its synagogue.

In 1932, Temple Emanuel marked its fiftieth anniversary. The texts of its anniversary publication stress particularly its stalwart role as the initiator and leader of Reform Judaism in Canada.

Its history is the history of a handful of men who, for half a century, have fought and striven and struggled to ensure the permanency of a great movement in this community...The records of the Congregation tell a graphic tale of the opposition it had been forced to encounter in a city so thoroughly conservative as Montreal...<sup>12</sup>

A poem, though printed in a later publication of 1970, nevertheless, speaks eloquently to the choice of a rather sturdy and even stern Byzantine style.

Yours no lofty spires, pointing as they rise  
With a slender finger toward the vaulted skies...  
Cupped toward earth, your structure naught of awe commands,  
Only quiet sanctuary as it stands...  
Yours no overbearing, intricate design,  
Only simple beauty in each graceful line...<sup>13</sup>

The architecture is a metaphor for a religious philosophy that unpretentiously asserts its position among more commanding ideologies. The reference to “lofty spires” and “intricate design” might be deriding the excesses of Gothic churches or the minarets and Moorish lacy ornamentation of late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> synagogues such as the McGill College location of the Shaar Hashomayim.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the ideals of nationalism and romanticism began to replace the ideals of the Enlightenment in Europe. The aspirations of developing nation-states fostered the writing of national histories and the creation of national myths and aesthetics. In architecture, these aspirations led to the revival of a multitude of historic styles. In the search for appropriate styles for synagogue architecture, a debate arose which considered styles which were reflective of the nations in which the Jews resided, thus asserting a non-distinctive position, and styles which reflected a national and ethnic distinction, generally associated with eastern origins. The participants in the debate were both Christian and Jewish architects (who had begun to enter the profession by the mid-century), governmental authorities, and Jewish lay and religious leaders.<sup>14</sup> During the design process for a synagogue in Kassel, Germany, the Egyptian design

proposed by the local government was rejected by the Jewish community in favor of a style combining classic and Romanesque elements. The architects selected by the community, August Schuchardt and his Jewish associate, A. Rosengarten, argued that the Egyptian style was foreign to both Germany and Judaism. This design, and the arguments supporting it published by Rosengarten, proved to be particularly influential, and out of the fray of the battle for appropriate synagogue styles, the Romanesque emerged as the most prominent.<sup>15</sup>

The first building erected by the Reform congregation Temple Emanuel in 1892 was a small structure whose design features defy stylistic classification. While the arched windows and door way reflect the Romanesque influence, it is the prominent Star of David stained glass window which confidently marked the building as a synagogue in the burgeoning centre of the city. The congregation's building of 1911, in its present location in Westmount, was, however, well articulated and may have been among the city's first examples of the Romanesque-Byzantine style.<sup>16</sup> In the historic revivalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the terms Romanesque and Byzantine were often used synonymously, the central dome, as that of Temple Emanuel, being the feature which most clearly distinguished the Byzantine. Moorish elements were often mixed with Romanesque or Byzantine, the minarets or onion domes perhaps being the most interesting feature. German architect, Ludwig Forster, began a trend when he designed synagogues in Vienna and Budapest featuring prominent twin minarets. These, he asserted, evoked the twin columns, Joachim and Boaz, of Solomon's Temple. The soaring minarets of the Shaar Hashomayim built in 1886, the prominent central window with intricate grill work, and the peaked pediment, formed a clear expression of the Moorish style.<sup>17</sup>

But then and even today, the most prominent congregation and impressive synagogue was the Shaar Hashomayim on Kensington Ave. Again, both the stature of its constituency and its edifice were honoured at the time of the dedication of the building in 1922.

Some of the oldest and most respected Jewish families in the city count in its membership... Besides its own work in the field of religion and education, the Congregation has also supplied leaders and indefatigable workers to all the communal activities of a philanthropic, educational and national character in the city and the Dominion...

This new Synagogue is an achievement which they [the founders] could hardly have thought possible... A structure, cathedral like in its imposing proportions, and dominating its immediate surroundings, it breathes the very life of stateliness and permanence. Built in a grey vitrified brick and sandstone, it is capped by a series of small Moorish cupolas that lend a touch of mystic orientalism to the whole...<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to the above description, there are no distinctive Moorish features in the building of 1922. It is, instead, a fine example of Romano-Byzantine synagogue architecture. The round arches, portals, and dome exemplify the German *Rundbogenstil*, style of the round arches. It is, nevertheless instructive, that the chronicler perceived this building as being particularly Moorish, as being connected to “orientalism.” The Romanesque round arch does originally derive from the orient and it is this feature which came to most prominently distinguish Montreal’s early synagogues from the Gothic churches of the city.

Important “modern” elements were introduced in the interior layout. These features were influenced by the Reform movement and were already evident in orthodox synagogues in Europe, particularly in countries of Germanic influence. The traditional separate *bimah* facing the ark was replaced by a reading table facing the congregation on a stage in front of the ark. The women’s section also received a new placement.

Two loges raised about two feet from the floor, flanking the sides are reserved for the ladies, and replace the old fashioned galleries.<sup>19</sup>

By their words, these “uptown” congregations expressed a sense of their historic and present significance not only within Montreal Jewry but also Canadian Jewry and even Canadian social and economic development. Not only did their buildings reflect this deserved stature in their monumentality, but they were representative of the European and North American search for an architectural synagogue style and vocabulary in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

### **The Early “Downtowners”**

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During the 1890’s and the first two decades of the twentieth century, a steady stream of immigration increased the Jewish population of Montreal in 1901 to almost 8,000 and in 1911 to nearly 29,000.<sup>20</sup> The downtown immigrant community maintained its own momentum of institution building establishing philanthropic, benevolent, social and educational institutions some of which provided the foundations of future organizations. Many of the early immigrant synagogues were as well harbingers of great institutions. Most of the approximately one dozen Eastern European congregations which had established themselves by the



*Beth Yehuda, 1906*

end of the first decade within the first area of settlement were probably small *minyans* worshipping in rented commercial lofts or residential units. But a few exhibited aspirations for buildings which matched their collective sense of communal leadership.

The fiftieth anniversary booklet of the Beth Yehuda of 1940 suggests that the congregation recognized its date of origin as being around 1890 when a small congregation of Hasidic followers of the Bohusher rabbi established Ohel Moshe in honor of the rabbi's son. Worshipping initially in the home of Rabbi Abraham Lang, they subsequently rented space in larger homes as the congregation grew. After some time, current financial constraints notwithstanding, some members began to advocate in favour of purchasing their own building. It was determined to purchase a former theatre which was renovated into "quite a fine shul" under a new name, Beth Yehuda. The new building attracted new members diminishing its financial difficulties. As the chronicler concludes, the Beth Yehuda became well known within the entire Jewish community as one of the most beautiful synagogues of Montreal.<sup>21</sup>

The first synagogue built by the new immigrant community was the Chevra Kadisha. As its name indicates, it was originally established in 1893 as a benevolent burial society providing ritual burial services to members of Jewish community regardless of their financial means. The society maintained this service until 1912 when Lazarus Paperman established Montreal's first Jewish commercial burial service. The congregation's original constitution indicates as well that the burial society would maintain its own place of worship. One can assume that despite its benevolent function, the society must have had a fair amount of paying customers as well, for within ten years it had erected what might have been Montreal's largest synagogue at the time. Indeed, a



newspaper article of 1899 reported that, “The financial condition of the society is flourishing, they having been able to purchase a hearse for exclusive Jewish use, and to completely pay off the cost of a Jewish cemetery at Sault au Recollet...”<sup>22</sup> An article reporting on the cornerstone laying on August 1, 1902 provides an indication of the condition of the current premises while it describes the plans for the new building:

The present synagogue of the congregation is in the tumble-down houses of the lower part of St. Urbain Street. Apparently two of them have been knocked down into one, and the upper floor of one of them has been retained as a gallery for the women, rough wooden pillars being erected to take the place of the partition between the houses.

The new synagogue will be a handsome structure, with a cut stone front, of Hebraic design. It will have two large towers, with Eastern cupolas at the summit and a large doorway in the centre, with a flight of steps leading up to it. The window will be fitted with colored glass, and the roof supported on trusses, with a clear space without columns from wall to wall. The dimensions are to be 90 feet by 46 feet, and will seat nearly 800 people, while the basement will be given up to classrooms.<sup>23</sup>

The dominant feature of the building, the two “Eastern cupolas,” was a common element of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century synagogue architecture in Europe and America. The reporter, whether Jewish or not, recognizes this as being “of Hebraic design.” There were no other markings, except for perhaps the name of the congregation, indicating that the building was a synagogue, and yet its function was obvious. The building was large and located on a prominent corner lot. Certainly it was intended as a statement of confidence and permanence. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire in 1920.

Though smaller in stature, the B’nai Jacob synagogue may have exceeded the Chevra Kadisha in communal importance. The congregation acquired the former Shaar Hashomayim synagogue in 1886. Originally named the Sons of Benjamin, the congregation took on the name B’nai Jacob in honour of a major benefactor, Jacob Gelber, at the time of the renovation. As we shall see, this was a rather common practice. Synagogue names that appear to refer to Biblical figures were more likely that of a

prominent patron, providing nevertheless, a double honour; recognizing the significant contribution while linking the benefactor to an important religious personage. The original synagogue was either demolished or, more likely, renovated and extended to provide for a larger capacity of 500. The renovations were carried out by the same architect who had designed the Chevra Kadisha, Eric Mann. A newspaper article of 1899 alludes to the congregation's success and prominence.

During the last ten years, the condition of the congregation has been highly satisfactory, and the membership has been steadily increasing till now the congregation numbers about 125 regularly attending members, while during the holidays the synagogue is crowded to its utmost limit. The success of the congregation is due in a very great measure to the labors of their leader, Rabbi A.M. Ashinsky. Indeed so great is the influence of Rabbi Ashinsky that every Saturday afternoon the synagogue is crowded by Jews of all classes who come eagerly to listen to his interesting sermons.

The financial state of the congregation is in a flourishing condition, they having paid for their synagogue and for a plot in the Jewish cemetery of Back River.<sup>24</sup>

In taking over the building of the former Shaar Hashomayim, the B'nai Jacob seems to have taken over as well its communal role within the neighborhood. "Between her walls," B.G. Sack wrote, "the most important Jewish gatherings in Montreal used to take place." In 1896, Rabbi Ashinsky founded the city's first Talmud Torah and a year later helped to establish the Canadian Zionist organization, all "between these walls." Sack remarked that not only did the B'nai Jacob serve as a place of assembly for these formal meetings "where Jewish leaders, the founders and builders of that time, would gather to discuss the matters and subjects that were important to the community," but also that "Jews of all kinds used to come not only to worship, but to socialize, simply to chat. [*chap a shmooze*]." <sup>25</sup>

The original constitution of the B'nai Jacob of 1886 is still extant. It is a proper and formal constitution following the content and structure of by-laws of any formally constituted organization. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of the officers as well

as the traditional synagogue officials, the *parnas*, *shamash*, and *gabbai*. It stipulates the conditions and benefits of membership. Expected conduct and attendance of members and officers in the shul and at meetings are clearly indicated as are fines for transgressions. Ultimate authority clearly resides in the president, sometimes in consultation with the *parnas*, a position often melded with that of president in other congregations. But the general principle of behaviour is expressed in the article entitled *Achdut*, unity or solidarity. “Every member is responsible for respecting the other. Every member is responsible for seeing that in the association there is peace and not division.”

The language of the constitution bears comment. Despite the fact that Article 2 stipulates that, “the language of business will be English,” the constitution is written in Yiddish. The Yiddish is, however, heavily anglicized. The document contains not only individual English words inherent in organizational vocabulary, such as regular, special and general meeting, but utilizes English verbs conjugated into Yiddish such as *attendn* or *instructn*, and idiomatic expressions translated directly into Yiddish, such as “call to order.” This would be surprising for such an early document representing a congregation of recent immigrants. The nature of the Yiddish strengthens an assumption of historian Bernard Figler “that among the founders of B’nai Jacob Congregation of Russian and Polish Jews were former members of the older Congregation of English, German and Polish Jews...[who] were no doubt reluctant to worship so far from their homes and preferred to form a new congregation...”<sup>26</sup> These “former members of the older congregation” may well have been veteran settlers, quite well integrated into the general

English community. The status of veteran would be consistent with both the aspiration and the ability to assume leadership.



Not unlike the “uptowners,” some of the early downtown congregations expressed their institutional aspirations, within a short time after their establishment, by seeking and finding accommodations in buildings of some note. Two congregations thus acquired buildings vacated by the original congregations. The Beth David, a congregation of Rumanian immigrants founded in 1888, purchased the synagogue of the Shearith Israel in 1890. The founding of the B’nai Jacob congregation in 1886 coincided with the move of the Shaar Hashomayim. In taking over the original synagogue, the B’nai Jacob seems to have as well usurped its role as the leading religious institution within the community of the surrounding area. The Chevra Kadisha, founded in 1893, built a synagogue with significant architectural presence ten years later while the Beth Yehuda settled, for the time being, in a renovated theatre which they nevertheless considered to be “quite a fine shul.” The permanence which such indicators of physical presence might have been intended to convey was to be short lived.

The first years of the second decade marked the beginning of the move out of the original enclave. Moving north rather than west, the immigrant Jewish community established residences, businesses, institutions and synagogues east and west of Boulevard St. Laurent defining what would become known as “the immigrant corridor.”

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<sup>1</sup> Downtown synagogues shown on map:

1886-B’nai Jacob took over the former Shaar Hashomayim on St. Constant (now de Bullion) near Vitre (now Viger).

1890- Beth David took over the former Shearith Israel on Chenneville and Lagauchetiere.

1893-Chevra Kadisha began worshipping at 18 St. Laurent and in 1903 built a synagogue at St. Urbain and St. Catherine which burned down in 1920.

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Before 1899- Chevra Shaas was originally on Cadieux and then possibly on Lagauchetiere at Cote.  
1901-Ahavas Achim, a short lived congregation, was established on St. Charles Borrome (now Clark).  
1906-Beth Yehuda purchased a theatre at Lagauchetiere and St. Laurent.  
1906 ?-Shomrim Laboker might have been in the 200 block of Cadieux.  
1908?-Adath Yeshurun may have been north of this area at St. Laurent & Pine.

Not shown on map:

1903-Chevra Thilim was in two locations in Area I: Mt. St. Charles Place and St. Philip.  
1904- Kehal Yeshurn  
1905-Tifereth Israel  
1906- Beth Itzack

Uptown synagogues:

1886- Shaar Hashomayim, McGill College Ave.  
1890-Shearith Israel, 1445, Stanley Ave.  
1892-Temple Emanuel, Stanley and Cypress

Note:

Only the two original synagogues, Shaar Hashomayim and Shearith Israel can be found on city maps. The other locations have not been confirmed as listings in Lovell's directory.

<sup>2</sup> Israel Medres. *Montreal of Yesterday.*, translated from the Yiddish by Vivian Felsen (Vehicle Press, Montreal) p. 21-22. Original publication ( Canader Adler Press, Montreal, 1947)

Israel Medres immigrated to Montreal from Russia in 1910. He became a reporter for the Canader Adler and a chronicler of the early Jewish community.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Rosenberg. "The Jewish Population of Canada-1850-1943"

<sup>4</sup> Recollection of Maxwell Goldstein who at age 19 attended the first organizing meeting on August 24, 1882 together with his father and brothers. "Temple Emanuel Jubilee Celebration, 1932" p.8

<sup>5</sup> Shearith Israel was located on Cheneville at Lagauchetier. Corporation of English German and Polish Jews was at 41 St. Constant, later Cadieux and now De Bullion. The first two rented facilities of Temple Emanuel were in the "uptown" area both around St. Catherine and Drummond.

<sup>6</sup> The Montifiore Club was established in 1880 as an elite Jewish secular, social club providing literary and dramatic programs. The Elmirdge Country Club was established as a Jewish golf club in 1925.

<sup>7</sup> CJCNA/synagoguesZG/Sherith Israel/ "One Hundred and fiftieth Anniversary of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of Montreal," 1918, p.17

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.39

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.51

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Witnitzer, "The Egyptian Synagogue Revival." Gutman. *The Synagogue* (Ktav, New York, 1975)

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Gruber, *The American Synagogue* (Rizzolli, New York,2003) p.29

<sup>12</sup> Rabbi Harry Stern, "A Word of Greeting," CJCNA/synagogues ZG/Temple Emanuel, "Fiftieth Anniversary, 1882-1931, congregation Emanu-el," p.2

<sup>13</sup> Zelda Landsman. CJCNA/synagogues ZG/Temple Emanuel, "Temple Emanuel, the First 78 years," 1970

<sup>14</sup> Dominique Jarrassé, *Synagogues* (Société Nouvelle Adam Biro, Paris, 2001, English translation, Vilo International, Paris, 2001) pp.145-166

Carol Herselle Krinsky, *The Synagogues of Europe* (Dover Publications, Mineola, New York, 1985) pp.59-104

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Krinsky, pp. 313-315

<sup>16</sup> Paul Trepannier and Richard Dubé, *Montréal, Une Adventure Urbaine* (Pointe-a-Calliere Museum, Montréal, 2000) "...les synagogues ont été a Montréal les premiers edifices religieux a adopter un vocabulaire oriental." P.167

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Jarrassé. pp. 171-202 and Krinsky. Throughout

<sup>18</sup> "Dedication Service-a Historical Sketch, September 17, 1922," CJCNA/synagogue/Shaar Hashomayim, p.13-14

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> based on statistics provided by Louis Rosenberg. "Changes in the Geographical Distribution of the Jewish Population of Montreal in the Decennial Periods from 1901 to 1911." (Bureau of social and Economic Research, Candian Jewish Congress, Montreal, 1966) p.5

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<sup>21</sup> Beth Yehuda anniversary booklet of 1940. History written by Gidaliahu Michalovsky, a former president gathered from the archives of the synagogue and from recollections of older members. The text was translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben.

<sup>22</sup> The Jewish Times, Special Number, Dec.11, 1899, "History of the Jewish Communal Bodies of Montreal," p.19

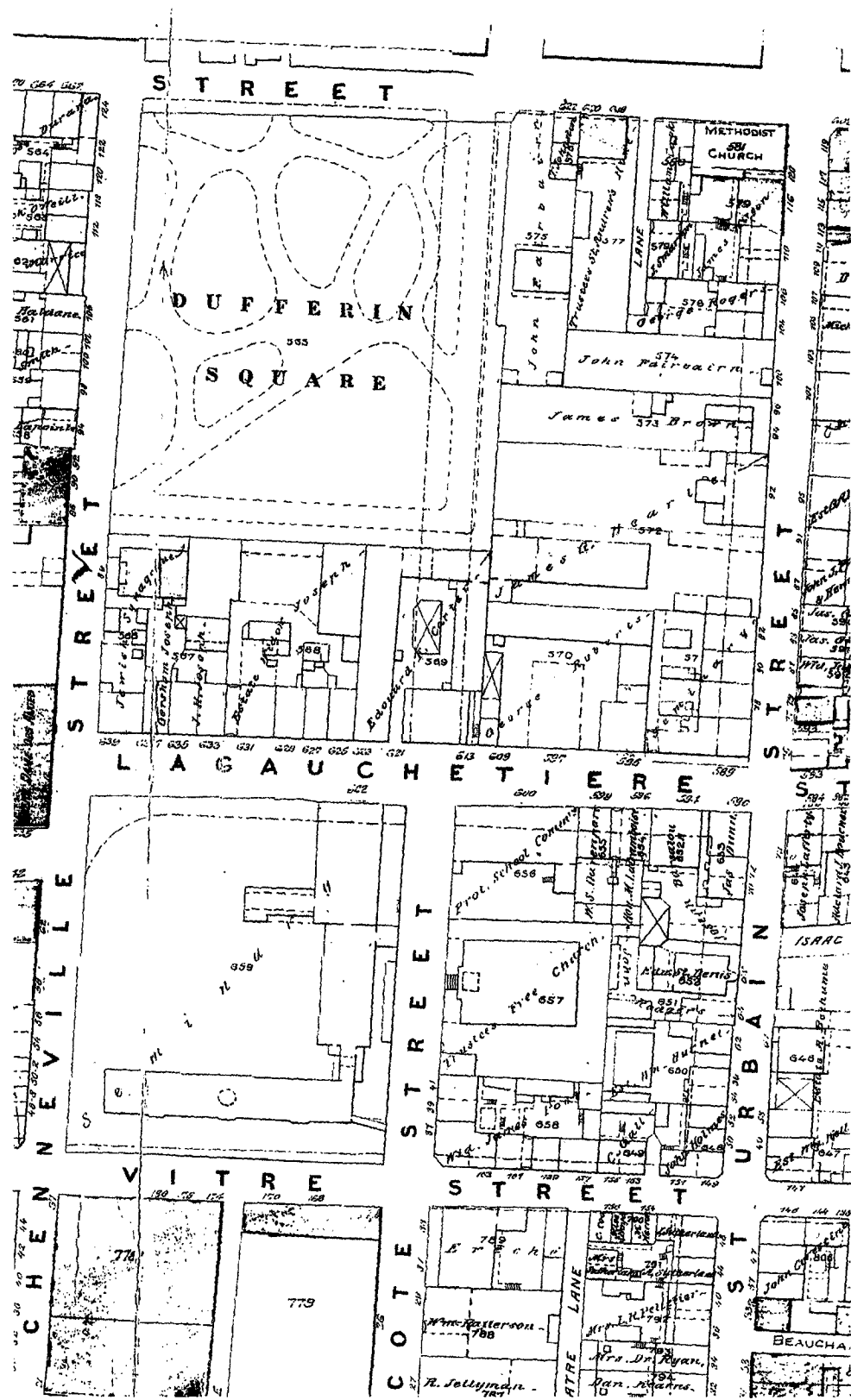
<sup>23</sup>. The newspaper clipping does not indicate the name of the newspaper. CJCNA/synagogues ZG/ Chevra Kadisha.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. The Jewish Times, Special Number, p. 15

<sup>25</sup> B.G. Sack. "A Shul that Reminds us of the Pioneers of Yesterday-Our Own B'nai Jacob Shul, a Chapter of the Jewish Past." Canader Adler. September 9, 1951 Translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben. CJCNA/synagogue ZG/ B'nai Jacob. B.G. Sack was a columnist for the Canader Adler. This article is one in a series about Montreal's old synagogues. Sack is recognized as the first historian of the Canadian Jewish community.

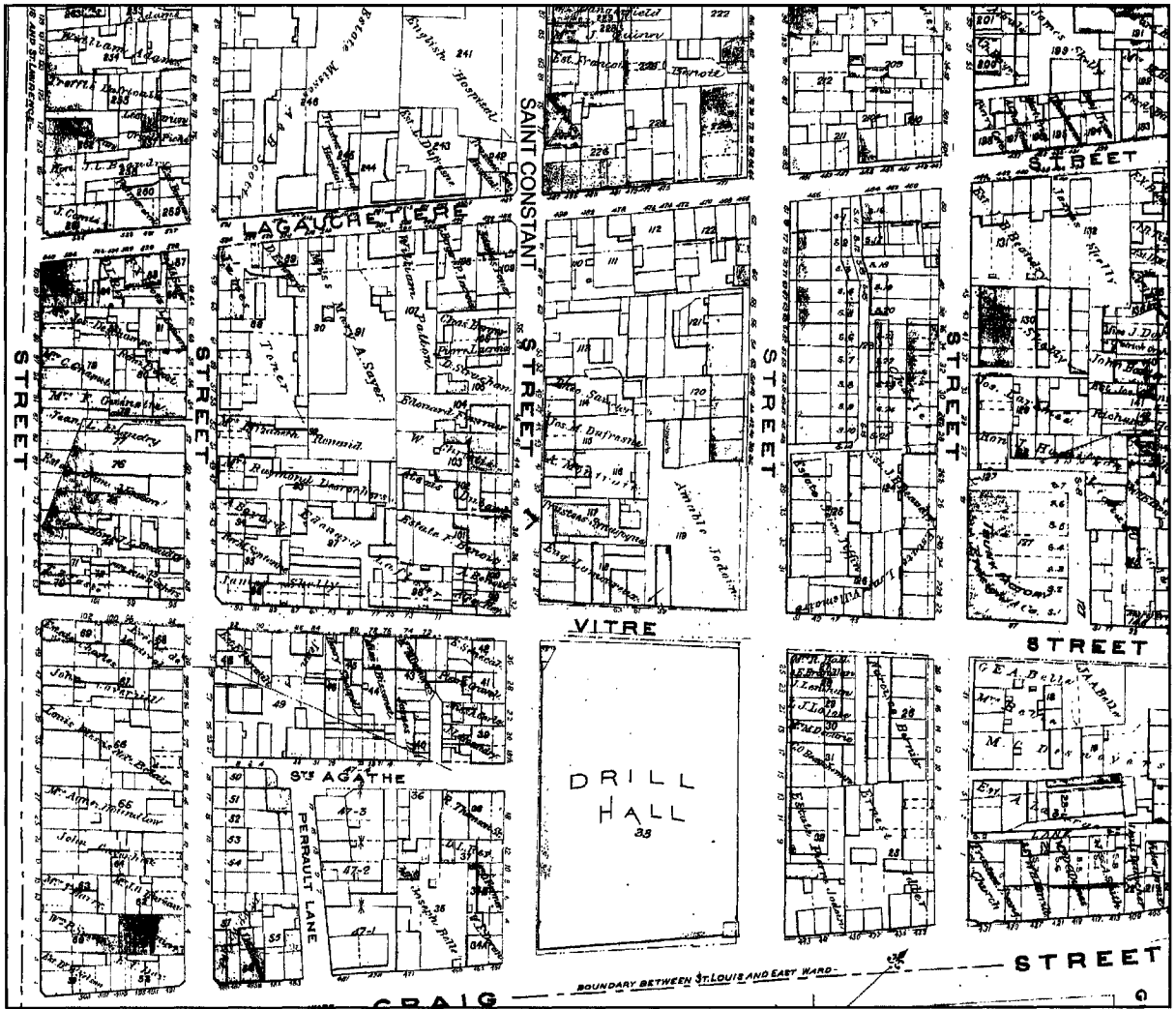
<sup>26</sup> Bernard Figler. "The Story of Two Congregations-Chevra Kadisha and Benai Jacob." CJCNA/synagogue ZG/Chevra Kadisha.

Shearith Israel, 1838  
Rue Chenneville



Shaar Hashomayim, 1859

Saint Constant Street

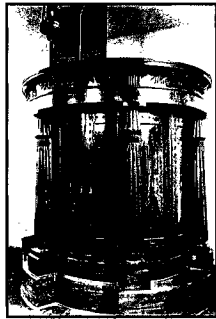
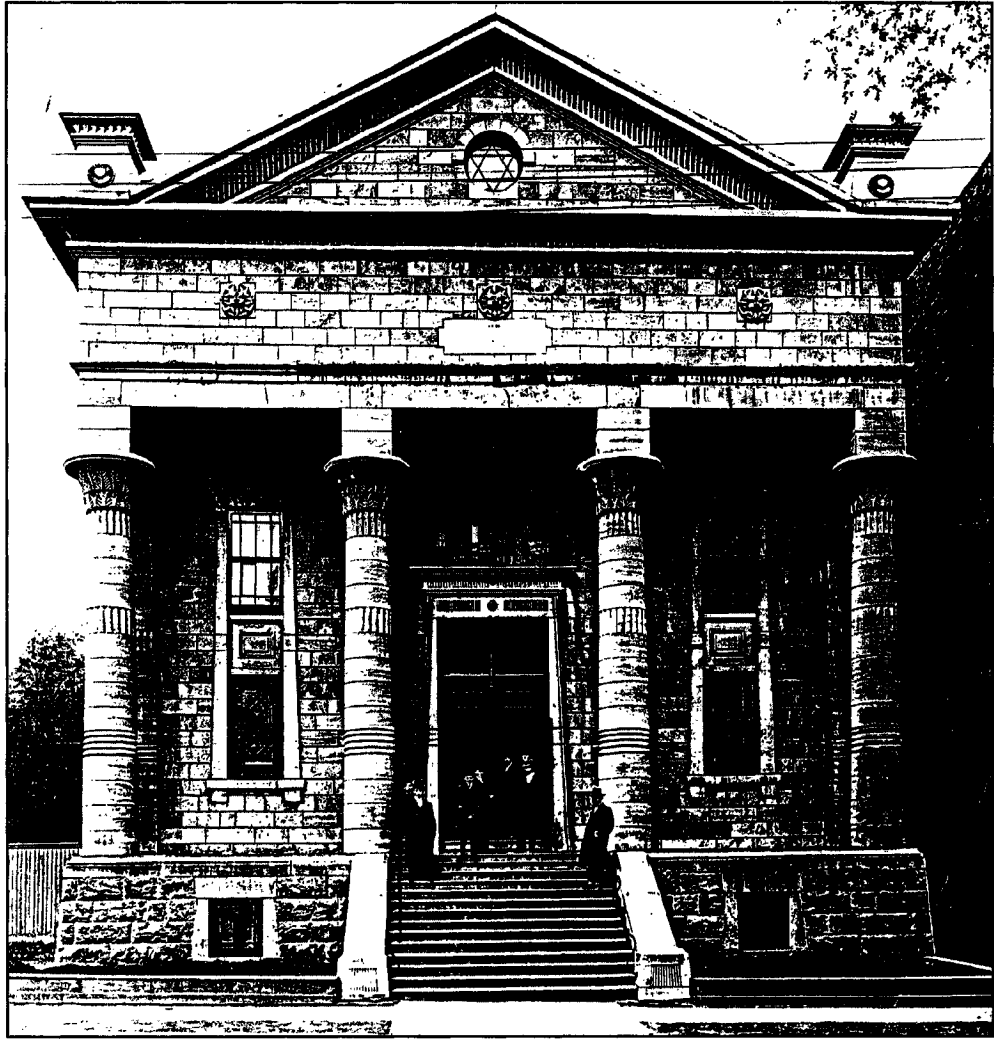




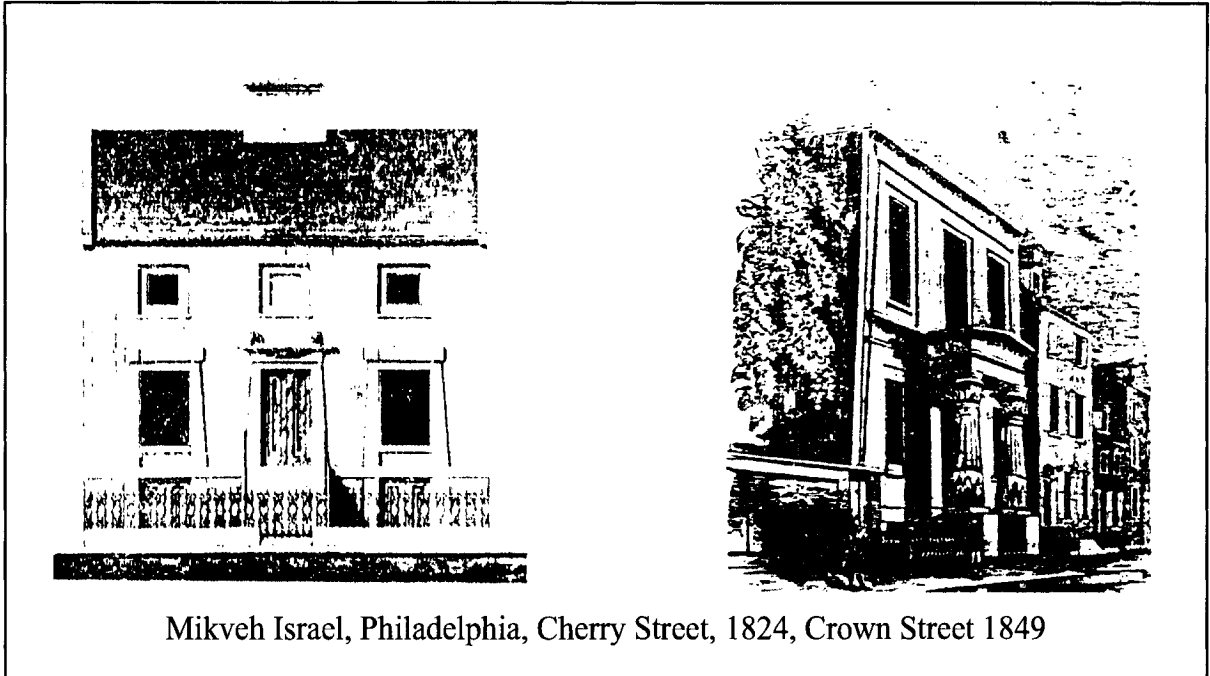
Shearith Israel, 1838  
Rue Chenneville



Shearith Israel, 1890  
1445 Rue Stanley



## Neo-Classicism in Synagogue Architecture



Shearith Israel, 1897, New York architect Arnold Brunner

**Temple Emanuel, 1892**  
Rue Stanley / Rue Cypress

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**Temple Emanuel, 1911**  
4100 Sherbrooke Blvd.



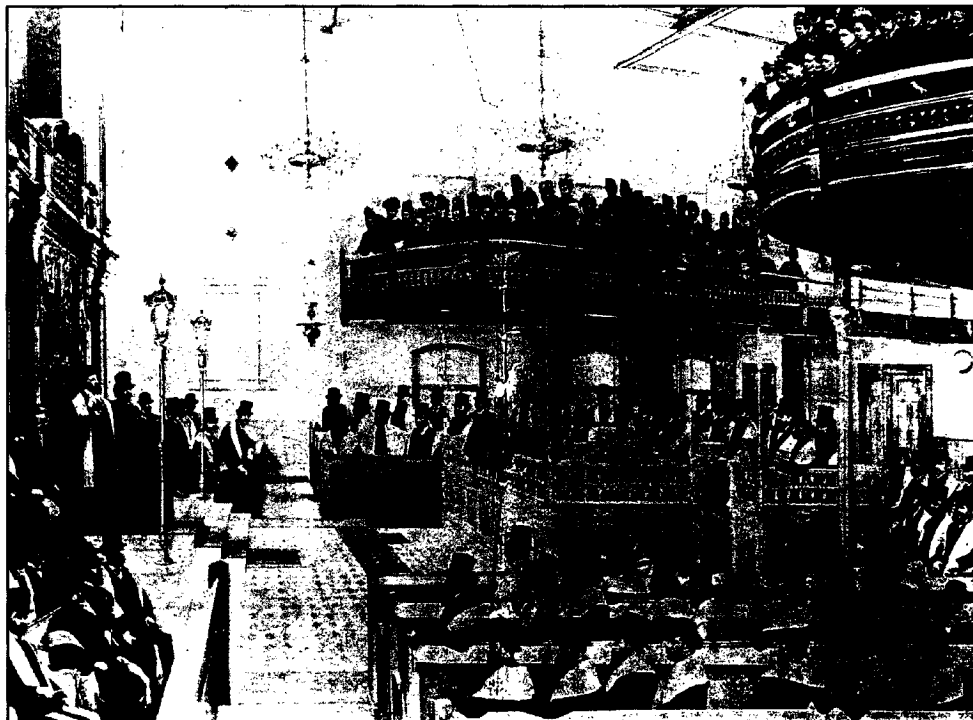
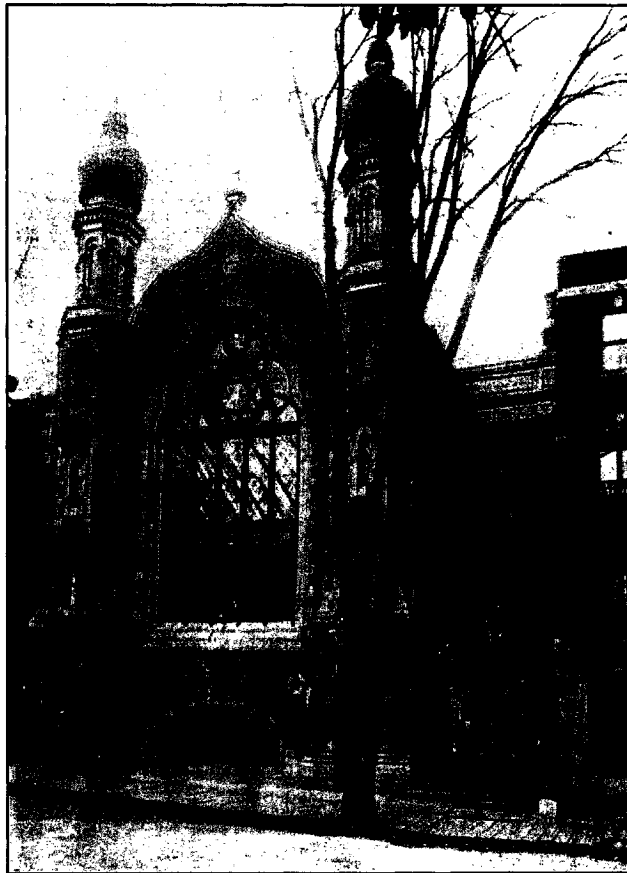
Kassel, Germany 1836-39  
Architects August Schuchart  
and A. Rosengarten



Dresden, Germany 1838-40  
Architect Gottfried Semper

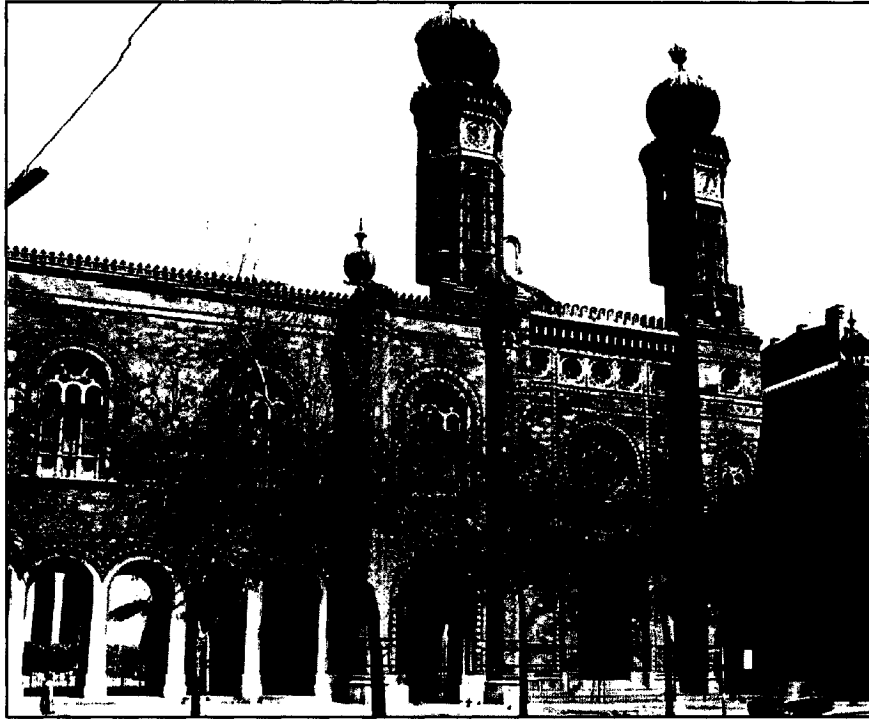
**Shaar Hashomayim, 1886**  
Avenue McGill College

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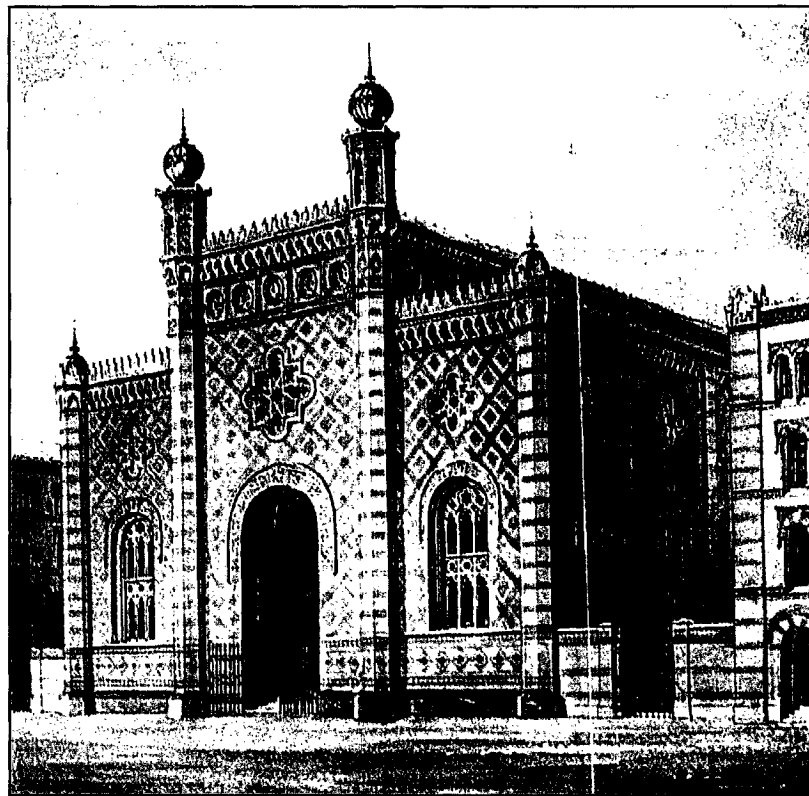


## Moorish Style Synagogues of Europe

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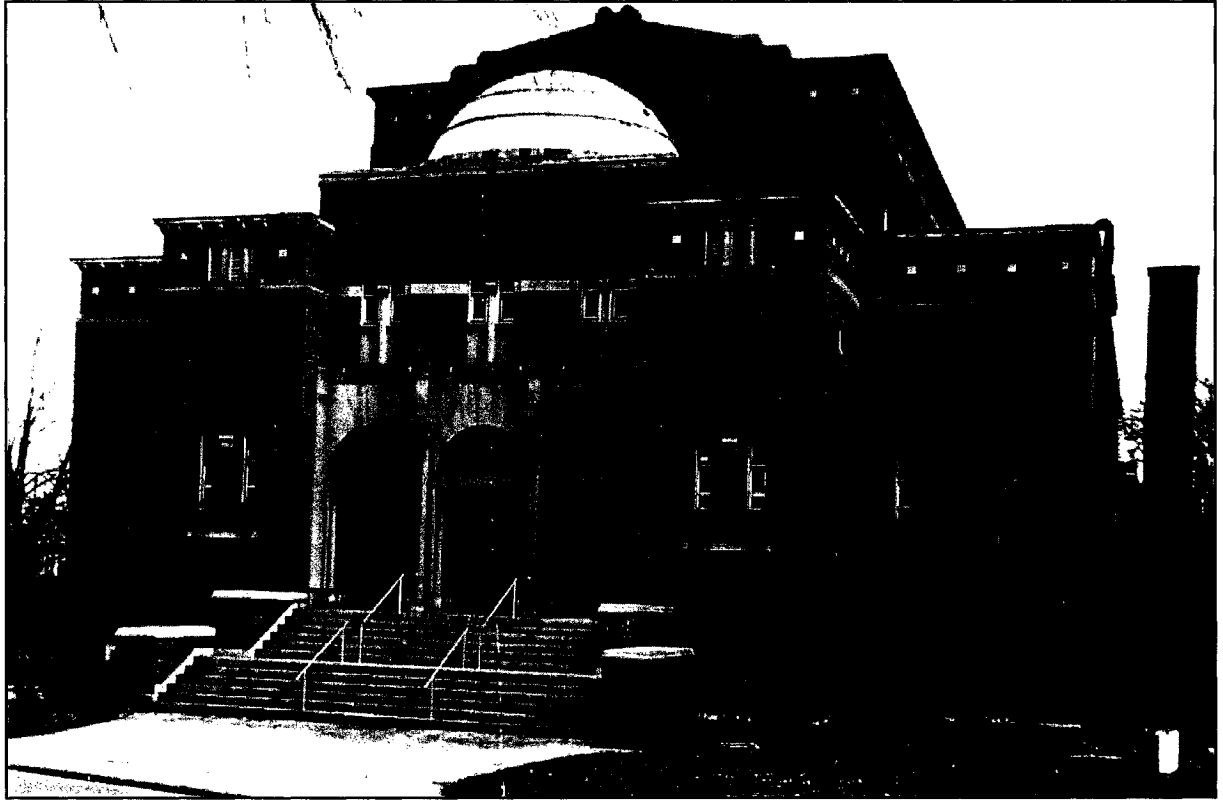
*Dohany Street Synagogue, Budapest, 1854-59,  
by architect Ludwig Forster*



*Vienna – Tempelgasse Synagogue, Vienna, 1858  
by architect Ludwig Forster*

**Shaar Hashomayim, 1922**  
450 Avenue Kensington

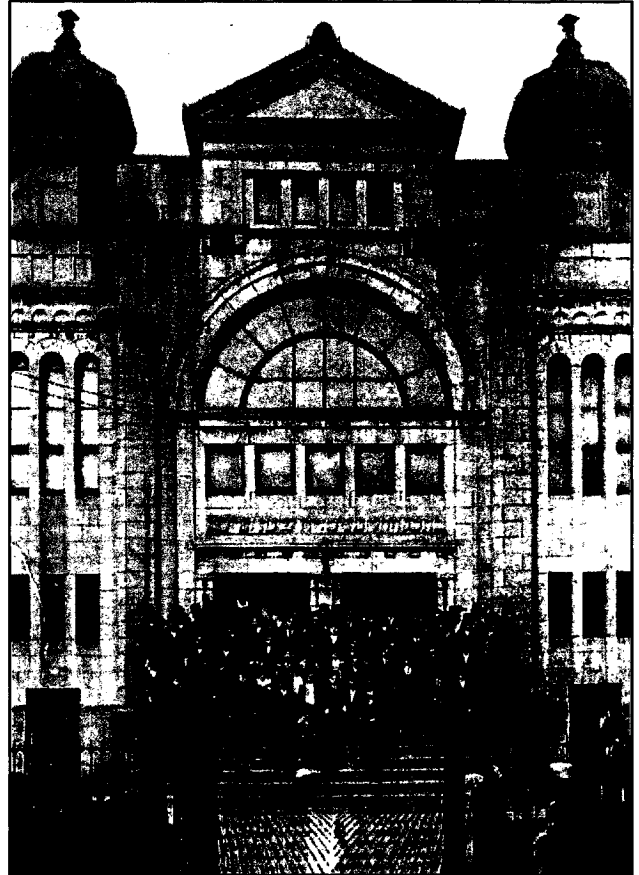
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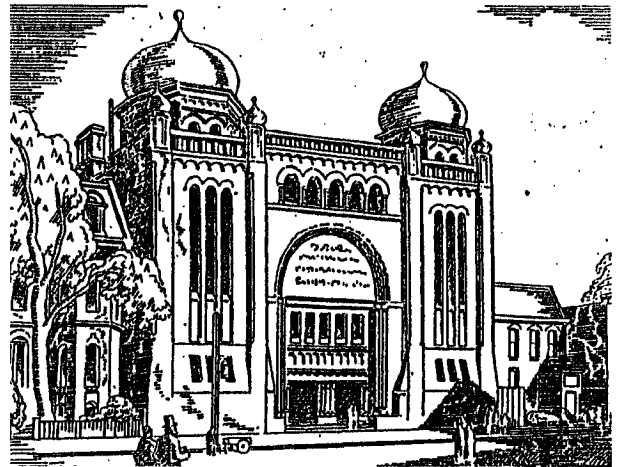


## Chevra Kadisha, 1903

Rue St. Urbain / Boulevard St. Catherine

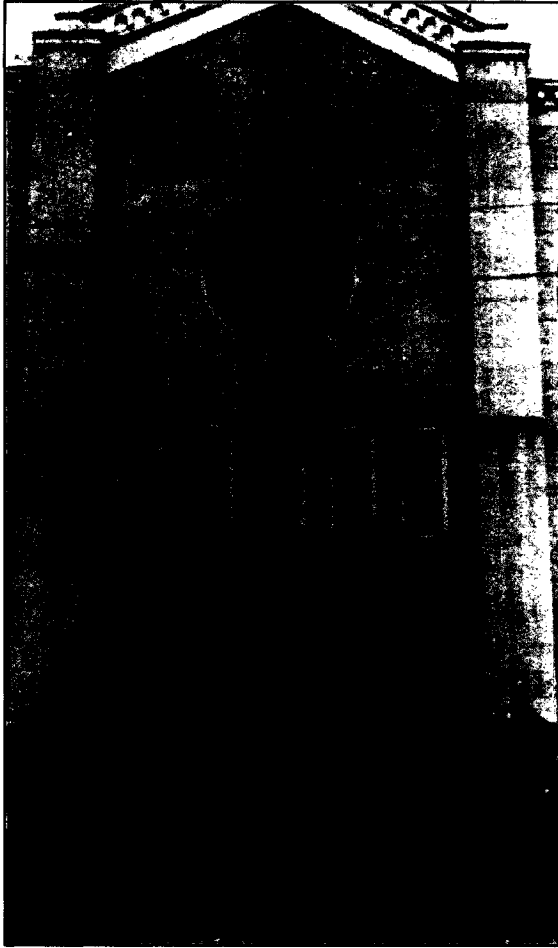


The design of Chevra Kadisha may well have been inspired by the architecture of Holy Blossom. Onion domes became the prevalent design feature of Toronto's early synagogues.

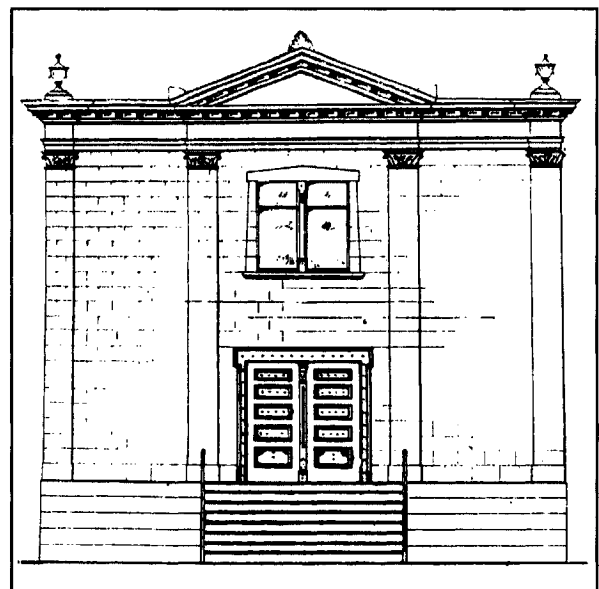


Holy Blossom, Toronto, 1897

**B'nai Jacob, 1890**  
41 Rue St. Constant



Façade of original Shaar Hashomayim



Proposed renovation of facade

## Chapter II: The Dispersion of *Shuls* and *Shulelach*, Here and There

### Synagogues in Areas II and III-circa 1945

In 1901 more than half of the total Jewish population of Metropolitan Montreal lived in the area south of Pine Avenue. By 1911 the majority of the Jewish population had moved northward into the area north of Pine Avenue and east of Park Avenue, and by 1921 the percentage of Montreal's Jewish population living within that area had increased to more than 86 percent. It was in that area that the new buildings of the Mortimer Davis Y.M.H.A., the Talmud Torah, the Jewish People's School, Jewish Public Library, Peretz School, Jewish Old Folks' Home and Neighbourhood House were built in the 1930's and 40's. In 1941 the majority of Montreal's Jewish population, exceeding 60 percent, still lived in that area.<sup>1</sup>

Louis Rosenberg

**St. Lawrence Blvd.** is filled with people at all hours of the day and evening, for here are the food shops - kosher meat and fish markets, herring and delicatessen and dairy and bakery shops, where the housewives of the area, as well as some who dwell farther a field, do their shopping...Only in Jewish bakeries...can bread baked in the Jewish manner...be bought...Only in Jewish delicatessens can the prized smaltz herring, sauerkraut, lox or salted salmon, be obtained. Even the grocery stores...handle certain Hebrew products not found in many chain grocery stores...

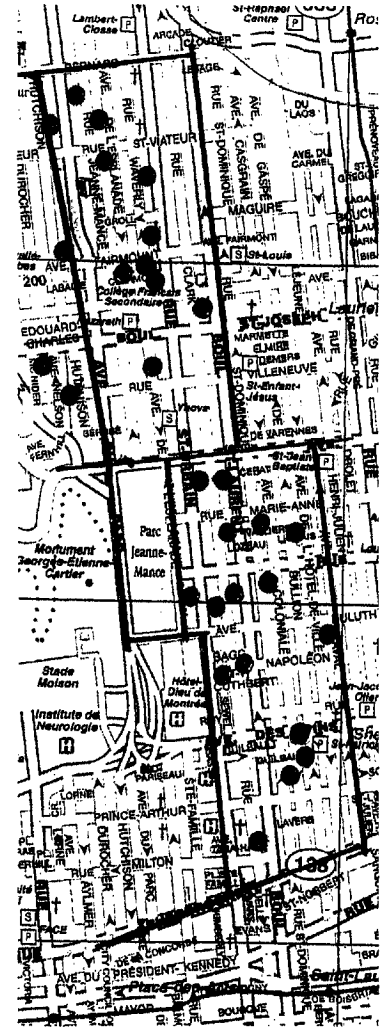
Many of the store windows display Yiddish lettering. Even the Montreal City and District Bank at the corner of Pine and St. Lawrence has Yiddish lettering on a side window...

Everywhere, inside and out, Yiddish is heard...The people who crowd the sidewalks are for the most part respectably, though not immaculately dressed. The young women more often than not are attired in clothes that while cheap, are in the height of fashion. Occasionally there passes an old woman, unconventionally dressed in shawl and sweater.<sup>2</sup>

**St. Lawrence Blvd.**...undergoes a striking change as it crosses Mount Royal Avenue...Quite suddenly, it discards a great many of the features that mark it as the Jewish "Main Street." There is less noise and traffic, it seems, fewer small shops of the type characteristic of the ghetto [the area below Mt. Royal Blvd.], fewer pedestrians. The stores that are located here are not so busy; many of them are French. **Park Avenue** has taken the place of St. Lawrence in this northern zone as the shopping and amusement centre...

Although there are kosher meat markets and Jewish bakeries on Park Avenue, there is practically no Yiddish lettering in the windows; the stores are clean and roomy by comparison, the wares more attractively displayed, the attitude between customer and proprietor or clerk slightly more formal. The customers, though undoubtedly Jewish, for the most part, are rarely of the long-bearded, Yiddish-speaking or be-shawled variety. The theatres on Park Ave., unlike the "Hollywood" and others on St. Lawrence, have never, or rarely, shown a Yiddish film.<sup>3</sup>

Judith Seidel



One former resident has described these neighborhoods as comprising a “*shtetl* within a *shtut*,”<sup>4</sup> a small Jewish town within the city of Montreal. Another nostalgically remembers the old neighborhood as the “golden ghetto.”<sup>5</sup> Though life was generally poorer, living conditions harder and more congested than today’s life style, all the residents’ needs and services as well as friends and family were close at hand. It was a *shtetl* made up of immigrants of different towns, cities and even countries, nevertheless, united by a common language. Yiddish was the predominant household language overriding the languages of the various home countries. Even in the early forties, when over 50% of Montreal’s Jewish population was Canadian born, Yiddish remained the mother tongue of over 80% of the population.<sup>6</sup> The Eastern European immigrants were also unified by the common tradition of Orthodox Judaism. Reform Judaism, as transported by German immigrants and ideologically and institutionally developed in the United States, had little impact on the Montreal and Canadian Jewish community. On the other hand, the secular ideologies of Zionism and socialism formed a considerable part of the baggage of the Eastern European immigrant in the early part of the twentieth century. But within the densely populated Jewish neighborhoods of our “*shtetl* within a *shtut*,” the polarization between the secular and the religious may not have been as marked as one might expect. The Eastern European immigrant synagogue of Montreal represented not so much a distinction between secular and religious as between the various immigrant communities.

By the late thirties the community was dispersed and developed in two areas of settlement centered on two distinct north-south arteries: St. Lawrence Blvd. and Park Ave. While St. Lawrence remained the hub of Jewish commercial activity, the northern

area became the location of significant Jewish institutions such as the Jewish Public Library, the YMHA, and several Jewish schools. Park Ave. also took on a distinctly Jewish character following the services of the High Holidays as the street would fill with people, mostly young, strolling from Mt. Royal to Bernard eager to socialize while wearing their best holiday attire.<sup>7</sup>

The community's synagogues lined the streets and boulevards east and west of Park Ave. and St. Lawrence Blvd. Sometimes two and three to a block, or just around the corner from each other, they served a community whose population had grown significantly in the first decades of the century. In 1901 the Jewish population of Montreal, Outremont, and Westmount combined was about 8,000. By 1941 it had risen to over 63,000.<sup>8</sup> In 1900 approximately 8 congregations served the Montreal community. By 1940 Montreal had some 45 synagogues. While the population had risen by over 680%, the number of congregations had increased by only about 460%. But 31 of the synagogues were concentrated in the immigrant neighborhoods in an area of a mere two square kilometers.<sup>9</sup> This pales in comparison with the synagogues of New York's Lower East Side, an area as well of not more than two square miles, where 500 congregations had been organized in the period between 1880 and 1915.<sup>10</sup> How can we understand the number of synagogues relative to the population size and needs? The answer is perhaps more anecdotal than numerical.

On Shabbat, the synagogues were not full. The exigencies of life in America meant that the Jew had to compromise his religious practices as he or she was often required to work on the Sabbath. The more observant sought work that would allow them to keep the Sabbath either within industrial work such as the needle trade, where shops

were closed on Saturday, or within the Jewish economy itself as teachers, *shochtim*, or rabbis. On a daily basis, these synagogues were certainly under used.<sup>11</sup> Reuven Brasloff described the efforts of some smaller synagogues in attaining a quorum for daily prayer:

I went to public schools and to Baron Bing High School. [This would have been in the mid to late thirties.] This was a quarter mile walk from my home. The Plateau had many little synagogues. The problem for these synagogues was in obtaining week day *minyans*. This became an obstacle course for my friend Benny and me on our way to school. The *shamashim* of these little synagogues would get out on the street and begin corralling anyone who looked like a Jew.<sup>12</sup>

Surely on the High Holidays the synagogues were full and even overflowing as outside halls were rented and rabbis were brought in creating once-a-year synagogues for the overflow crowds. Yet one newspaper article, written in 1934 on behalf of the *Vaad Hair*, suggests that even on these popular holidays, there was considerable competition and concern regarding the sale of seats.

The income from our synagogues comes from two main sources: from permanent members and from the sale of seats for the High Holidays. Every shul attempts to bring in a well known cantor and a fine choir so that he who comes to worship will gain a sense of spiritual pleasure. They spare no expense in pleasing the worshipper.

Thus it is the heartfelt request and plea from the Vaad Hair to all Montreal Jews to support our synagogues by going to worship on the High Holidays only in the synagogues. There is enough room in our synagogues to comfortably seat all the Jews in Montreal with their wives and children. Not only is it a mitzvah to worship in a permanent house of worship, where worship is carried out all year round, but it is a huge communal responsibility which falls on every Jew to help our synagogues to maintain themselves, or we may, God forbid, lose them which will bring shame upon the entire community.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the relative plethora of orthodox synagogues within the immigrant neighborhood does not indicate the presence of a particularly pious community. I would suggest that they served a purpose other than purely religious. They served as a place where the immigrant could feel ritually, culturally, and psychologically at home. Harry Stillman attended the Machzike Hadath during his youth and young adult years. Most of the congregants had come from the same area of the Ukraine.

It really was more of a *landsliet* type of association than a religious one...most of the members were not Shabbos worshipers. They belonged to the Labour-Zionists, to the Farband and more left. This is where they went almost out of habit to embrace a group of people, their own *landsliet*; they felt comfortable with their own.<sup>14</sup>

In honour of the sixtieth anniversary of the Chevra Thilim synagogue, B.G. Sack summarized the motives of the early founders.

They sought to find a place to fit where they could do things in their own manner both socially and in terms of religion. Not being able to accustom themselves to the existing shuls, they determined to create an environment according to their own spirit...As these Jews could not adjust themselves to the existing synagogues, they decided to establish new shuls here and there.<sup>15</sup>

Israel Medres provided an amusing anecdotal explanation for how and why these synagogues came to be created. When an immigrant would come to Montreal, he would first attend an existing synagogue.

When an immigrant began to feel at home in these congregations, he began to express opinions and to become involved in the synagogue's business and procedures. With time he would come to disagreements with the president, the rabbi or the *gabbai* and he would become unhappy...When a few such unhappy members would come together, they would begin planning a new congregation where the rules would be more democratic, where there would be a brotherly feeling, where the *alyiahs* would be more justly distributed, where more familiar people [*hamishe menshen*] would be elected to the offices of president, vice president and trustee...And in more or less such a manner were "*shuls* and *shulelah*" created by immigrant Jews in Montreal.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Shuls Among the Shulelach***

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It was from among the congregations that had been established in the early enclave that the larger, mostly purpose built, synagogues were constructed in the subsequent areas of settlement. Some of these early congregations were identified with their countries of



*Former B'nai Jacob*

origin. Thus the B'nai Jacob, established in 1886 was known as the *Russishe Shul*; the Beth David, founded two years later, was the *Rumainishe Shul*; and the Shaare Tefilah, dating from perhaps as early as 1892 was also called the Austro-Hungarian Shul.

The Shaare Tefilah was perhaps the earliest congregation, and certainly the first synagogue built above Sherbrooke, probably by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Israel Medres suggested that the surrounding blocks might have housed some of the wealthier members of the immigrant community of the time. "The affluent Jews lived on Prince Arthur, Ontario, and other streets nearby."<sup>17</sup> Certainly, the building was an imposing structure with architectural detailing possibly of Austrian influence. The circular elements on the peaks of the roof parapets, stylized rays of light, can be seen as decorative elements in German and Austrian synagogues and churches. A small attached building might have been used as a Talmud Torah for boys and the basement was partially reserved as a residence for the caretaker. Observers of the demolition of the building noted a recessed area in the basement level possibly indicating the presence of a former *mikveh*. Sara Jacobs's father, David Solomon, was instrumental in the building of the synagogue. He served as president until his death in 1918. Mrs. Jacobs recalls that while a green velvet curtain covered the gaps of the railing surrounding the women's gallery, the women's faces were not curtained and she had a clear view of her father sitting on the central *bimah* dressed in the formal attire of the President in a high silk hat and morning coat, a manner of dress and decorum probably not typical of the immigrant synagogues.<sup>18</sup>

The interior of the synagogue represented a typical arrangement of an Orthodox synagogue in this community. Separate seating areas were provided for the men and



women, the most typical architectural solution being, as in this case, a second level women's gallery, generally "U" shaped with the ends of the "U" terminating at the wall above the *aron hakodesh*. On the main level, the men's section, the *bimah*, a raised platform containing a reading table upon which the Torah scrolls were unrolled, dominated the central space in front of the Torah ark. In some synagogues there were no seats between the *bimah* and the ark; in others, a few rows of seats were provided in this space for *kohanim*, heirs of the ancient priestly cast who have ritual functions in the synagogue liturgy.<sup>19</sup> Rows of seats on either side of the *aron hakodesh* were and are reserved for clergy and officers. In the Shaare Tefilah, while the women were seated separately, neither their presence nor their line of view was completely obliterated indicating the perpetuation of a custom that recognized the participation of women in the synagogue. The women's sections in medieval synagogues were often an afterthought, created in annexed rooms, or in a level under the main sanctuary. The women's galleries were probably derived from Protestant churches where they were built to seat larger numbers of congregants within earshot of the preacher. The first synagogue generally noted to have included a women's gallery was the Sephardic Synagogue of Amsterdam in 1639. Until the advent of Reform in the early part of the nineteenth century, the galleries were separated physically and visually by high balustrades or grills. In Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries, unaffected by Reform influences, and until today in the very pious communities, the *mehiza* dividing men from women remains a full visual barrier. The subtle half curtain was the typical device used to separate the women in these synagogues in Montreal rather than full length screens or even walls installed in other times, places, and communities.<sup>20</sup>

Further north, the Adath Yeshurun, established largely by Lithuanian Jews, began to build its synagogue in 1916. A simple and sturdy brick building, its façade was marked by a feature that would become probably the most prevalent distinguishing element of these urban synagogues, an arch inscribing a circular window depicting a *Magen David* in stained glass. Former members recall the traditional layout of the interior: the *aron hakodesh* faced by the central *bimah* and the women's balcony decorated with simply drawn illustrations, a practice common in Russian/Polish synagogues. Neither inspiring awe, nor conveying any sense of splendour, the interior was finished with woodwork that was rough and floored in linoleum. Yet auxiliary spaces, an office and small chapel used for daily *minyans* and study distinguished it from smaller synagogues.<sup>21</sup>

The building of the synagogue represented a considerable effort for its members who were assisted by Lyon Cohen, the honorary president and chairman of the building committee. At the time Lyon Cohen was president of the Shaar Hashomayim. In assisting the Adath Yeshurun, he followed his father's example. Lazarus Cohen, a former president of the Shaar Hashomayim, had extended a loan to the Beth Yehuda congregation in 1906 for the purchase of its building. Lyon Cohen was probably the most prominent Jewish leader of Montreal of the time. A nephew of the prominent Rabbi Hirsch Cohen, Lyon Cohen was a leader, founder, and developer of multiple communal institutions, and an important and effective advocate for the immigrant community. On two occasions, he personally approached the United States and Canadian governments. In the first case he secured the arrival of 650 Jewish immigrants en route to the United States on the same day as the adoption of the quota system in 1921, under which the

immigrants would have otherwise been refused. And in the second case he obtained Canadian immigration permits for 5,000 refugees of the Ukrainian pogrom who had found temporary haven in Rumania in 1923.<sup>22</sup> Yet Lyon Cohen was seen as both benefactor and detractor of the immigrants. The incident which accompanied the dedication of the Adath Yeshurun synagogue in 1917 highlights the paradoxical relationship between Lyon Cohen, as representative of the “uptown” established Jewish community, and the “downtown” immigrants.

Yesterday there was held the *Chanukos Hasbais* of the new uptown synagogue [in relation to those further downtown, not to be confused with the established “uptowners”], the Adath Yeshurun, at the corner of St. Urbain and Mount royal...Mr. Fromson, in introducing Mr. Lyon Cohen, paid tribute to the board of officers and the executive on the achievement of the construction of the new synagogue.

Mr. Lyon Cohen, however, did not deliver his address due to the disturbance caused by numerous strikers who were present at the ceremony. (A strike in the needle industry was then in full swing; in view of the fact that Mr. Cohen was Chairman of the Manufacturer’s Association, the full wrath of the striking workers was being directed against him.) Mr. Wolofsky was then called upon to calm the gathering, after many other attempts to address them had failed. Mr. Wolofsky, who through his journal had thrown his support in the industrial dispute to the side of the strikers, succeeded in bringing order to the assembly, persuading the strikers that it was not fitting for Jewish workers to disturb a religious ceremony.<sup>23</sup>

The first synagogue built above Mount Royal was the B’nai Jacob. The beautiful and auspicious building was designed to serve and to lead the community that was moving northward. With this new building, B.G. Sack concluded, the B’nai Jacob “remained as important as before.” Its basic Romanesque inspiration was reflected in rows of arched windows and the barrel shaped roof creating a massive arch on the façade. Interestingly, the façade bears a striking resemblance not to synagogues of Russia, but of France. This suggests that the congregation or the architect might have chosen to connect this important Jewish immigrant building with its location in a French Canadian city. The building was clearly meant to appear prominent in the cityscape. A dominant circular window featuring a *magen david* topped by tablets of the Ten Commandments, mark it unabashedly as a synagogue. Large and obvious as it was, it was nevertheless dwarfed by

nearby St. Michael's Church, built in 1914-15, which, still intact, is as well dominated by a massive arch over its façade and lateral wall.

Rare professional photographs of the interior of the synagogue attest to its acknowledged architectural importance. The interior had the elements of a traditional orthodox synagogue. The main level featured a large central *bimah* with two rows of benches in front generally reserved for *kohanim*. An ornate *aron hakodesh* was topped by a large circular window with a *magen david* mirroring the window on the façade. Flanking the arch were the traditional *mizrach* seats reserved for the officers. All the woodwork was evidently rich and finely carved. While the exterior might connect the synagogue prominently as a public building in Montreal, the interior had an intimacy that evoked, in its decoration, themes common to Russian-Polish synagogues. The balustrade of the women's balcony was decorated with a plaster relief depicting the signs of the Zodiac. Illustrations of the Zodiac, often enmeshed in intricate floral designs, depictions of animals, and lines of Biblical texts decorated the interiors of Eastern European synagogues, most notably, the walls and ceilings of the wooden synagogues of Russia and Poland. These wooden synagogues were almost certainly built and designed by Christians but the existence, even names, of Jewish mural painters is well documented.<sup>24</sup> Montreal immigrant synagogues continued this tradition, some remnants of which are still intact in the small, auspiciously named, Temple Solomon, otherwise known as the Bagg Street Shul.

Astrology, a deterministic belief system, has been present in Judaism since ancient times, contested and supported by rabbis of the Talmud and medieval rabbis and philosophers. Abraham Ibn Ezra, a Hispano-Judaeo philosopher of the 12<sup>th</sup> century

explained a Jewish response favorable to astrology: “Israel has no star-as long as they observe the Torah. But if they do not observe it, the stars shall rule over them.”<sup>25</sup> The practice of *mitzvot* could mitigate the fate of the stars. The signs of the zodiac are associated with the months of the Jewish calendar. A symbolic system of attributes connects each sign of the zodiac with the Biblical, historic, ritual or spiritual significance of each month.<sup>26</sup> Even in one of today’s most pious communities, Meiah Sherim, Jerusalem, images of animals depict the signs of the zodiac and the tribes in the ceiling paintings of the Beit Haknesseth Hagadol. While the presence of imagery in synagogues belies the supposed Judaic injunction against it, it exemplifies, as well, certain conventions in representation. Whereas sculpted images and the use of the human form are generally avoided, paintings and animal figures are not uncommon. The signs generally represented in human form in non-Judaic traditions, Virgo and Gemini, are often replaced by animals, as the two storks in the B’nai Jacob and the two gazelles in Temple Solomon, and the reindeer, whose masculine form rather comically represents Virgo in Temple Solomon. Sagittarius, whose symbol is the archer, is represented either as a drawn bow or as a detached hand pulling the bow.

The small Bagg Street Shul still retains the simple, folkish illustrations of the Zodiac drawn by a father and son named Shadewasser.<sup>27</sup> The paintings are lent a certain Canadian character with the depictions of the bison and the reindeer. In the B’nai Jacob, in keeping with the more sophisticated and expensive character of its construction, the images are not painted but sculpted; they are not naïve but executed with finesse and skill in the emerging Art Deco style by Harry Rappaport, a professional sculptor who later

went on to sculpt interior decorative elements for movie theaters in New York and Los Angeles.

As in the earlier neighborhood, the B'nai Jacob served as the locale for many communal gatherings including addresses by local politicians. Along with three or four other synagogues, it was the location of larger weddings and bar mitzvahs. It was known as a choral synagogue, its fine acoustics and renowned cantor attracting loyal listeners. Many young boys found their connection to synagogue life as members of its choir. The B'nai Jacob remained at this location until 1956 when it amalgamated with the Chevra Kadisha and moved to its present suburban location. Remarking on its move, perhaps regrettable though necessary, Sack wrote:

[T]here are many reasons why we should maintain the old shul. We have to maintain a house of prayer whose very walls represent a sort of historic continuity that reminds us of the pioneers of yesterday and of a piece of the Jewish past of Montreal.

The presence of such imposing synagogues as the Shaare Tefilah, the Adath Yeshurun, and certainly the B'nai Jacob suggests that the more established congregations had accumulated sufficient wealth to afford the expense of larger, more elaborate buildings. However, if the history of the Beth Yehuda is any indication, these buildings speak more to aspirations than to attained affordability. Indeed, the history of the congregation, reconstructed in great detail from the archives of the synagogue and from recollections of older members and activists, focuses to a great extent on the need for a suitable building.<sup>28</sup> Yet the minutes record that even renovations to the original building were often an unaffordable expense.

[I]n the treasury there was not even one cent. The minutes of every meeting of that time [1911] report that when bills were presented for work completed there was no money to pay. They had to knock on doors to ask for charity. But with the members and officers together they weathered this storm and many other such storms of financial difficulties...As soon as this expense was met, a new one was found. The officers of the time sought to beautify the synagogue. Of course, this all

cost money, which wasn't there, and they were constantly appealing to the members who always did their best to respond to the requests of the officers.

With the movement of the community further north, the desire and need for a new building intensified and was finally realized in 1923 when the congregation moved from its original location below Sherbrooke to its newly constructed synagogue on the eastern boundary of the second area of settlement.

In that year the large and beautiful synagogue was built with all the improvements and with splendor and glory. Neither effort nor money was spared. We erected such a fine building that it was the pride of all Montreal Jews. Nearly all of the members of the shul participated in this undertaking under the leadership of the officers of the time.

Not only the officers of that time, and of that particularly significant effort, but also the officers of every year and all members of every committee are listed with care and with pride. These lists comprise a "genealogy" of institution building within which the writer, Gidaliahu Michalovsky, with somewhat less than complete modesty, includes himself as the president who ushered in "a new era in the history of the synagogue," one of greater fiscal responsibility. Yet despite his efforts and creative fundraising endeavours, the synagogue remained in financial difficulties. No sooner was it erected, than it was placed on a "sheriff's sale," due to unpaid bills to contractors, and rescued, thanks to the intervention of several generous members, a situation which reoccurred with alarming frequency.

With the opening of the new synagogue, and, at least partly in response to its financial difficulties, a women's auxiliary was organized. Their first event was a bazaar which culminated in a raffle offering a car as grand prize. And for the meanwhile at least, "money came in from all sides." With such a beautiful new shul, the congregation aspired as well to have a suitably fine cantor. "[A]nd, indeed one of the greatest cantors in the world was hired, Cantor Takach from Holland, along with a fine choir. This treat

cost almost \$7,000 a year.” The congregation, burdened by an expensive building, was vulnerable not only to economic fluctuations, but to the constantly changing residential patterns of its members. When Mr. Michalovsky took office in 1929 he noted that even more serious than the stock market crash was the movement away from the neighborhood of the wealthier members and seat holders who left the synagogue a “widow” with deficits, debts, and expenses.

The need to raise funds was an ongoing enterprise. The Beth Yehuda became well known for its cantors and cantorial concerts which often served as significant fundraisers. Well known cantors, frequently from the United States, were invited to serve during the High Holidays. Presenting a concert before the holidays would not only bring in revenue, but also encourage the purchase of seats for holiday services. The performances of one rather young cantor proved to be particularly successful. Following a warning of a bank foreclosure in 1934, Mr. Michalovsky suggested that a cantor be hired for Saturdays and special concerts. When the first two cantors proved to be a disappointing draw, it was decided to bring in Cantor Shloimele, an eleven year old prodigy. The young cantor was engaged to sing for the High Holidays. “It was an event that brought a smile to the face of every member.” The enterprise with Cantor Shloimele brought in a profit of \$4,000, four times the amount that had been raised in their previously most successful concert!

The Beth Yehuda, rising several stories above its surrounding buildings, was indeed renowned for its splendour. Marked by a circular window with a *magan david* in stained glass on both the façade and rear elevation and a peaked rook topped by the tablets of the Ten Commandments, it stood evidently and proudly as a synagogue within the immediate urban landscape. A newspaper notice heralded the soon to be completed



building “as one of the most beautiful synagogues in Canada.” It nevertheless, marked no particular architectural innovation as the style could be seen not only in European synagogue prototypes, but in Montreal church architecture as well. Its distinguished façade was matched by its plush interior. Rows of circular clerestory windows on both sides must have flooded the interior with rays of coloured light streaming in with both the setting and the rising sun. As one of the grander synagogues, it was a frequent choice for larger weddings and bar-mizvahs. The decades-long aspirations resulted in the creation of a grand locale which served the Montreal Jewish community but, the members themselves, remained servants to their building.

Unfortunately, such similarly detailed accounts are not available for the other large congregations. Although the Beth Yehuda may have chosen an especially poor location for its permanent building, there is reason to believe, as we will see, that other congregations may have encountered similar difficulties in maintaining their large buildings.

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**The Shulelach**

*Former Beit Haknesseth Anshei  
Ukraina now Episcopal  
(Ukrainian) church*



With increased immigration, smaller congregations were formed, many representing not countries of origin but geographic areas, cities, and towns as reflected in several of the names: Anshei Galicia, Ukraina, Moroshe, Ozeroff, and the Pinsker Shul. With these close ties to more recent places of origins, they remained, perhaps, more intimately connected to the places, brethren, and particular traditions which they left behind. They were engaged in helping their friends and families at home, committed to assisting them in immigrating, and involved in their integration when they arrived. Formally, the words of some of the congregational leaders suggest that these small synagogues were models of stalwart orthodoxy. Organizationally, they sought both to exert control over and to care for their community of members. Individually, the members were drawn to these shuls as an extension of *landsmanshaftn*, a connection to home, and a place where extended family and old friends could meet.

[L]et us praise the value of the small *shulelach* that maintain the true traditional Judaism without deviation and without modernization.<sup>29</sup>

Such were the words of praise of Rabbi Yehoshua Halevi Herschorn, his words echoed by the comments of others, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Anshei Ozeroff. Special occasions provided an opportunity for communal recognition of the small congregations. On the occasion of the eightieth birthday of Rabbi Hirsch Cohen and celebration of his fiftieth anniversary of residence in Montreal in 1940, several smaller congregations paid tribute to him as well as to themselves. Their sentiments were recorded in a souvenir booklet of the event. Zerei Dat Vedaath, Young Men of Religion and Learning, as the name indicates, was established for the dual purpose of prayer and study. “Until this day,” they proclaimed “every Shabbos, before prayers, they study an hour of *shulchan aruch* or *gemara*.” Likewise, a representative of the Tifereth Israel

wrote: “The synagogue conducts itself according to the most beautiful, traditional ways and is firmly based in the foundations of Torah and charity. We worship and study everyday and we support Jewish institutions of justice and Torah.” Baruch Tannenbaum, president of Machzike Hadath, extolled his synagogue: “Though [the shul] is small, it had always taken an active role in all orthodox and religious matters and supports, with all her efforts, Talmud scholars...”<sup>30</sup>

Yet it is unlikely that President Tannenbaum’s vision of the Machzike Hadath as a leading Orthodox institution in the Jewish community was a motivating factor for its congregants. What drew the members to this shul, whether on Shabbath or on holidays, was a sense of familiarity. Most of the congregants came from the same area of the Ukraine, from Kaminetz-Podolsk, and from the towns of Dinovitz and Poskurov. Harry Stillman noted its significance as being “more of a *landsleit* type of association than a religious one,” its members being for the most part, not particularly religious. Similarly, Percy Tannenbaum,<sup>31</sup> a nephew of Baruch, noted that his parents were Labour Zionists. For his grandfather, who attended services every morning, the shul served a satisfying social function. On nice days, he and his friends and fellow worshippers would convene to Fletcher’s Field or Mary Anne Park. Baruch’s own children were not educated in religious schools, in *cheders* or Talmud Torah, but in the Folkshule, the Jewish People’s School with a Labour-Zionist Jewish orientation. His daughter Rose Tannenbaum Zuckerman recalls, that though her parents both went to shul on Shabbos, the children did not. Yet gatherings in their home on holidays and every Shabbos remain memorable.

Yolette Vool Mendleson described a similar connection to the Pinsker Shul which was founded by immigrants from Pinsk, Poland, her great uncle among them. She too

attended the Folkshule which served as a focal point of family involvement and an expression of their Labour-Zionist orientation. The household was kosher, the holidays were celebrated in a traditional manner, and though her father worked on most Saturdays, he would attend shul on a Shabbos when he wasn't working. Their home provided a welcoming haven for recently arrived immigrants, a hub for political discussions and a gathering place for the landsleit following holiday services. Her memories of the synagogue itself convey a sense of warmth and familiarity.

I remember it in connection with the holidays and everyone together and having a good time. I would visit my mother upstairs and see all the cousins. It was stuffy and hot...The decorum was lively and noisy. Quiet was often asked for. The women would pray but there was also a lot of conversation with kids running in and out.<sup>32</sup>

The members of the Anshei Ukraina seemed particularly closely connected, bound by a shared memory that was both poignant and enduring. When the congregation received its charter in 1924, it registered a name that served as appellation and mission: "Anshei Ukraina, in memory of the holy ones who were martyred in the Ukraine." The members of the congregation formed an extended social group and the shul was the focal point of the community on any given Saturday. "If you needed anyone for anything important during Shabbos," Olive Golick Brumer relates, "you would go to the synagogue." Informal discussions and gatherings continued after services and on Sundays. Though some of the meetings were on the financial matters of the shul, often a newcomer would be invited to speak, as the members were anxious to hear news from home.

If it was heard that an immigrant came from the Ukraine they would be encouraged to come to the shul. One told the other. It was something that would attach them to home. And they would have an understanding of what it meant to escape from a pogrom.<sup>33</sup>

On the occasion of the historic event of the tribute evening for Rabbi Hirsch Cohen, they recalled their own bitter past in Europe and their dedication to maintaining their values in Montreal.

Having lived through the storm that swept across the length and breadth of the Ukraine, when entire Jewish communities and settlements were murdered and destroyed, we, together with other members of broken families in search of a place to save and reestablish a life after this bloody nightmare, wandered over many roads and borders to finally reach a place where we might have the opportunity to settle on new ground. The less fortunate could not flee along with us and had to stay under the murderous hand of the wild hooliganism that reigned in that time.

As fate had it, we settled in Montreal where daily life with its "*Hoo-Ha*" was ready to swallow us together with our memories and obligations to our brothers and sisters. Eventually, some of us, who understood the danger of the situation, undertook to initiate the organization of an administrative body empowered to organize the newly arrived refugees with the goal of helping one another in the time of need as well as to support friends and acquaintances overseas.

A meeting was called of all the victims of the Ukrainian pogrom where many questions were debated and it was decided to establish a shul that would give us the opportunity to keep together and at the same time it was decided that the shul would forever carry the memory of the untimely martyrs of the bloody Ukraine.<sup>34</sup>

It would seem that the "*Hoo-Ha*" of daily life in Montreal, if we can take that to mean the temptation of Canadianization, posed nearly as great a danger of eliminating collective memory and values as did the pogroms. The solution was not only to help each other, those who had arrived and those who were still overseas, but also to establish an organization, a shul, by which the process of integration could be mitigated and controlled.

Very few documents such as the one above have survived. From several announcements of meetings, a minute book, the vestiges of a revised constitution, and an anniversary souvenir book we can piece together the sense of responsibility and mission of the many small synagogues. The announcements of meetings all follow a similar format. Addressed to a "worthy brother" they indicated the agenda of the meeting, usually the installation of officers and presentation of the annual report, and provide space indicating the sums which the member still owes the synagogue in membership

fees, contribution to the building fund or charity fund. Punitive measures were directed at members who fell in arrears but at the same time a charity fund was set up to extend loans to needy members. Members were encouraged to bring in new members to help maintain and grow the congregations. Announcements of meetings of the Hadrath Kodesh congregation included a letterhead logo depicting two hands clasped in brotherhood. During the late twenties and thirties, not surprisingly, the announcements expressed an ongoing financial concern. Apparently by the thirties a ladies' auxiliary had been organized as one of the notice of meetings encourages the "brothers" to see to it that their wives were registered. The establishment of ladies' auxiliaries seems to be consistent with economic difficulties as they provided not only a social diversion for the women but also maintained fundraising efforts. One meeting in 1931 was organized for a particularly poignant purpose suggesting that, small as the congregation might have been, their sense of purpose went beyond their own congregational needs. Indicative of their ongoing concern for the Jews of Europe, they met

רום קודש פאר אונזערע קאנגרעגאציעס אין אונזער קהילה

3829 סדר דאמיניק ספרים



ג. וויבאנעל, פארוואנדל  
 י. וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל  
 ג. וויבאנעל, פארוואנדל  
 ה. ל. וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל  
 פארוואנדל: י. וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל  
 ו. ה. וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל  
 א. וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל  
 ב. וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל

ווערטער ברודער: —

אין וועגענעראל מיטגוט וועט פאקטמען וועגן אונזער דעם  
 17-טען נאוועמבער 1929, אום 8 אודר, אין אונזער שולחן 3829 סדר.  
 דאמיניק ספרים.

פארשידענע באריכטען פון די באגאד. איר קאמיטעט באריכטען.  
 ווערטער ברודער, קאמט צו זייען מיטגוט. עס וועט געזען  
 ווערן א יעדליכען פונקט ראפארט, ווי איר וועט איר אינאנצאל  
 רען די נייע אפיסערס פאר זייען יאר.

ניש די נייע אפיסערס פון די אפיסערס פאר דעם ווייל און נעסטע פאר אונזער  
 שולחן.  
 מאכט גוט איינע שולדען און זייט נישט אין איינע.

די אפיסערס אפגעלייגן צו זייען ברודער איר צו ברענגען נייע  
 געבערס וועט געווען ברודער עס וועט איר צו ברענגען 5 נייע  
 געבערס וועט געווען אפגעלייגן ווערן פון אונזער שולחן.

זייט נישט אין איינע. די נייע וועלט זיינען שולדיג פאר פון 1000 זיינען  
 צו זייען געגעסען נישט באריכטען. דאס פאלט גוט איינע שולדען און זייט נישט אין  
 איינע.

ביי אירער דעם פריערדיגן,  
 ב. וויבאנעל,  
 4318 סדר, וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל, 2343

שלמה ווערטער, פון סעקעטארי  
 5180 פארשטיינדיג, וויבאנעל, וויס פארוואנדל, 3604

10 §

זייען ברודער אין געבעטען צו פאמאנייען איינע דעם צווייטען.

Meeting announcement

to register a collective protest with the Polish government against the relentless pogroms.

The minute book of the Anshei Ozeroff congregation, dated 1925-1943, remains extant. Embedded in it is a revised version of the congregation's constitution. Ozeroff (Ozarow) was a shtetl in central Poland south of Warsaw. In 1921, 2,258 Jews formed 65% of the total population. The Jewish population was administered internally by an elected *kehillah*. Small and poor though the community was, it nevertheless maintained several communal institutions. Coming from such a small town, it is not surprising that the administration of the congregation in Montreal became an extension of the former *kehillah*, both regulating its congregants' behaviour and caring for their needs. This essential sense of purpose and empowerment is suggested in the constitution and reinforced in the records of the minutes. Informal, and hand written in Yiddish, as a list of points in no particular order, the constitution stands in contrast to the formally written and structured by-laws of the earlier B'nai Jacob. It does not designate consistent rules and regulations of meetings, nor does it define and enumerate the standing officers, their roles and responsibilities. But what stands out in the points of this constitution are matters auxiliary to synagogue management and conduct. Disputes between "brothers" may not be brought to a court of law before the issue is discussed by the congregation. Here the synagogue administration assumes the role of the *beit din* in a traditional Jewish community where civil legal matters were handled internally. One such dispute is recorded in the minutes. Brother Shaphir had publicly insulted Brother Green who had exhibited some form of misconduct in front of strangers near the shul. Following three hours of deliberation, they were each fined three dollars. More striking still are the privileges and assistance extended to members. The B'nai Jacob constitution contains a

short article that lists the “rights of membership” which includes the right to distribute *aliyahs* “when a member’s son has a Bar-Mitzvah or before his wedding” and a free *chupa* for the marriage of a child of a member. The privileges granted a brother and his family at the Anshei Ozeroff show far greater concern and generosity. On the occasion of a wedding, a child of a member must be offered a gift and members of the officers are selected to attend the *simchah*. A daughter, who is married following the death of her father, is entitled to a free wedding and a gift. Special consideration and reduced fees are extended to the widow and unmarried minor children of a deceased member. Finally, while the minutes of the congregation attest to the ongoing struggle to meet the financial obligations of the synagogue, the constitution stipulates that “when a brother is in a critical situation, we must help him. The president and vice-president must borrow money from the shul, up to 25 dollars, in order to help the brother. A meeting is to be called and a tax exacted on every brother according to the decision of the meeting. The money must be collected immediately.”<sup>35</sup>

On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the synagogue, Sam Birenbaum, secretary of the congregation for seventeen years, noted with pride this tradition of caring for congregants and *landsleit* in Ozeroff.

(This occasion) begs for the telling of a few good deeds that we can boast about. We have set up a charity fund which is useful for the members of the congregation who may from time to time need help. We have to extend thanks to several members, who could not be indifferent to the cry for help from our home town, and raised money by which a Torah scroll was bought for the shul and an additional considerable sum was sent to our shtetl, Ozeroff.<sup>36</sup>

The anniversary celebration of 1943 marked as well the dedication of their new building. Preparations began six months in advance with the officers and the ladies auxiliary working together to plan the event and the souvenir book which would contain remarks by congregational and community leaders to adequately commemorate the



occasion. The opening remarks by President Roseman acknowledge that underlying the joyous occasion lay a pall of sorrow.

In the time when the Jewish folk are saturated with sorrow over the tragedy of the Jews of Europe, we, the Beth Haknesseth Anshei Ozeroff, are marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the dedication of our building to prove to our enemies that Jewry will not go under. There synagogues are destroyed, but here we are fortunate to be able to build new ones.<sup>37</sup>

For a community so closely bound with the memory of its small *shtetl* and consumed with worry for family and friends left behind, it is remarkable that they nevertheless chose to celebrate in recognition of their own tenacity and the particular ties which bound them. The smallness of the institution and shared background of the congregants certainly enhanced the sense of belonging and mutual responsibility. Perhaps the officers took a particular pride in this quality of their shul when they invited external community leaders to contribute articles to the anniversary publication. Three of the contributors addressed the quality of smallness not merely as a virtue but as a metaphor of virtue.

There is a Talmudic legend that when the Temple was destroyed, God spread the stones over the entire world and on everyplace where a stone landed, a synagogue was built. Hence, every synagogue is called a small temple—a *mikdash miat*.<sup>38</sup>

Though *mikdash miat* refers to all synagogues, large and small, as the institutional heirs of the destroyed Temple, one senses that Rabbi Eliezer Lippa Shapira, indeed speaks of a small synagogue in using this term as a metaphor for the Anshei Ozeroff.

In the time of King Solomon the Temple was built. God said to him, “And this house shall be built of massive whole stones.” This house, in its construction must be built of whole stones. It is not to be built of hewn stones. It must not be patched together...It must be built without racket, without commotion, only from whole stone, through wholeness and unity must a place for God be built...Unity, love, brotherhood, peace, and friendship, are the spiritual and bodily legs of the people of Israel.

Friends of the Anshei Ozeroff Synagogue, you may be proud of your shul, both with the manner in which it was built and with the traditional practices in all the synagogue’s activities. It can honestly be an example for others.<sup>39</sup>

He instructs the congregation to continue to build of “whole massive stones,” the building blocks of brotherhood, unity, integrity, and tradition.

Rabbi Yehoshua Halevi Hershorn proclaims the virtues of a small synagogue in terms that are far more explicit and directly critical of large synagogues.

Not only during war time but also in normal times when it is quiet on all fronts, Jews in any typical American city are too busy to pay attention to a small shulechel that does not play a large role in the 'who's who' of American Judaism. Such an honor is generally due only to the larger synagogues beginning with the [Reform] temples and conservative synagogues whose members belong to the "high windows." [An expression meaning auspicious and wealthy buildings or high positions.] This includes those orthodox synagogues who have comfortable large buildings and who boast about whatever they have. A small shul has no chance against such honor.

However, I will especially in this time of war, when we are involved in a matter of enormous historic proportions and when the fate of the Jewish people hangs in the balance, especially now will I stand up at an anniversary of a small synagogue in our community and accord her the well deserved honours...[Regarding] The necessary function which these small shulechlach fill in our local life and the important role that they play in the development of orthodox Judaism in this land, we can say, that these small synagogues have greater merit in their category for religious Jewry than the role of the larger synagogues in this land.

R. Hershorn quite clearly attacks the larger synagogues on two fronts: conspicuous and unaffordable expenditures and dilution of orthodox practice. "Our parents in Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine, Rumania, and Hungary," he wrote "used to pray in houses of study, small prayer groups, *shtibles*, and small synagogues that distinguished themselves not with greatness of buildings and not with beautiful accommodations." Immigrants falsely believed that only large and beautiful buildings could attract youth to synagogue. This unsuccessful strategy left them with nothing but "large mortgages and debts." The synagogue is saved from financial ruin only through the generosity "of a good president or treasurer who reaches into his own pocket and the balance must be raised by the brothers..." The large building in itself necessitates a constant search for more members and thus the congregation looks "in other false directions." They "anglicize" and "modernize" the service and try to establish attractive new programs.

When the future historian will examine the mistakes that the early Jewish inhabitants made (if such a historian will one day exist), he will not fail to note the mistake that was made that through grand buildings, beautiful walls and carpets...

And as such errors are only to be found in the large synagogues, let us praise the value of the small shulelach that maintain the true traditional Judaism without deviation and without modernization.<sup>40</sup>

Rabbi Herschorn's nostalgia for the small synagogues of "Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine, Rumania, and Hungary" belies the fact that the cities of nineteenth century Europe witnessed the construction of monumental synagogues which dwarfed any built in Montreal. The granting of equal rights for Jews and the abolition of residential restrictions was accompanied by a dramatic migration from rural to urban centers in Western and Central Europe. But the building of the large synagogues often proceeded the dates of full emancipation and, as Richard Cohen has pointed out, also often proceeded the period of largest growth of the population.<sup>41</sup> In Eastern Europe large synagogues were built in anticipation of emancipation which never materialized. These prominent structures were clearly an expression of optimism and a "demand to be visible."<sup>42</sup> Not all Jews, however, greeted the project of the construction of opulent synagogues with equal enthusiasm. In Carol Herselles Krinsky's summary of the development of large synagogues in modernizing Europe, we hear the echo of Montreal's Rabbi Herschorn's concerns.

The large synagogues that went up in many cities from the 1850s onward were, then, sometimes built for reasons other than simply to accommodate a rising Jewish population...Traditionalists ...were concerned about the spiritual danger if they imitated the practice of building large churches. They knew that assimilation in general culture and assimilation in architecture often went together...

Proponents of new, large buildings usually won the arguments, because Jews able to approach the majority society responded to its values...It was feared that Jewish youths exposed to the lure of Christian social advantage might desert the old faith if they had no synagogues able to compete with imposing churches. Jews who wanted to confirm their place in modern society built large synagogues that would, as they put it, be worthy of their cities and show the congregations' gratitude for their new civil status.<sup>43</sup>

Actual examples of advocacy and opposition reveal even greater tension than the description portrayed by Krinsky. The confrontation between Hasidim and Maskilim in

nineteenth century Galicia, thoroughly documented by Raphael Mahler,<sup>44</sup> provides a rather extreme example of conflict between assimilationists and traditionalists. Joseph Perl led the Maskilim in virtual battle against the Hasidim. Sharing the values of the absolute monarchs, who sought to centralize their powers by eliminating the ethnic differences among their subjects, the *maskilim* promoted secular education and disdained the irrational practices of Hasidism. Perl petitioned the authorities to confiscate “harmful books, close Hasidic *battei midrash*, and *minyamim*...[as places] of refuge for vagabonds, thieves, and similar types and, as a matter of course, a nest of demoralization and of harmful, often even nefarious, scandalous deeds.”<sup>45</sup> A note attached by the provincial governor to Perl’s petition to the emperor described Perl as “one of the most educated men of his nation, the founder of the great synagogue, that is, the temple in Tarnopol.”<sup>46</sup> The conflict between Perl and the Hasidim came to a head in Tarnopol when Perl appointed a *maskilic* rabbi to the pulpit of the main synagogue. The Hasidim responded by desecrating the synagogue, going so far as to violate its most sacred space, the *aron hakodesh*. The level of mutual animosity is most vividly described in a contemporary report of Perl’s funeral. The coffin was followed by municipal and district officials and by “armed police agents who were dispatched to guard the corpse against an attack by Hasidim. On Perl’s fresh grave the Hasidim let loose in a wild dance.”<sup>47</sup>

The founders of the great Tlomackie Synagogue built in Warsaw in 1874-77 were described in Alexander Guterman’s essay as enlightened and acculturated Jews. They sought integration but, reluctant to forgo attachments to traditional Judaism, rejected Reform. The more orthodox, nevertheless, shunned this synagogue and referred to it as “*di daytche schul*,” the German Shul, its members little better than *goyim*. A

contemporary journalist wrote: “At the time, the strictly observant circles of the Hasidim considered the ‘Synagoga’ itself an impure place, where no Jew who had not shed his Judaism (*a yiddisher yid*) could show his face, particularly not to pray...”<sup>48</sup> The Hasidic prayer house remained the prevalent model of Jewish space of worship in Warsaw which had, as Krinsky notes, 450 shtibels by 1926. The synagogue of the Progressive Jews of Lodz (1881), modeled after and rivaling the Tlomackie Syangogue in scale and grandeur, was similarly known as the German Shul. Author Krzysztof Stefanski writes that the wealthy “manufacturers, merchants, and bankers” who founded the synagogue were also called “‘civilized’ or ‘German-ritual’ Jews not because their ritual followed the German tradition, but because they derived assimilationist patterns from Germany.”<sup>49</sup> In Eastern Europe modernizing practices were adopted in the hope of gaining emancipation that never materialized.

The first country to grant equal civil rights to the Jews was France in 1791. The Jewish communities were organized under official *consistoires*. Conflict ensued throughout the course of the latter half of the nineteenth century between the Jewish authorities of the *consistoire* of Paris and the growing population of Eastern European immigrants. The *consistoire* was represented by the monumental Rue de la Victoire synagogue built in 1875 in the Romanesque style. The Eastern European immigrants worshiped, as they had in Eastern Europe, in a plethora of small prayer rooms. The communal leadership battled these private *minyamin*, enlisting, as in Galica, governmental support in controlling their dispersion. In 1911 nine small congregations did merge to build a substantial synagogue of their own. Some scholars have suggested, their choice of a divergent and original style indicated a form of resistance and a

statement of independence from the established community.<sup>50</sup> The young architect Hector Guimard was enlisted to build in the then current and innovative style of Art Nouveau. The interior layout of the synagogue on Rue Pavé, with clearly separate demarcation of space between *bimah* and *aron hakodesh*, remained entirely orthodox. But the statement of the president of the new congregation indicates that “large,” in itself, represented change and modernization.

We no longer need to take refuge in temporary, private premises where our children refuse to accompany us. We shall have a large synagogue with all modern conveniences.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast, the synagogue that Montreal’s Anshei Ozeroff dedicated in 1943 was indeed a rather simple building. Despite the title of the souvenir book which announces the “Opening of Our Newly Erected Synagogue,” the building was a former residential unit, one of two identical units in a series of row houses typical of Montreal’s urban landscape. The interior was renovated to accommodate the necessary fittings of a synagogue including a second level women’s gallery. The *bimah* and the ark were well carved. The synagogue’s secretary, Sam Birenbaum, was also a frequent *bal tefilah* and *bal kore*, a lay leader of prayers and reader of the Torah, who was a carpenter by trade and hand carved two lions which perched above the *aron hakodesh*. An extension to the rear of the building accommodated the Ark which was illuminated by a circular window still visible on the rear elevation. A rare photo of members standing in front of the building, including Mr. Birenbaum and other “brothers,” bears evidence that only the door, with the name of the congregation in wood relief and a small circular window with a stained glass *magen david*, marked the building as a synagogue.

The large majority of the buildings which served as synagogues in these old Jewish neighborhoods were converted from existing buildings. Perhaps not more than

four of the small shuls were purpose-built. Two of these, north of the area of greatest concentration, The Poele Zedek and the Tifereth Jerusalem, were built by the members themselves. Jewish craftsmen, carpenters, plumbers and electricians dedicated several years of their after work hours to build their own house of worship. Some of those synagogues which had been created on the base of pre-existing buildings were fully architecturally articulated synagogues. The Nosach Ha'ari, still functioning today, provides an excellent example.

Former members recall the conversion of the duplex into a synagogue. The congregation originally worshipped on the ground floor. A curtain in the back divided the women from the men. The upstairs was a separate apartment. In 1947, the congregation took over the upper unit and completely renovated the building creating a typical small synagogue. The façade is symmetrical marked by a two story concrete arch with an inscribed circular window featuring a stained glass *magen david* and the exposed lateral wall was fitted with a row of stained glass windows. The entrance is punctuated by a peaked parapet decorated with a row of arches formed by brick work, a prevalent “neo-



*Former Poele Zedek now Cao Daist Temple of Montreal*

Romanesque” motif of both Montreal synagogues and churches of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Double entrance doors lead into a small vestibule. On the right, a stairway leads up to the women’s gallery created from the former second floor of the duplex. A second set of doors opens up on to the main sanctuary. A Talmudic passage (b.Berakoth 8a) calls for two doors as entrance to a synagogue which has often been interpreted as a door from the outside into the vestibule and a second door from the vestibule into the sanctuary.<sup>52</sup> The vestibule serves as a transition between the mundane and the spiritual. The lower height of the vestibule ceiling, often imposed by the floor of the gallery above, creates a sense of grandeur, even in the smallest synagogues, as the worshipper passes into the main sanctuary. The vestibule, directly aligned to the axis of *bimah* and *aron hakodesh*, introduces as well a reference to the ancient Temple and the procession of chambers leading to the Holy of Holies, the climax of which is encapsulated in the *aron hakodesh*. In this synagogue the ark is built into a niche extended from the rear of the building. A designated reader climbs the steps to the ark as the Talmud stipulates that men should go down from it.<sup>53</sup> He pushes aside the Torah curtain (*parochet*), opens the doors of the cabinet, removes the silver ornamentation, shield (*tas*), crown (*keter*) and finials (*rimonim*), and pulls away the velvet sleeve which covers the scroll. Finally placing it on the reading table of the *bimah*, the *bal koreh*, the lay reader of the Torah text, unravels the scroll to the designated weekly portion, and guiding his eyes with a silver pointer (*yad*), he begins to read the sacred text.

The focus is now on the *bimah* and the reader. These small congregations generally did not have their own clergy. Sometimes one rabbi would have an association with several small congregations, visiting them occasionally to deliver a *drash*, an



interpretation of Torah or Talmud. These rabbis would rarely receive remuneration, earning their living instead as *mohelim* or *schochtim*. Cantorial music was highly valued and sometimes a visiting cantor would draw crowds even to the small shuls. The services, however, were generally were conducted by the congregants themselves.

The sanctuary of the Nosach Haari is somber, save for sunny days when light streams into the stained glass windows. The woodwork of the ark and the traditional *bimah* is dark and richly ornamented. Both the ark and *bimah* were built by the congregation's major benefactor and president, a furniture manufacturer, Morris Gorelik. This synagogue also probably represents an average size for the congregations in this area, or what might be considered a medium sized synagogue. It seats about 200 men on the main level and about 90 women in the gallery. One can make an interesting observation about the direction of prayer in this synagogue. The direction of prayer is mandated to be towards Jerusalem. Therefore, in the west, the *aron hakodesh*, housing the Torah scrolls should be on the eastern or *mizrach* wall. Yet this injunction regarding the direction of prayer seems to have often been ignored in orienting these houses of worship. Only about a third faces east.<sup>54</sup> In the Nosach Ha'ari, however, the direction of prayer seems to have been taken quite seriously. The benches along the *mizrach* wall are reserved for the synagogue officers and face out towards the congregation. Not only does the rear of the building face east, but the *mizrach* benches have a shelf that lifts up from the back allowing the worshiper to rest his book while turning to face east during standing prayers.

In Judaism the task of study and learning is complimentary to prayer. A place for learning forms part of the interior spatial requirements of a traditional synagogue. The

basement, lined with shelves of decaying books, was once used as a study hall and retains its function as a *kiddish* room. In the main sanctuary, tables and benches line the wall in front of the *mizrach* seats. And in the rear of the sanctuary, in a corner fitted with an armoire of books, a table, and chairs, a study corner is illuminated by the filtered light of stained glass. One former member recalls the ambiance in the shul as day turned to dusk during the study sessions between the afternoon and evening prayers.

Between *mincha* and *maariv* services, there was always a period of “*lernen*.” [study] The men would sit around a table beside the *aron hakodesh*. There was a bench against the wall and chairs around it. [The rabbi] would have me perched beside him. For a kid of eleven years of age it opened up marvelous vistas. He would read the Hebrew and then translate into Yiddish and the men would argue points of law. With the announcement by one of the men that the first star was in the sky we would *davin maariv* and then go home.”<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the Nosach Haari, most of the small congregations were housed in premises that probably underwent little renovation in their transformation to a synagogue. As one walks the neighborhood today, few signs remain of what once was a synagogue in a triplex, duplex, or commercial loft. Only the occasional rare photo or the recollections of a former worshiper, provide clues as to how these buildings might have been adapted



*Former Kerem Israel*

to serve as small shuls. The building which once housed the Kerem Israel is a simple two story brick residential unit with modern rectangular windows. A photo in the hands of the Parnass family, who once owned the synagogue, reveals that a simple arch with an inscribed *magen david* once extended above the roof cornice. The name of the congregation and the date of its foundation, 1910, are engraved above the entranceway. The congregation worshipped on the ground floor while the second floor was used not as a women's gallery but as a free school for children. The Stepener Shul was housed in an attached cottage that had previously served as the fifth home of the Jewish Public Library. Photographs from the Library's archives reveal stained glass windows featuring *magen davids* on the double doors. It is reasonable to assume that the Stepener Shul maintained these glass panels. According to the current resident who purchased the building from the congregation, the second level was open to the lower level indicating that the congregation had renovated the space to form a women's gallery. The current owner retained a small section of plaster wall with a wall painting depicting a cluster of



*Former Stepener Shul*

lions which once formed a larger mural painted by the congregation.

Congregations worshipping in commercial premises probably did very little to alter the space. The furnishings, including a simple *aron hakodesh* and an equally plain *bimah*, were probably movable. These spaces may have been provided by a fellow congregant or other community member who owned the building. Such was the case with the Shevet Achim, whose congregants were allowed to worship free of rent by Abraham Ragninsky, a conscientious community leader who was then the president of the B'nai Jacob. As a result "...it was decided that because Mr. Ragninsky had done so much for us...that the name be changed to Shevet Achim d'Bet Avraham."<sup>56</sup>

Today, many former residents refer to all the small shuls in the old neighborhoods as *shtibels*. There is probably more than just a touch of nostalgia in so broadly defining all the small places of worship. Perhaps we can arrive at a more accurate social and architectural definition of a *shtibel* within the context of the physical landscape of the area at the time. *Shtibel* means small house or room. In the European context of the shtetl, a *shtibel* might have been a small free standing house or simply a place designated for prayer and study in someone's home. The combination of prayer and study in an intimate setting reserved, probably exclusively, for men is what characterize a *shtibel*. In the Hasidic tradition a *shtibel* was formed around a local charismatic *rebbe*. In the Montreal setting a *shtibel* might have been as simple as a *minyan* of men worshipping in someone's home or commercial premises. The Zerei Dath V'Daath congregation worshiped in a series of commercial and residential sites. One of their locations occupied the first floor of an attached duplex which they converted into a sanctuary and study hall with little or no alteration to the former interior configuration. The former hallway,

living room, and dining room served as the space for the sanctuary while the kitchen space was used as an afternoon chapel. A rear door led out to a small yard in which a *succah* with a retractable roof was erected during Succoth. Small as it may have been, the sanctuary had the necessary fittings of a traditional synagogue: a central *bimah* and an *aron hakodesh* on the eastern wall which was flanked by chairs for the officers, the typical honorary *mizrach* eastern seats. However, instead of rows of fixed benches, arranged from side to side, the small sanctuary was fitted with tables and benches, placed front to back. In such a configuration study partners could face each other and discuss points of law or Biblical interpretations. This indicated a dual function of *beit tefillah* (house of prayer) and *beit midrash* (house of study). Such a configuration allowed for no women's section. Within the architectural context of this neighborhood of Montreal, this could most clearly be called a *shtibel*, a small house of prayer and study which did not generally include the participation of women. Until today, this congregation continues to worship in a small converted residential building in the Cote des Neiges area, a neighborhood of subsequent migration of the Jewish community.

The Tallner Beit Hamidrash could also be considered a *shtibel*, in this case, formed in the early forties around a Hasidic rabbi, Rabbi Twersky, who was supported entirely by his congregants. A small cottage provided a residence for the rabbi and his family on the second floor with the *shtibel* on the ground floor. Ben Zion Dalfen, a former congregant, described the use and configuration of the space.

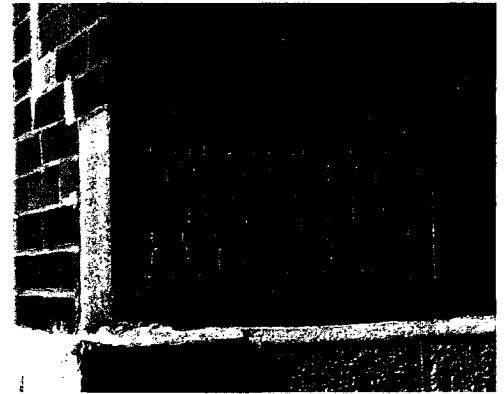
There were about 60 or 70 men congregants and a women's section behind a *mechiza* on the same floor which held about 30 women. Yet the women came rarely. The *rebitzin* would be there and maybe five or six others and during Yom Tov [there would be more]. As kids we used to play around in that section during services. The "sanctuary" was the former living room and dining room. The only thing that was posted on the wall was the *luach*- with dates of all the holidays. Nothing else adorned the interior and nothing marked the shul on the exterior.

I had my Bar Mitzvah at the Tallner shul....The reception was in the shul as well. Everyone stepped out of the shul. The shul was set up with benches and tables and they were

rearranged for the meal and the food brought out. The food was prepared in a small kitchen to the side but for the Bar Mitzvah we brought it from our house across the street and warmed it up in the shul. There was a *bimah* in the center which was easily removable. The *aron hakodesh* was by the wall facing east. So everything could be easily rearranged. The shul at its maximum could hold 100. We had a very large family and we had to limit the number of guests. Weddings were held in the shul as well and the interior rearranged in the same manner.<sup>57</sup>

The women, not included in study and minimally in worship, were called into service in the preparation of receptions and holiday meals. Unlike, the *shtible*, however, most of even the smallest synagogues had a designated women's section often created by opening the ceiling to the second floor in order to form the traditional women's gallery. Yet, by most accounts, the women's sections were not full except on the High Holidays.

The presence of ladies' auxiliaries in many of these congregations suggests, however, that synagogue life served an important social function for women and that they made a necessary contribution to the financial needs of their congregations. The still extant cornerstone of the Anshei Ukraina acknowledges the role of the ladies auxiliary in the construction of the synagogue. In traditional Judaism, the role of the woman is in the home, not just as homemaker, but as provider and facilitator of many important religious and ritual functions which are



*Cornerstone of Beit Haknesseth  
Anshei Ukraina*

fulfilled in the home. But in the case of these smaller synagogues, the home served as an extension of the space of the synagogue, providing room for functions which were handled within the confines of the larger synagogues. Thus the dining room served as conference table for board meetings and planning and social gatherings of the women's auxiliary; the kitchen and living room were reception halls, welcoming worshipers after services; and the entire house was transformed for weddings and bar mitzvahs. Shulamis Yellin recalls weddings in her Bubi's house.

The weddings of *landsliet* were celebrated in my Bubi's house. In the living room they had the *chupa*. The cooking was done in the basement kitchen. Upstairs in the bedrooms, the beds were taken out. They rented tables. The daughters were the waitresses. Everyone helped and it was great fun. This happened many times. *Yontif* was *yontif* and celebration was celebration.

As often as weddings or celebrations came about, Shabbos happened every week. Then, as today in a traditional household, the home was a swarm of activity. In the memory of Marty Bercovitch, Shabbos preparations were "fantastic."

The house was spotless. My mother would get up at five or six in the morning and throw in a load of coal in the stove. Then she would wash and wax the floors. Then she would make her gefilte fish and her *kigels* and her *latkes* and her roasted chickens. She would bake, of course, and prepare the *chulent* for Shabbos. I would have the chore of grating the horseradish. Her chicken soup was absolutely incredible with *knaidach* and *kreplach*...Even after we were all married Shabbos was still at my mother's house.

Such a meal required grating, chopping, kneading, rolling, and stuffing, all without the help of modern appliances not to mention probably hand plucking the chickens. It is no wonder that, as Mr. Bercovitch explained, while "the synagogue was half to three quarters full [on Shabbos], there were not so many women in the gallery. The women mostly stayed home." After all these preparations what woman wouldn't welcome a few hours of uninterrupted quiet before hungry family and friends assembled after services?



Thus with modest means, and in a relatively simple manner, these small synagogues, *shulelach*, and *shtibels* adapted themselves within an existing urban environment. Most were located in pre-existing buildings modified to a greater or lesser degree to accommodate the needs of a synagogue. This was not only a possible expression of modesty and a reflection of limited financial means but a practical response to the situation of a membership that moved with some frequency. Many of these congregations, like the Anshei Ozeroff, had several locations over the course of time, following their members as they moved north and west. Some, like the Shomrim Laboker, with a primary location in the southern corner of the second area of settlement, set up branches in other neighborhoods, often within the commercial premises of a congregant. The Anshei Ukraina moved as well to remain closer to its congregants. To borrow once again some key words from the speech of a leader of that congregation in 1940, we recall how they sought to “keep together” to sustain a “shul [that] would forever carry the memory” and would guard against the “Hoo-Ha” of daily life which “was ready to swallow us together with our memories and obligations to our brothers and sisters.” Smallness was not just a consequence of practicality; it was a conscious existential choice responding to a concern articulated by Rabbi Herschorn.

The orthodox shul is in danger of losing its orthodoxy and this, to a large measure, is due to the state of some of the large orthodox synagogues....The small synagogues have not been moved by the harmful influences and, thus, they remain, until today, the minor temples that they were in the Diaspora.<sup>58</sup>

While the religious and lay leaders may have been concerned with maintaining traditional Eastern European Orthodoxy, the synagogues served not only as places of worship but as gathering places where the newcomers could feel welcome, respected, and at home in their adopted country. The larger and older congregations, having aspired to



and acquired larger synagogues, were less concerned with serving a congregation narrowly defined by place of origin and more focused on their leadership role within the community at large. They signified a conscious transformation from immigrant to Canadian Jew. As Herschorn said, the tendency was to “Anglicize and modernize” and thus to Canadianize. Yet even the small *shulelach*, who clung to familiar and particular traditions, nevertheless, aided in integration by providing a spiritual, social, and cultural context in which the immigrant could flourish.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Rosenberg, “Changes in the Geographical distribution of the Jewish Population of Metropolitan Montreal in the Decennial Periods from 1901 to 1961...” (Bureau of Social and Economic Research, Canadian Jewish Congress, Montreal, 1966) p.1

<sup>2</sup> Judith Seidel, “The Development and Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal.” A master’s thesis, Department of Sociology, McGill University, 1939, p.63-64

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p108-9

<sup>4</sup> Isadore Albin, taped interview

<sup>5</sup> Edward Wolkove, taped interview

<sup>6</sup> Louis Rosenberg, “The Jewish Population of Canada - A Statistical Summary,” Reprinted from the American Jewish Yearbook, Vo. 48, 1946-47 containing statistical supplement for period 1951-54. Rosenberg qualifies the term “mother tongue as being problematic and described by the census bureau in different ways in various years ranging from the language most commonly spoken at home to the language learned in childhood but perhaps no longer even understood. Nevertheless, based on my own experience interviewing former residents of these neighborhoods, the vast majority (80%) indicated Yiddish as the language spoken at home despite the fact that large majority (over 80%?) of my interviewees were Canadian born.

<sup>7</sup> Based on the age of interviewees who recounted this memory, this might have been a custom during the 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Rosenberg, “The Jewish Population of Canada-1850-1943”

<sup>9</sup> The number of congregations may have been higher. My estimate of 31 congregations corresponds with the UdM study, however, Louis Rosenberg notes that “39 congregations in Montreal and Outremont in 1941 were concentrated in an area with in one mile radius of the corner of Fairmount and Hutchinson Streets.” Outside of this area, he lists Shaar Hashomayim, Temple Emanuel, and Shaar Zion. Sherith Israel on Stanley probably falls within the 1 mile radius. The three synagogues in the Papineau area are not included in his count as well as perhaps four other smaller congregations which would fall outside of his one mile radius. If we combine his figures with mine, and adjust for the geographic areas as defined in this study, there might have been a total of 49 congregations in Montreal with 38 in the area of greatest concentration.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Wolf, *The Synagogues of New York’s Lower East Side*, p.31

<sup>11</sup> Based on the respondents of my study, only 8.3% of the fathers and 4.7% of the sons attended synagogue daily.

<sup>12</sup> taped interview

<sup>13</sup> Canader Adler, “Our Synagogues,” Sept. 7, 1934, p.8. Translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben

<sup>14</sup> taped interview

<sup>15</sup> B.G. Sack, “Sixty years of existence of a shul,” sixtieth anniversary publication of 1936. Translated by Sara Tauben

- <sup>16</sup> Israel Medres, *Montreal of Yesterday*, Canader Adler Press, Montreal, 1947, p.28 Translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. Medres, 'Montreal of Yesterday,' p.22
- <sup>18</sup> Sara Jacobs, taped interview
- <sup>19</sup> Cantor Shimshon Hamerman, in describing the amalgamated congregations of today's Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem, indicates this designated seating for *kohanim* with regards to the Beth Itzhak, synagogue bulletin, July-August, 1980
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid. Krinsky. comments on women's galleries: pp.28-31, 51-2, 299, 363
- <sup>21</sup> Harvey Berger, Irving Halperin, Lawrence Popliger, taped interviews
- <sup>22</sup> Bernard Figler. *Canadian Jewish Profiles-Rabbi Dr. Herman Abramowitz, Lazarus Cohen, Lyon Cohen*, Ottawa, 1968
- <sup>23</sup> Hirsch Wolofdky. *Journey of My Life* (The eagle Publishing co. Ltd., Montreal, 1945) p. 80 Wolofsky was founder of the Canader Adler and vice-president of the Adath Yeshurun at the time of the dedication.
- <sup>24</sup> Thomas Hubka, "The Gwozdziec-Chodorow Group of Wooden Synagogues." "*Polin*" vol. II, edited by Anthony Polansky (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998) pp141-182
- <sup>25</sup> Tzvi Langerman. "Some Astrological Themes in the Thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra." In *Rabbi Ibn Ezra*. edited by Issador Twersky and Jay M. Harris (Harvard UP, 1993) p. 50
- <sup>26</sup> Matityahu Glazerman. *Above the Zodiac, Astrology in Jewish Thought* (Aronson, Inc., Nothvale, New Jersey, 1997)
- <sup>27</sup> According to Joe Brick, the caretaker of the synagogue.
- <sup>28</sup> Gidaliahu Michalovsky. "50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Beth Yehuda." 1940. (Private archive of Eiran Harris, Montreal.) Translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben.
- <sup>29</sup> Yehoshua Halevy Herschorn, "In Honour of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of a Small Shul-The Anshei Ozeroff." Printed in "*Congregation Anshei Ozeroff Silver Jubilee and Opening of Our Newly Erected Synagogue, 1918-1934, 5244 St. Urbain Street.*" (From the private collection of Rachel Birenbaum and Jean Zwirek, Montreal.) Translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben.
- <sup>30</sup> souvenir book honouring Rabbi Hirsch Cohen, 1940, translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben. CJCNA/VJC collection series ZB/ Hirsch Cohen
- <sup>31</sup> Percy Tannenbaum, based on notes of phone conversation
- <sup>32</sup> Yolette Mendelson, based on taped interview
- <sup>33</sup> Olive Brunner, based on taped interview
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid. souvenir booklet honouring Rabbi Hirsch Cohen, author unknown, translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben
- <sup>35</sup> The minute book of the Anshei Ozeroff is in the private collection of the daughter, Jean Zwirek and widow, Rachel Birenbaum of the former secretary, Shlomo (Sam) Birenbaum. They preserved it as a memento to Sam who passed away suddenly and unexpectedly upon returning from a meeting planning the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The minutes were translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben and Rochelle Ferdman.
- <sup>36</sup> S. Birenbaum, "A Survey of Seventeen Years of Involvement in the Shul" *Congregation Anshei Ozeroff Silver Jubilee and Opening of Our Newly Erected Synagogue, 1918-1943, 5244 St. Urbain Street*. From the private collection of Rachel Birenbaum and Jean Zwirek. Yiddish texts translated by Sara Tauben
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid. *Anshei Ozeroff*, D. Roseman, "Message From the President"
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid. *Anshei Ozeroff*, R.I.K. Goldblum, executive director of Kerem Kayemet, Canada
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid. *Anshei Ozeroff*, Rabbi Eliezar Lipha Shpira, "The Main Purpose of a Synagogue"
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid. *Anshei Ozeroff*, Rabbi Yehoshua Halevy Herschorn, "In Honour of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of a Small Shul"
- <sup>41</sup> Richard Cohen. "Urban Visibility and the Biblical Vision- Jewish Culture in Western and Central Europe in the Modern Age." *Cultures of the Jews*. Edited by David Biale (Schocken Books, New York, 2002) p.748
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 752
- <sup>43</sup> Carol Herselle Krinsky. *Synagogues of Europe-Architecture, History, Meaning*. Dover Publications, New York, 1985, p.63
- <sup>44</sup> Raphael Mahler. *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, Their confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Translated from Yiddish by Eugene Orenstein, Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem, 1985
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., quoted on p. 135
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., quoted on p.126

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., quoted on p. 148

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Guterman. "The Congregation of the Great Synagogue in Warsaw-Its Changing social Composition and Ideological Affiliations." *Polin-Studies of Polish Jewry*. Edited by Antony Polansky. Volume II, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998, p.113

<sup>49</sup> Krzysztof Stefanski. "The Synagogues of Lodg." *Polin-Studies of Polish Jewry*. Edited by Antony Polansky. Volume II, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998, p. 156-7

<sup>50</sup> Dominique Jarrase. *Synagogues*, Société Nouvelle Adam Bris, Paris, 2001  
English version, Vilo International, Paris, 2001, P.147-8

Krinsky, p.148

<sup>51</sup> Dominique Jarrase. *Synagogues*, Société Nouvelle Adam Bris, Paris, 2001

English version, Vilo International, Paris, 2001, p.148 quote of president of the congregation, J. Landau

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Krinsky. p.31

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.52

<sup>54</sup> I arrived at this estimate by concluding that the *aron hakodesh* would usually be on the wall opposite the entrance which faces the street. Therefore, only buildings on the east side of the street would result in a direction of prayer facing east.

<sup>55</sup> Bill Surkis, taped interview

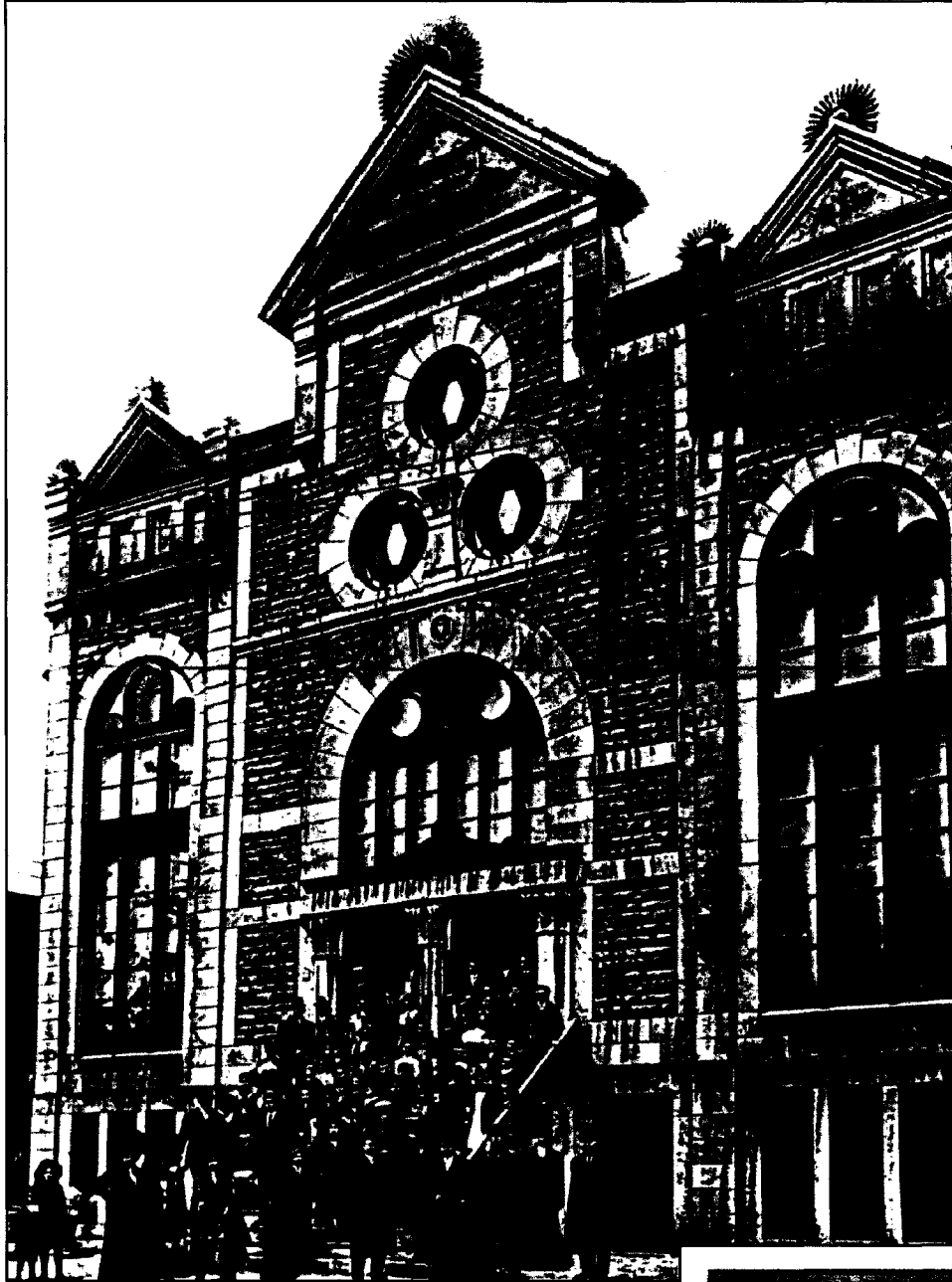
<sup>56</sup> Nathan Rosenoff, 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary speech, Allan Raymond collection, Archives of the JPL/Religion/Shevet Achim

<sup>57</sup> Ben-Zion Dalfen, taped interview

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. *Anshei Ozeroff*, Rabbi Yehoshua Halevy Herschorn, "In Honour of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of a Small Shul"

**Shaare Tefilah, before 1925**

129 Rue Milton Ouest



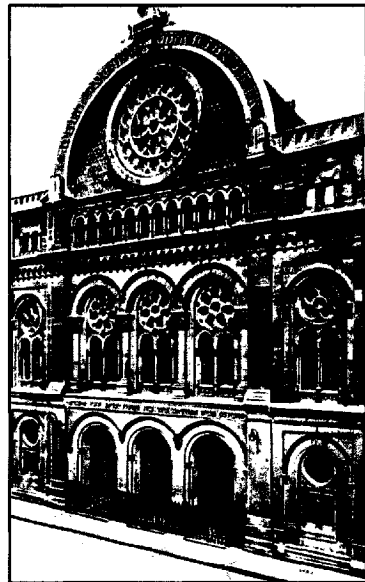
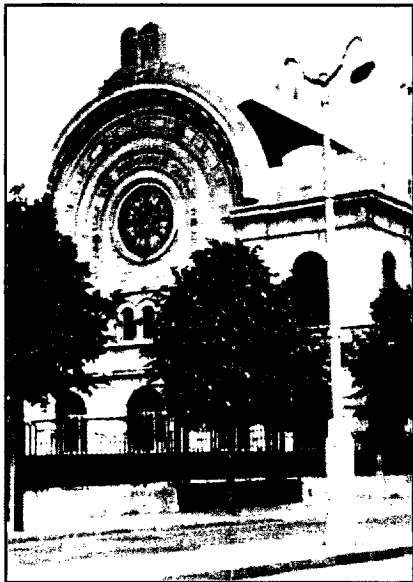
**Adath Yeshurun, 1917**  
4459 Rue St. Urbain



די נייע עדת ישורון שוהל

Honorary Officers and the Executive Board  
of the new  
**ADATH YESHURUN CONGREGATION**  
Founded in 1916

**B'nai Jacob, 1918**  
172 Avenue Fairmont

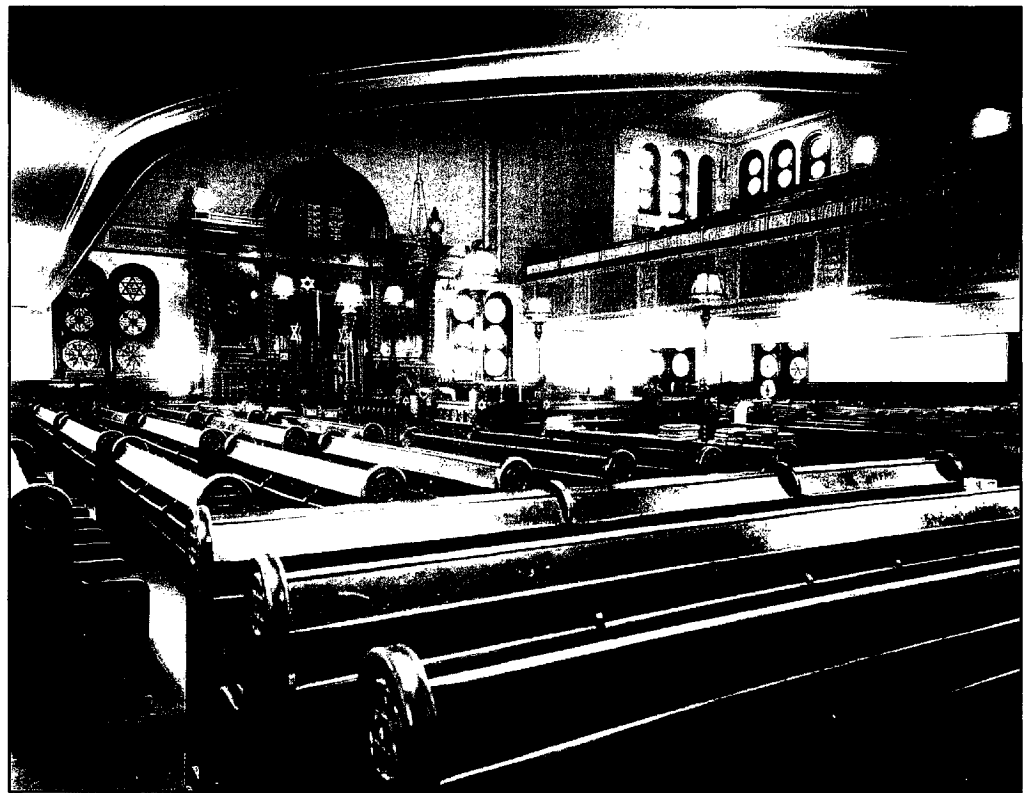


Nancy Synagogue, 1861

Rue de la Victoire, Paris 1861-74

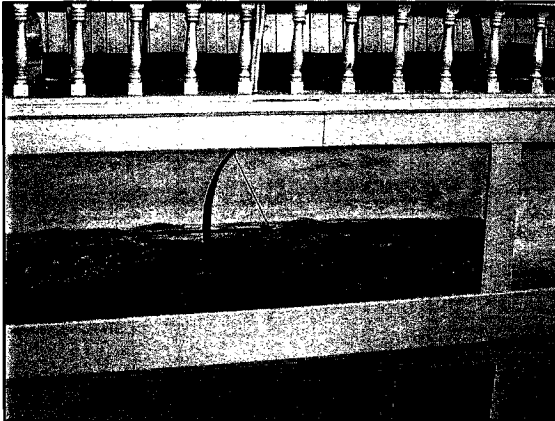
Both designed by Jewish architect A.P. Aldrophe

**B'nai Jacob, 1918**  
172 Avenue Fairmont

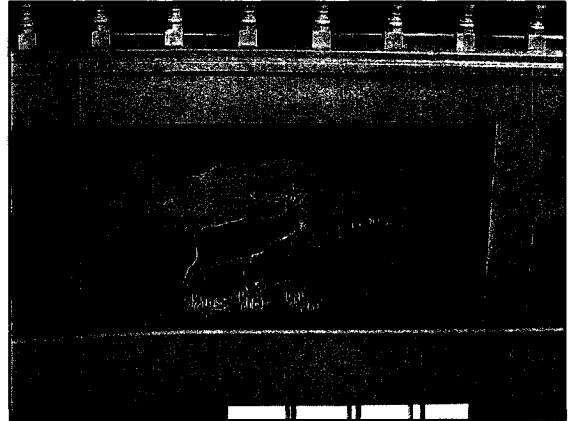




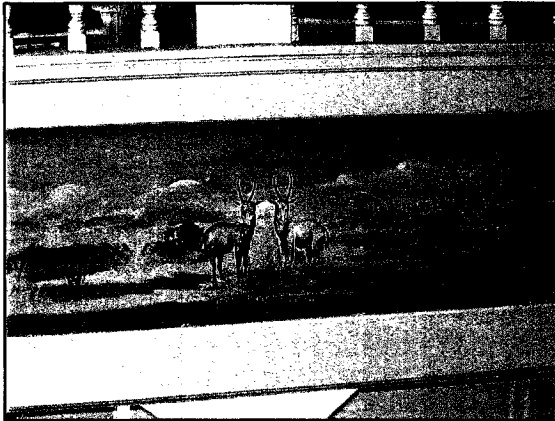
Temple Solomon. Montreal



Sagittarius, *keshet*, Kislev



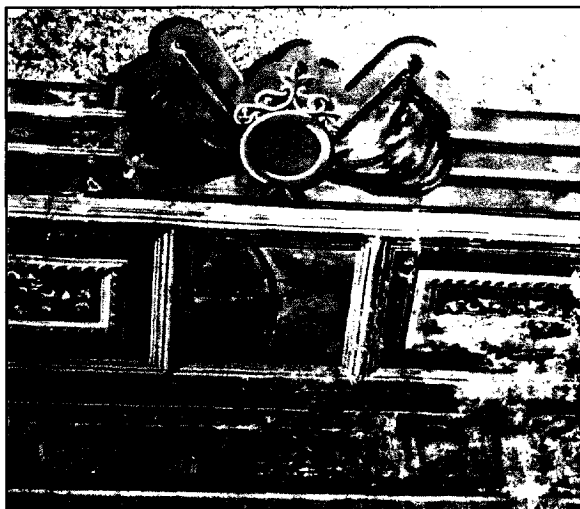
Virgo, *bitulah*, Elul



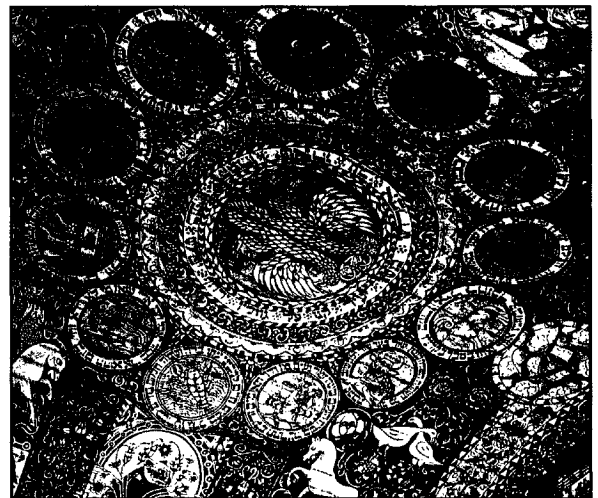
Gemini, *tiumim*, Sivan



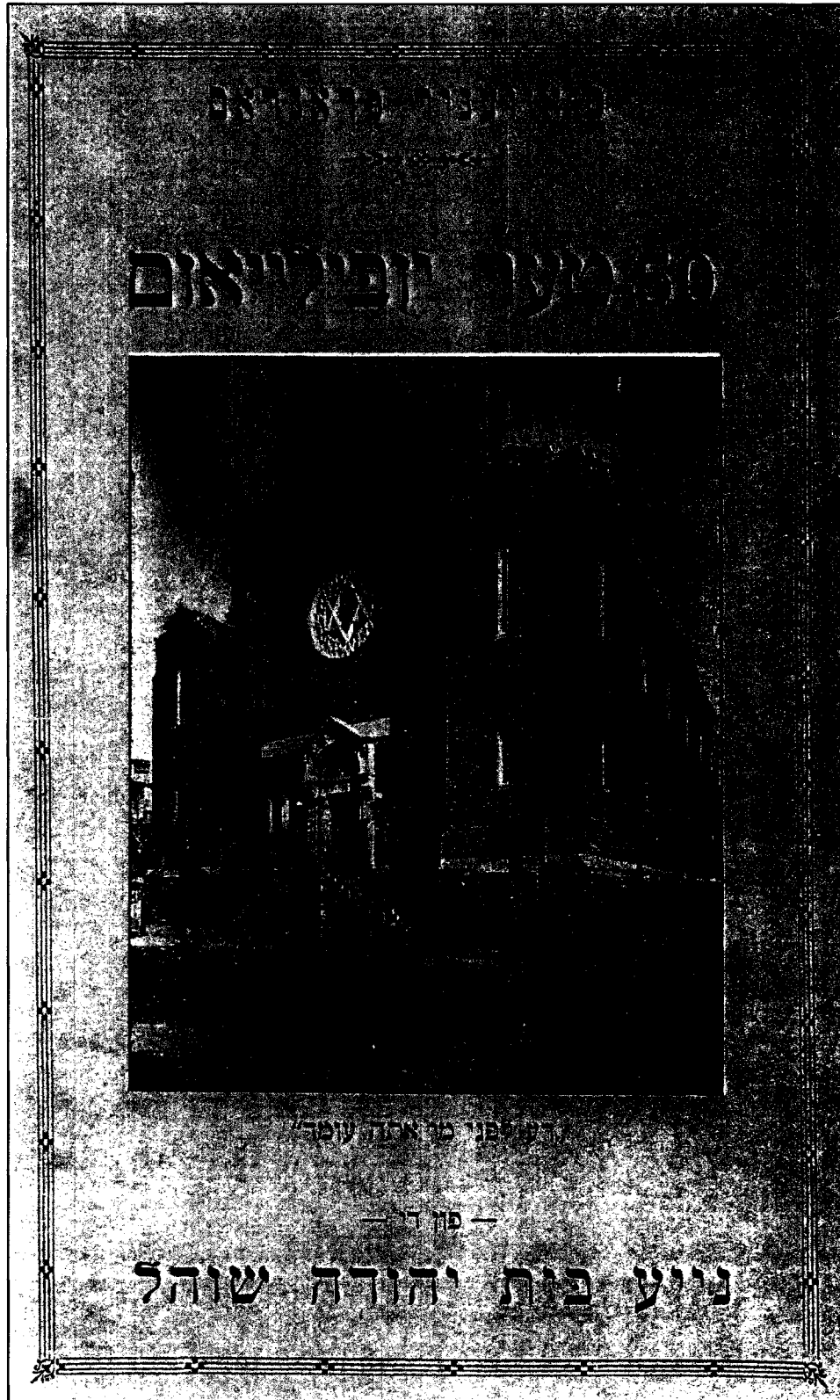
Taurus, *shor*, Ivar



Meiah Sherim. Jerusalem



Wooden Synagogue, Poland



Souvenir program of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Beth Yehuda

**Beth Yehuda, 1923**  
214 Avenue Duluth Est

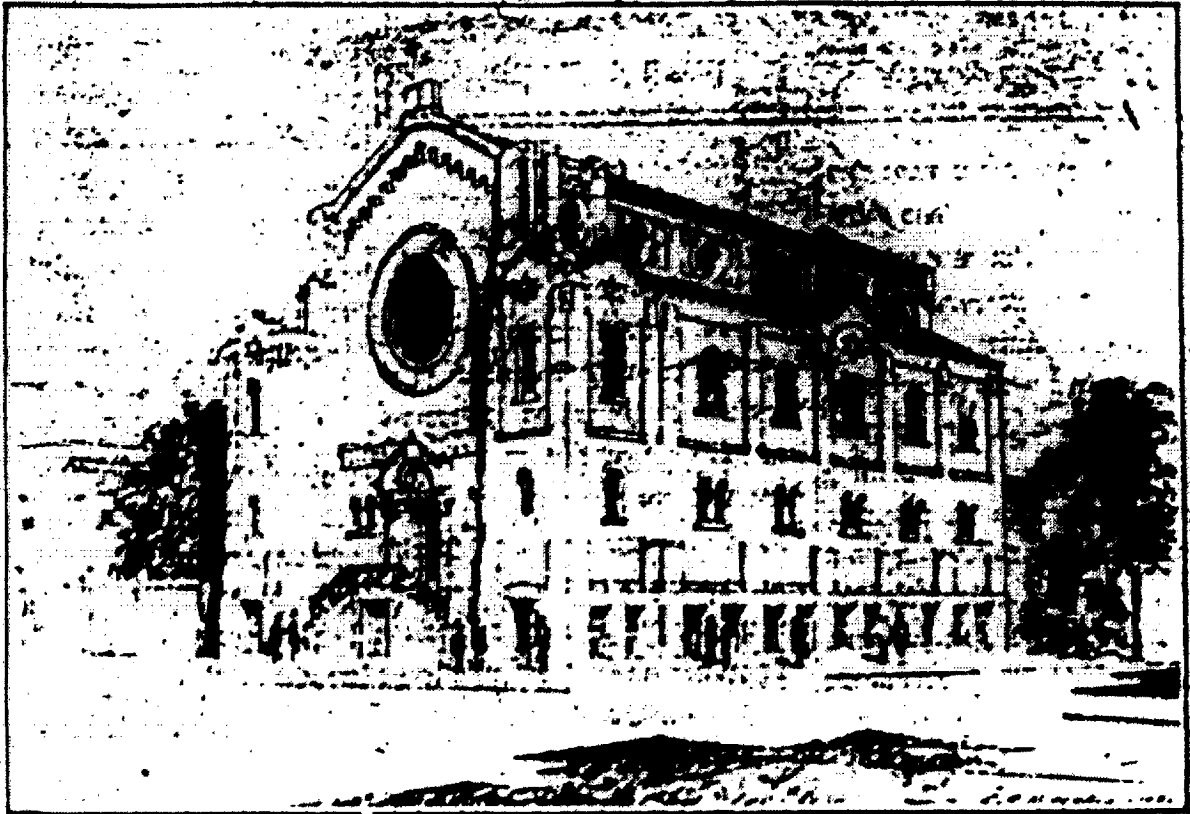
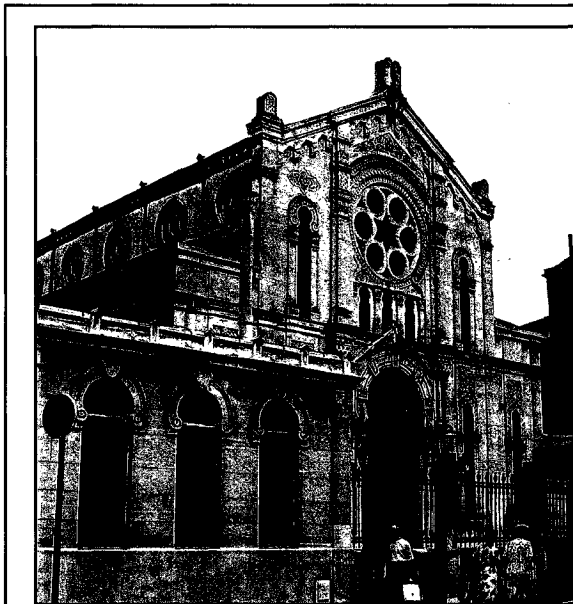
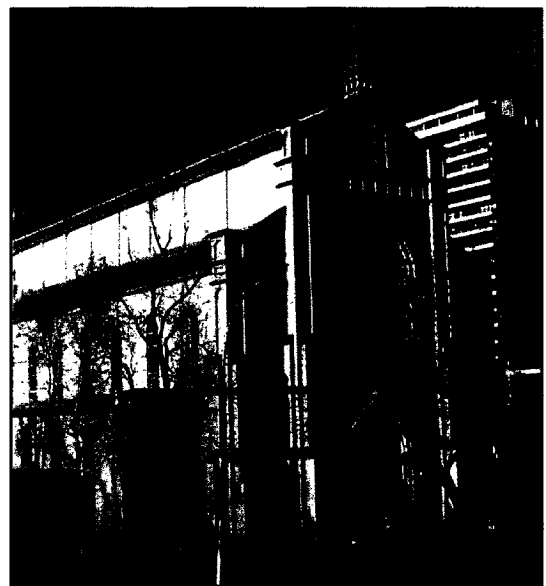


Illustration of proposed building announcing selling of seats for the High Holidays



Synagogue in Rheims, France



Convent-church in Montreal

Anshei Ozeroff, 1943

5244 Rue St. Urbain

CONGREGATION ANSHEI OZEROFF

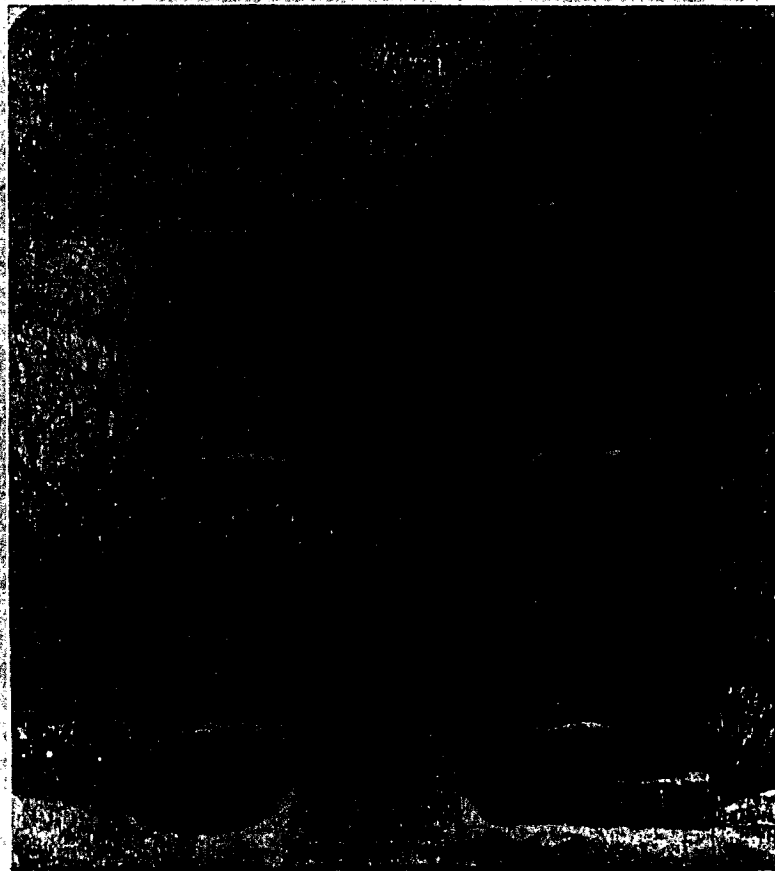
*Silver*



*Jubilee*

AND

Opening of Our Newly Erected Synagogue



5244 ST. URBAIN STREET

1918

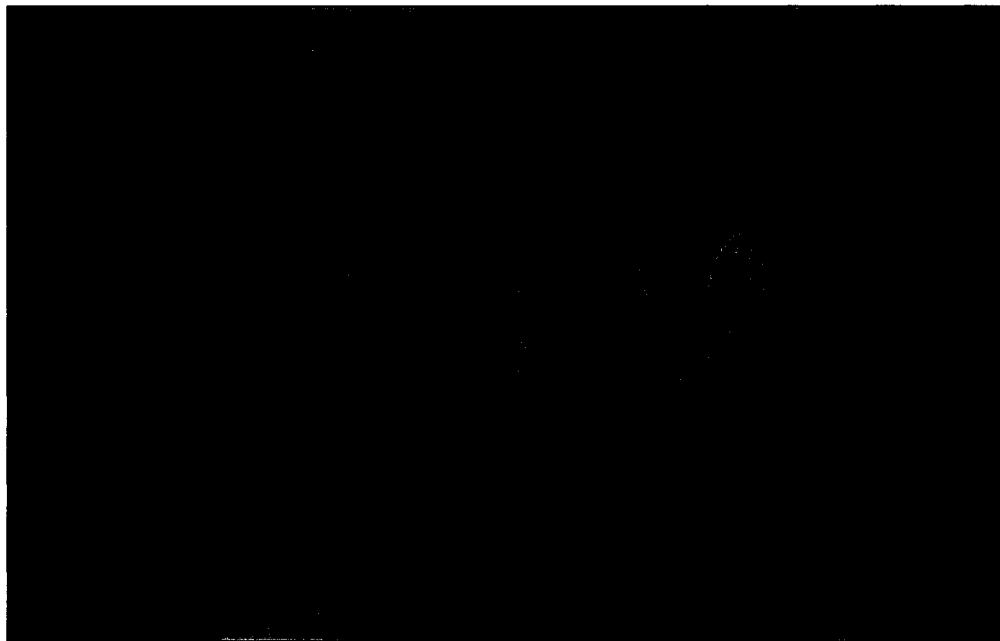


1943

**Anshei Ozeroff, 1943**  
Rue 5244 Rue St. Urbain



The former Anshei Ozeroff, one of a twin in a series of row houses,  
now houses the Centre Sri Sathya Said du Quebec.



A group of congregants stands in front of the synagogue entrance door which  
is marked by the name of the congregation and several Stars of David.

# הרשאות

הרשאות דתן 26-טן/ נאוועמבער 1930  
 דינסטיג פרעגט זי לוי אונד אפגעבאלטן געווארן אבארט  
 מיטן און די אגלעוואר לוי 3833 מינעלויניג סטריט בורק די הארט געלויבט  
 וויס ברענדען פון פאלקמער אנווענדער, די איכאל שארף קלארע צינדער  
 די געלויבטן די זאמלונגן די קרין די געלויבט די אויבאכער און די אגלעוויניג  
 סעקרעטער די בירגער קאלאמערס אונד קעזעלשטיאט געווארן.  
 אונטערזוכט די געלויבטע פון די געלויבטע, אונד און די געלויבטע ווערן  
 פונקט געלויבט ווערן אונטערזוכט. נאכה קייט אונטערזוכט, קלארע צינדער  
 די 18 פונקט פון די געלויבטע.

# געלויבטע

1. די לוי געלויבטע די נאמא געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר און די געלויבטע  
 נישט אונטערגעבן ווערן און די געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן.
2. די געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן  
 קענען געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן.
3. די געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן  
 אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן.
4. די געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן  
 אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן.
5. די געלויבטע אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן  
 אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן אונד אגלעוואר אונד אונטערגעבן.

Page from minute book with revision of constitution

**Poele Zedek, 1910**  
7161 Rue St. Urbain

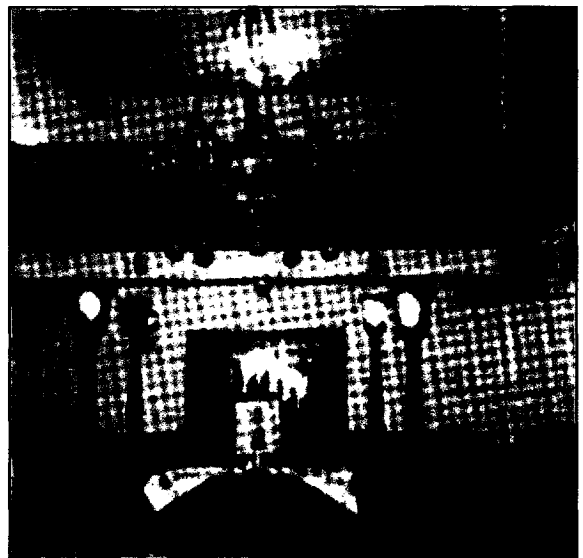
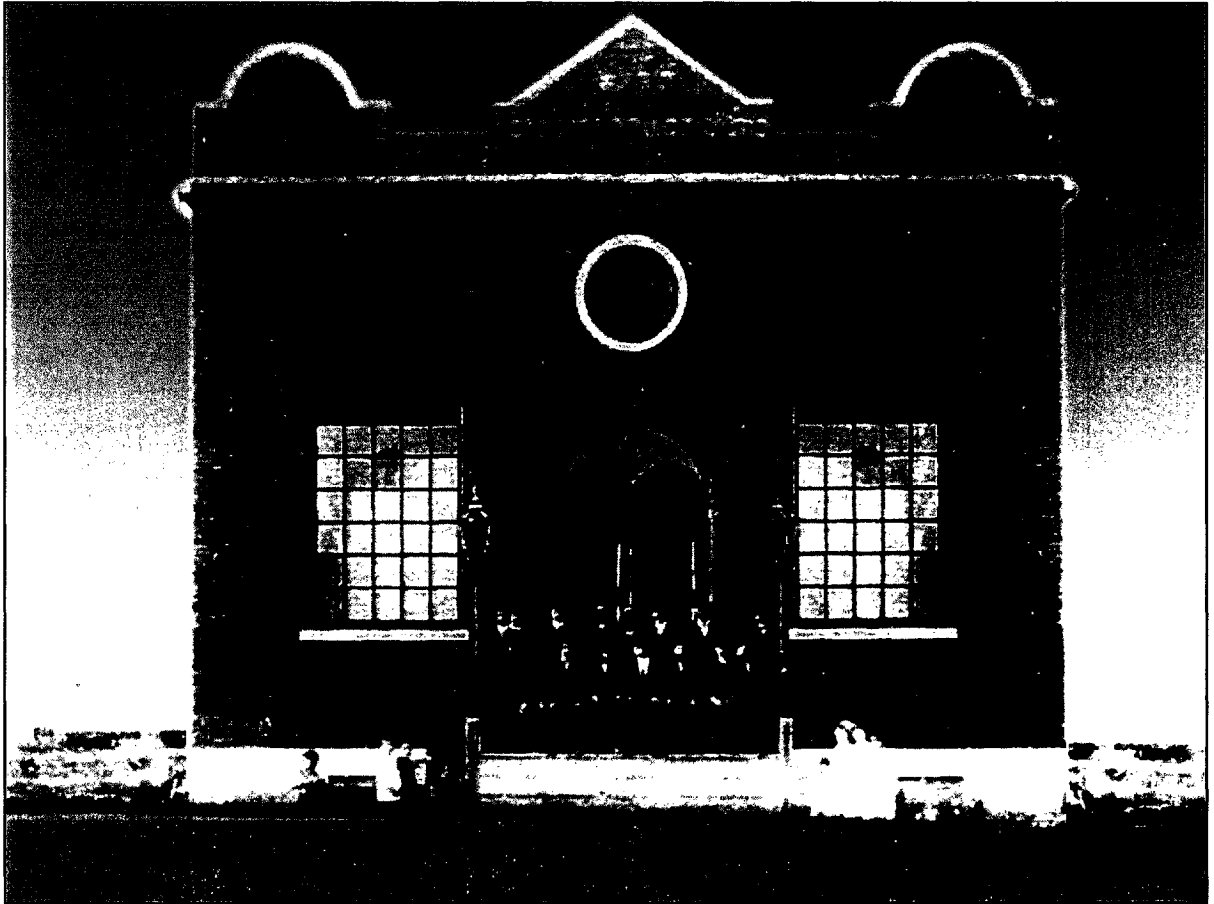


Simulated Shabbath Service as  
seen in stills from the movie  
“Enemies-a Love Story”



Tiferth Jerusalem, 1911

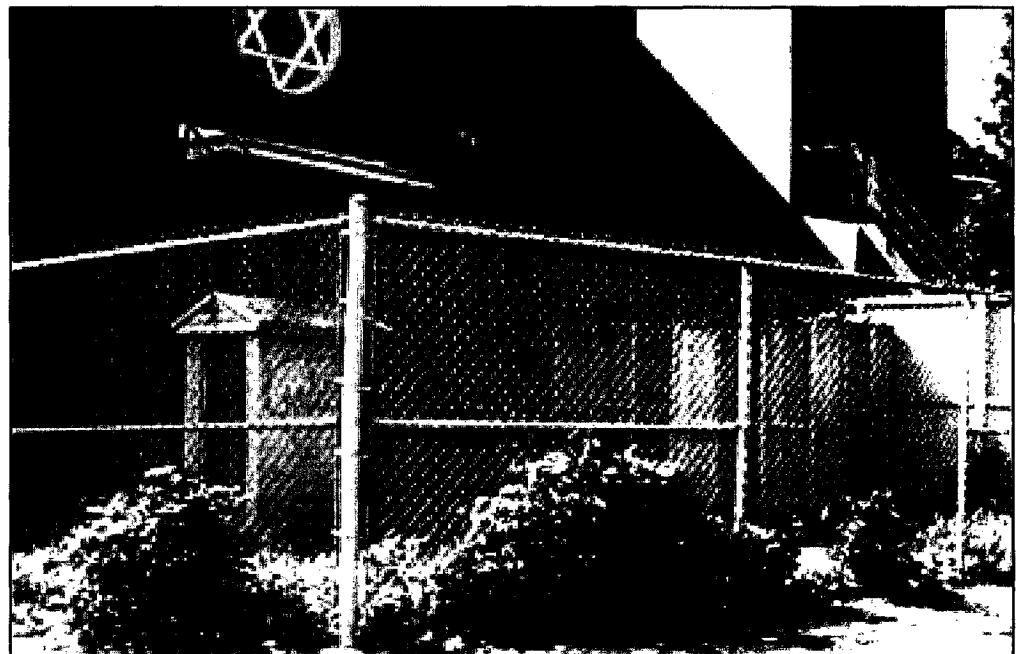
6627 Rue Cartier



View looking towards entrance

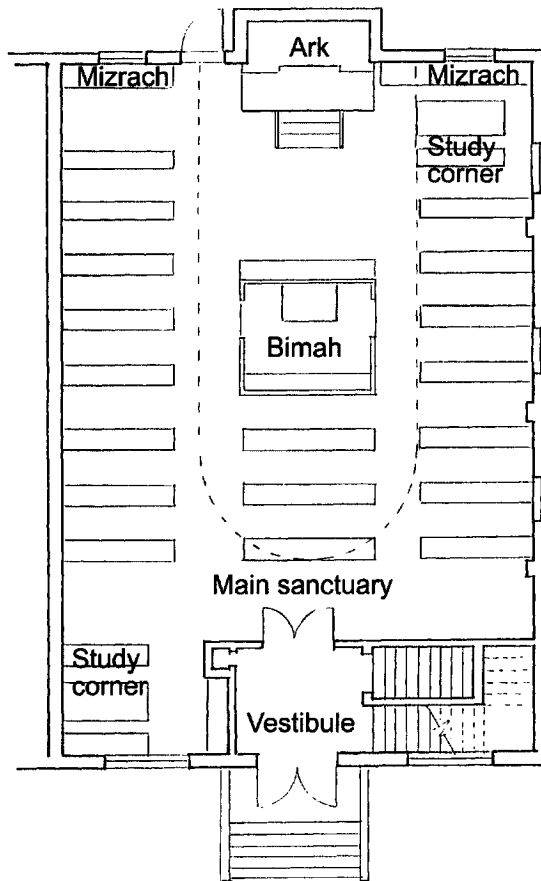


**Nosach Ha'ari II, 1947**  
5538 Rue Jeanne Mance



Rear of synagogue with the extension holding the Torah Ark and the temporary structure for the holiday of *Succoth*.

Nosach Ha'ari II, 1947  
5538 Rue Jeanne Mance

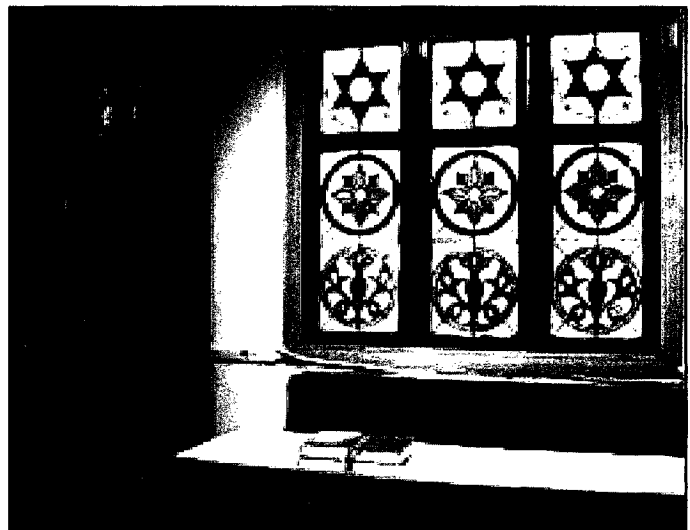




Max Rothman, caretaker of the synagogue, leans against a table, which serves both banquet and study functions, while glancing at the old *aron hakodesh* saved from the Ahavas Shalom congregation.

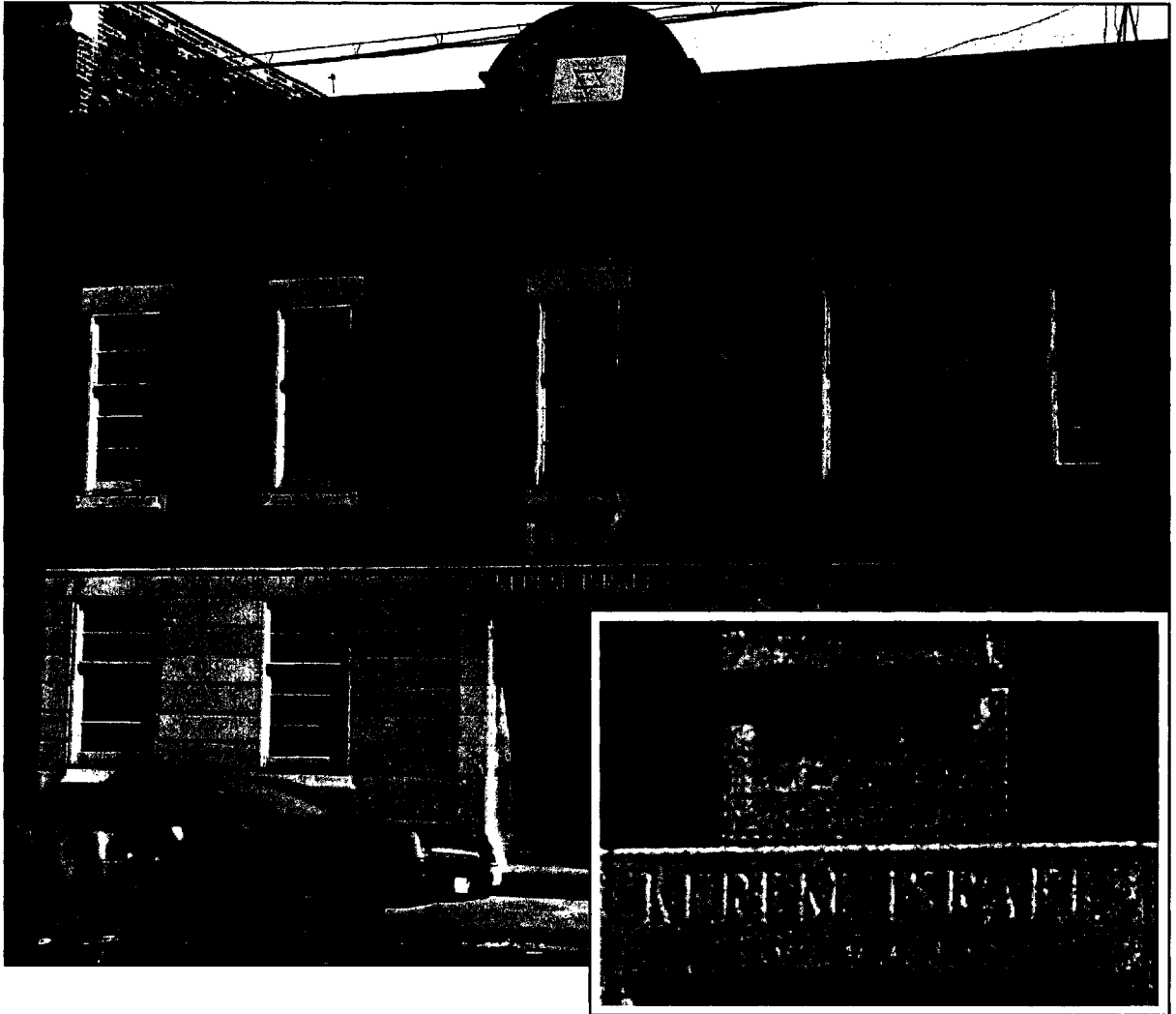


The retractable reading ledge along the *mizrach* wall



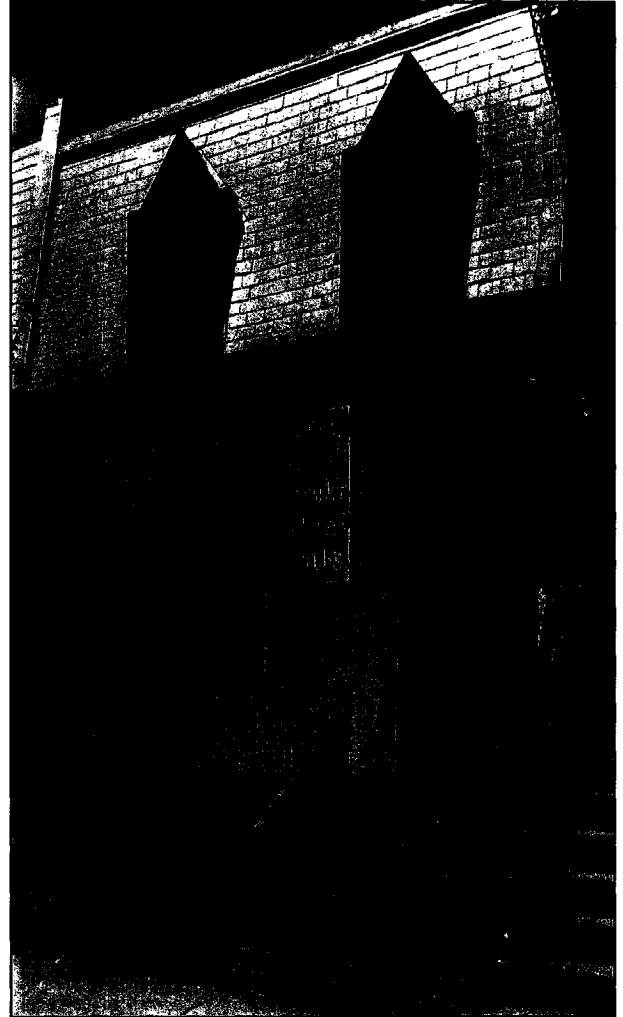
A cabinet of books and a table with benches make up the study corner illuminated by stain glass in the rear of the sanctuary

Kerem Israel, 1910  
4335 Rue St. Dominique



**Stepener Shul**  
4115 Rue St. Urbain

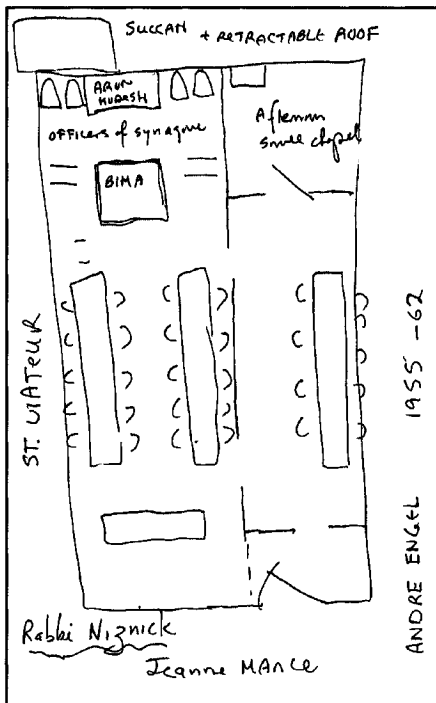
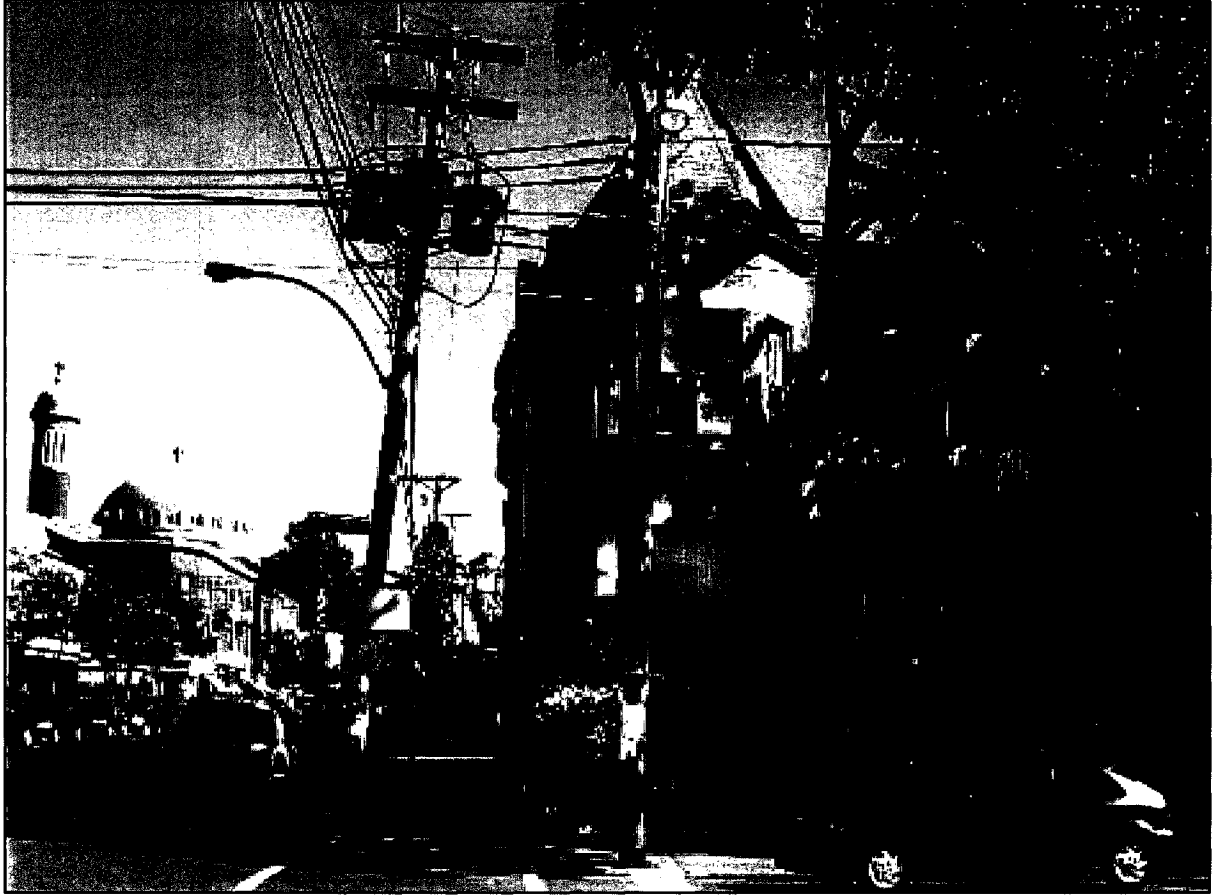
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Remnant of original  
wall mural



**Zerei Dath Vedaath, 1940**  
 5457 Rue Jeanne Mance

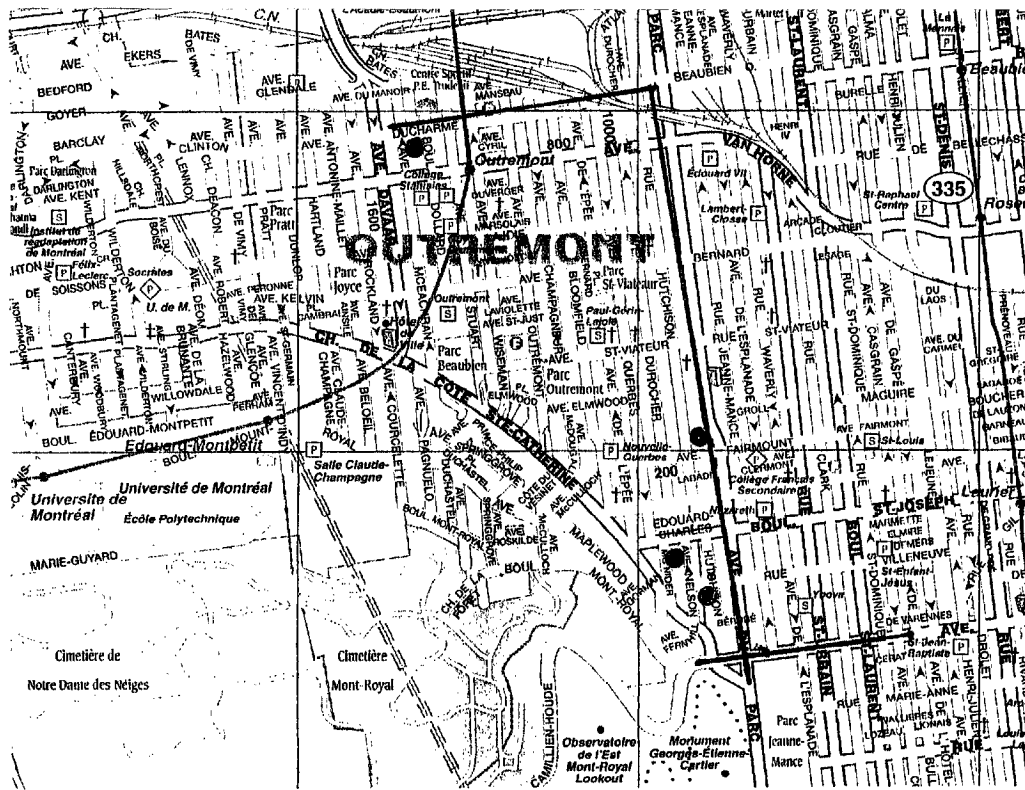


The lower floor of this corner triplex once housed the former synagogue. The monumental St. Michael's Church looms in the background.

This floor plan sketch was drawn from memory by Andre Engel, a congregant in the years 1955-1962.

## Chapter III- The Synagogues of the “High Windows”

### Synagogues of Area IV-circa 1940



In the first years after the great world war, the traditionally rich Jews, the uptowners, lost their privileged status in the community. Many of the downtowners, the former immigrants, had benefited from the war time prosperity and also became well off, some of them even very wealthy.

Some of them moved to Outremont, which was as well (as Westmount) a fine residential neighborhood. Soon a dense Jewish neighborhood developed there. New streets with beautiful homes were quickly built where the former downtowners now resided who had become lucky in business and became quite well off.<sup>1</sup>

Israel Medres

In proportion to [the second and third] areas [this] area forms a smaller percentage of the total population whose residents are mostly well to do, some even very economically successful. Ethnically, Russian is still the largest group, but Roumanian Jews comprise the second largest group. Most of the younger population is Canadian born.

There are far more single dwellings and modern duplexes and apartment houses here. Practically all the streets are tree-lined, the houses fronted with lawns. Their streets are much freer from papers and refuse, better lighted and more passable in winter than those east of Hutchinson. The small stores - candy and cigarette stores, ice cream parlours, beauty salons, and the like are characteristically cleaner and more attractively appointed than in the other two areas.<sup>2</sup>

Judith Seidel

Three of the four synagogues which we will examine in the area bordering Outremont and into Outremont proper do indeed have high windows. But the phrase in Yiddish is not architectural but metaphorical and refers to an area of auspicious buildings. With a knowing look and a certain intonation of voice, the expression “*Er is fin dee hoche fensters*”- “He is from the high windows”- would describe the social status of a person living in such an area. Three of the synagogues moved to this area within a three year period from 1926-1929 purchasing former churches. They were located within blocks of each other bordering on the very corner of the Outremont municipality in order to serve a burgeoning community. The fourth synagogue was built in 1940 in the heart of Outremont to serve as both synagogue and community centre for a, by then, well established community.

### **From Church to Synagogue**

When the Beth David purchased a former church in 1929 at the south east tip of Outremont it positioned itself to serve this growing Jewish population. In relocating from Chenneville Street the Beth David took on many new members in addition to those who had

### *St. Giles Presbyterian Church*





followed the congregation. Lawrence “Sonny” Popliger was a young boy at the time of the move. His father, a lawyer, facilitated the purchase of the building and served as the synagogue’s president for several years. His grandfather was a member of the Adath Yeshurun, a smaller and older shul built on St. Urbain in the second area of settlement in 1916.

The Cheneville St. synagogue was comparable to the Adath Yeshurun in that they felt older and attracted an older congregation. The move to St. Joseph brought younger members. The Adath Yeshurun was my grandfather’s shul. The Beth David was my father’s shul.<sup>3</sup>

The Beth David differed as well from the Adath Yeshurun and other traditional synagogues in the layout of the interior space. The building itself, the former St. Giles Presbyterian Church, was probably little altered in its transformation to a synagogue. Only a plaque over the entranceway, probably featuring the tablets of the Ten Commandments, served to indicate the metamorphosis from church to synagogue. A traditional section for the women was adapted from the pre-existing balconies and supplemented by a section in the rear of the sanctuary. The greatest divergence from the arrangement of a traditional synagogue was in the elimination of a separate *bimah*.

Only blocks away, the Chevra Kadisha congregation, its original building having been destroyed by fire in 1920, finally found another permanent home in 1927, purchasing and renovating the former Fairmount Methodist Church Annex. This building underwent significant modification in its conversion to a synagogue. The side wings were raised to create a second level for a women’s gallery. The columns supporting the gallery are still intact and reveal a decorative detail that was no doubt part of the synagogue renovations. The lotus capital of the columns is similar to that seen in photos of the original Shearith Israel on Cheneville. The entire peaked roof was removed, probably in the process of creating sufficient height for the second level, and the peaked parapet

changed to an arch following the curve of the central window. A concrete Star of David in relief marked the building as a synagogue. An adjacent building was adjoined by a hall to the main building and served as a residence for the *chazen sheini* (the associate cantor) who was also the building superintendent. There was a room reserved for meetings and the hall served as a daily chapel. The concrete plaque, which most certainly originally represented the tablets of the Ten Commandments, still marks the entrance of this annex. A double-sided stairway was built in the front creating a new central entrance way. Despite all these very significant renovations, the interior layout of the main level was not altered to make way for the traditional central *bimah*. Thus while in the one case, a former church underwent little modification, in the other, major renovations were undertaken to transform a church to a synagogue. Yet both congregations chose not to install the traditional central *bimah*. This suggests that the elimination of this feature is the result of a modernizing trend in synagogues and not a practical consideration of renovation.

In both of these synagogues a reading table was installed on the platform of the original altar space, an innovation established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Reform movement. The proper placement for the *bimah* had been suggested by Maimonides in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and reinforced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Joseph Caro, the author of the legal code, the *Shulchan Aruch* and confirmed by the commentator of the code, Moses Isserles. The *bimah* was to be near the center of the sanctuary so as not to imitate Christian placement of the altar next to pulpit and to locate it in the midst of the congregation. This precept was liberally interpreted, as in Sephardic and Italian synagogues where the *bimah* was in the rear of the sanctuary.<sup>4</sup> However, it was the Reform movement that removed

the *bimah* entirely from the floor space of the sanctuary, placing it on a stage next to the ark. Such an arrangement diverts the focus of worship from the congregation to the clergy. It confirms the status of the rabbi and cantor as leaders in prayer removing the function from the lay prayer leaders. In traditional Judaism, a rabbi, as scholar, serves the community as the authority on Jewish law. His role as communal leader may have been a function of his personality but not necessarily a function of his position. The Reform movement reinvented the rabbi as preacher and leader of a synagogue congregation. The primary role of the Reform rabbi in the synagogue was to deliver “edifying” sermons emphasizing the moral and ethical content of Jewish tradition. Such a role required the rabbi to be physically front and center. The elimination of the central *bimah* in the context of an Orthodox synagogue must signal a similar change in the perception of the role of the rabbi. Another important physical feature distinguished the Beth David, the full scale organ inherited from the church. Organ music was as well introduced by the Reform movement in order to create the ambiance of tranquility and spirituality experienced by worshipers in churches. The Beth David, nevertheless an orthodox congregation did not play the organ on Shabbath and holidays which is forbidden by Jewish law. The deep tones of the organ lent a desirable aura of formality to weddings held at the synagogue.<sup>5</sup>

The basement of the Beth David had multi-functional spaces, a large and small hall and a daily chapel. The facilities, served by a fully equipped kitchen, attracted many bar mitzvahs and frequent weddings. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebration, the sisterhood is credited with having equipped and furnished appropriate facilities.

With this opportunity we must make note of the wonderful work of the ladies’ auxiliary in the Beth David shul, that is already functioning for ten years and has an outstanding record of involvement...They carried out work generally not undertaken by men. They equipped the dining

room, the kitchen, and bought two full sets of dishes, to provide for all our celebrations, banquets, weddings, bar mitzvahs, etc. Thus the well equipped and comfortable position of the synagogue made the Beth David synagogue a Jewish center in Montreal. Thanks to the current president, Mrs. H. Aronovitch, together with the corporation of all the women of the auxiliary, donating all their energies and talents to the auxiliary, the synagogue has made considerable progress in gaining a greater and greater importance in Jewish social life.<sup>6</sup>

“Sonny” Popliger’s bar mitzvah, in 1932, was not unlike today’s affairs, minus the DJ. The three hundred guests, who attended a dinner in the basement reception hall of the synagogue, included judges, lawyers, and politicians, non-Jews among them. Also like today’s youth, Sonny received everything he needed to outfit a “sports minded” young man: volley balls, soccer balls, baseballs, mitts, and hockey equipment. Such an event stands in contrast to the *bar mitzvahs* in the smaller shuls where the ceremony would be followed by a simple lunch at home in the company of close family and friends.

The long held goal of the congregation to establish a “modern and progressive synagogue to meet the current demands and aims and to be located in a section of the city to which the members had moved”<sup>7</sup> was achieved through the acquisition of this building. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1938 was a celebration of this accomplishment and the present status of the synagogue. It is not surprising that Rabbi Abramovitch of the Shaar Hashomayim and Rabbi Bender of the Shearith Israel, were invited to bring greetings on the occasion of this historic milestone. In tribute to the Beth David, Rabbi Abramovitch notes that “loyalty to Canadian ideals” did not compromise “Jewish tradition.”<sup>8</sup> Though tribute is paid to the founders, the officers stress the recent achievements and draw from the past that which corresponds to their image of the present.

The jubilee of the Beth David synagogue is an event which all Montreal Jewry must take part in, as this is a “holiday” for the entire Jewish community, a “holiday” in which a half century of Jewish life is reflected, a half century of Jewish activity and progress in this metropolis of the Dominion of Canada.<sup>9</sup>

The fathers and founders of the Beth David Congregation of Montreal were men of light and leading...They faced and conquered the spiritual perils of prosperity. These men were Jewish Canadians in the best sense of the term.

The Beth David congregation when first organized 50 years ago set for itself the task of introducing into the community a sense of dignity in a traditional religious service and gradually evolved an educational program to include every member of every family, particularly stressing a point of view of Jewish life which would look forward to an integrated Canadian Jewish community instead of perpetuation of distinctions based upon lands of origin.

We dedicate this golden book to the small but energetic membership who laid the foundation for the present large congregation in Outremont, who at great personal sacrifice made possible the tremendous potential energy for good that is evidenced by the purchase of this beautiful edifice in which the congregation is now housed.

Our present generation, thanks to their splendid efforts, is more fully qualified both intellectually and spiritually to transmit this great Jewish heritage to generations that are to come and to leave with them as great an inspiration as we have received.<sup>10</sup>

The concern voiced by the president regarding “the spiritual perils of prosperity” was perhaps not unlike that of the smaller shuls conscious of the danger of “daily life with its ‘*Hoo-Ha*’.” However, the president’s response to the challenge of modernity was not strict adherence to convention, but appropriate change which he reported as being inherent in the congregation from its inception. A shul that is “modern and progressive,” can not at the same time be entirely traditional. Such words were signifiers of change, the banners of liberalizing tendencies such as the emerging Conservative movement in the States. The Beth David strove to introduce and maintain “a sense of dignity in a traditional religious service.” This implies a certain decorum, emphasized in Reform Judaism, a quiet and unified manner of prayer that differed from the small shuls where worshipers mumbled audibly and *shockeled* visibly, each at his own pace.

The comments of the congregational rabbi are considerably more restrained than those of the lay leaders. Though the rabbi does credit the Beth David with contributing towards keeping alive a “religious sentiment” and a general “loyalty to Judaism,” he bemoans “a laxity in the observance of our rituals [and] a marked lack of knowledge of our sacred heritage...” He attributes these failings generally and not specifically to his

own congregation, but he suggests that the Jubilee marks not only an occasion for acknowledging “progress and achievement” but also an opportunity to address “shortcomings.”<sup>11</sup> The author of these comments, Rabbi S. (Shia) Herschorn, is the very same Yehoshua Halevi Herschorn who would extol the merits of the small shul in the anniversary booklet of the Anshei Ozeroff in 1943.

The tendency in some synagogues [is] to Anglicize the shul, to modernize it...Instead of worship, services are held. Instead of a Jewish word from a holy text, we will hear sermons in English and book reviews. .. [W]e can not create Jewishness through bible-stories and sleigh rides.<sup>12</sup>

The words “services,” “sermons,” “sleigh rides,” and “bible-stories” are transliterated directly from English into Yiddish adding an obvious note of cynicism. It seems odd to parallel “bible-stories,” a function of religious education, with “sleigh rides,” clearly a mere recreational activity. But neither “bible stories” nor educational programs nor even the free Sunday school, which the officers of the Beth David recount among their proudest achievements, fulfill the function of traditional learning of Torah and Talmud to which the small shuls express a commitment. Such learning focuses on the rabbinic interpretive tradition and reasserts generations of accumulated rabbinic authority challenged by modernity. Education, it would seem, as Rabbi Herschorn wrote in tribute to the Anshei Ozeroff, is that which happens naturally in the small shulelach, “where a child can still see his father’s eyes well with tears at a Rosh Hashonah prayer.”<sup>13</sup>

In honour of the anniversary of his own synagogue, Rabbi Herschorn dedicated his most important remarks not to his congregants, nor to the history of the congregation, but to the historic legacy of Rumanian rabbis. The Beth David is known as the “Rumanishe Shul” indicating “a love and respect for Rumanian Jewry because this Jewish community radiated a strong Jewish commitment and contributed a great deal to

the development of Torah [learning] and piety and religious and rabbinic literature.” He praised and illustrated the innovative role of the sages of Rumanian Jewry who made significant contributions to the field of *Halachic* interpretation through the inclusion of *Agadah* in understanding the tenets of Jewish law. This topic provided him the opportunity of demonstrating his own erudition as well as his ongoing role in this theological dialogue.

I am writing these remarks on the basis of the literature that I have at my disposal. I am in written communication with the learned rabbis of Rumania and I know that even today there are important Torah authorities in Rumania who continue to enrich rabbinic literature. One of them, the learned R. Yoel Katz, has recently published an important work of questions and answers in which he has included one of my *responsa*, and I may add, that our correspondence regarding *Halachah* has been one of great personal pleasure.<sup>14</sup>

In light of the contrasts and comparisons between the “uptown” and “downtown” community and their respective houses of worship, we might consider the Beth David to be a sort of “hybrid” synagogue and congregation. Located in a neighborhood that began to approximate the uptown neighborhoods of Westmount, it saw itself as the focal point of the surrounding community, both religiously and socially. Its officers expressed a commitment to religious tradition at the same time as they sought to represent modernity and progress. Its interior layout abandoned aspects of the traditional synagogue. While they still identified with their Rumanian origins, they envisioned themselves as representing a mix of all Canadian Jewry, an objective which may not as yet have been accomplished. An ad announcing a cantorial concert may serve to exemplify this duality of purpose and character. The concert is billed as a “momentous” event not only in the history of Montreal but in all of Canada. The letter appears in both English and Yiddish. On the English version, Samuel Kanter, “the most gifted tenor of the age,” is pictured in the formal tuxedo of a concert performer. In the Yiddish text he is shown in traditional cantorial robe clutching a prayer book.

## A Family Shul

Only one block away from the Beth David, the tiny Yavneh Synagogue of the Children of Parnass occupied a free standing corner building which was purchased in 1926 from the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The doorway of the plain brick exterior is flanked by shallow concrete pilasters and topped by a plaque honouring the founders and by the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The interior, sparse and spartan, was illuminated by bare florescent fixtures. A small and plain *bimah* stood in front of the *aron hakodesh* which was flanked by the rows of honorary seating. A women's section was provided for in the rear of the sanctuary.

Such a description hardly seems to fit with the designation of synagogues of "high windows." However, the influence and aspirations of the founders and leaders of this synagogue exceeded the humble stature of its architecture. The Yavneh Shul was the second synagogue owned and operated by the Parnass family. Pinchas Parnass established the first family shul in 1910, the Kerem Israel, located in the second area of settlement. As both the community and the family moved north and west, the family sought an additional location which



*Yavneh B'nai Parnass Shul*



eventually replaced the original shul. The Yavneh shul was purchased by Pinchas for his wife Raizel in honour of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Raizel had long wished to establish a family synagogue in honour and in memory of her father who had had his own shul in Russia. This was a practice not uncommon in Europe, but the Parnass family was the only one to have established a privately owned shul in Montreal. When the Seventh Day Adventists advertised for purchasers who observed the Sabbath, the Parnass family took advantage of the opportunity and Raizel became the patroness of her own shul. An acrostic poem, written as preamble to the synagogue's constitution, confirms Raizel's status as benefactor and expresses the mission and the legacy that she bequeaths to her husband, her four sons and one daughter.

Firstly the Yavne synagogue was founded  
In the coming days honest words will be engraved  
In the memory of the last generation, children and children of children  
Will receive these things upon themselves and their seed  
This holy place will be known as a house of worship  
Joy and prayer will be carried to he who dwells on high.  
This house, dedicated by a kosher and modest woman  
In pure generosity, sanctified to the heavens  
Her words [of dedication] have acquired [the synagogue] for heavenly [purposes], a responsibility  
bequeathed to coming generations.<sup>15</sup>

The constitution spells out a clear mission for the trustees and their descendents: the property must never be used for anything other than a shul and it may never be placed in jeopardy as security on a loan. As in the family's earlier shul, the second floor was to house a free Talmud Torah school for children and High Holiday services were open to anyone in the community without the need to purchase seats. The congregation was to follow a strict orthodox tradition using, as was not uncommon in smaller congregations, the *Nosach Sepharad*, the Sephardic ritual, and no reforms may be brought into the practices of the shul. Pinchas and Raizel's granddaughter claims that the family originated from Spain and that they maintained the Spanish ritual throughout their

centuries' long sojourn in Russia. Notwithstanding the particularity of the Parnass family history, the *Nosach Sepharad* was adopted by the Hasidim of Eastern Europe. Many of the smaller congregations in Montreal used this ritual version out of habit even in the absence of a fully articulated Hasidic social setting or the leadership of a Hasidic *rebbe*.

If one measures the extent of her gift not merely as a small brick building and plot of land but as that of a legacy of devotion and commitment to family, tradition, and community, Raizel's bequest was most enduring. The family had gained both economic and communal prominence and their influence and energy extended well beyond the walls of their tiny shul. Raizel and Pinchas's eldest son was particularly remarkable. Abraham Parnass was a founder and active leader in many community organizations with a special commitment to Jewish education. He was a founder and supporter of schools of diverse ideologies: J. Peretz School, Jewish People's School, and the Rabbinical College of Tomchei Timimim Lubavitch. He was a cofounder of the Jewish Public Library and president of Jewish Community Services, and was involved in the Jewish Convalescent Home, and the Jewish National Alliance Worker's Alliance (which had been established by his parents in 1910). He also served as a delegate to the first Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919.

Nan Wiseman, Abraham's granddaughter relates a story of Abraham's quiet generosity on the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Nan agreed to help him out by acting as his driver for the day and escorted him to fifty different Jewish educational institutions where he left a gift of fifty dollars. "At each place," she recalls, "he got a personal welcome, with hugs and kisses from the secretary in the office to the rabbi of the school." But his greatest passion was reserved for the Jewish People's School.

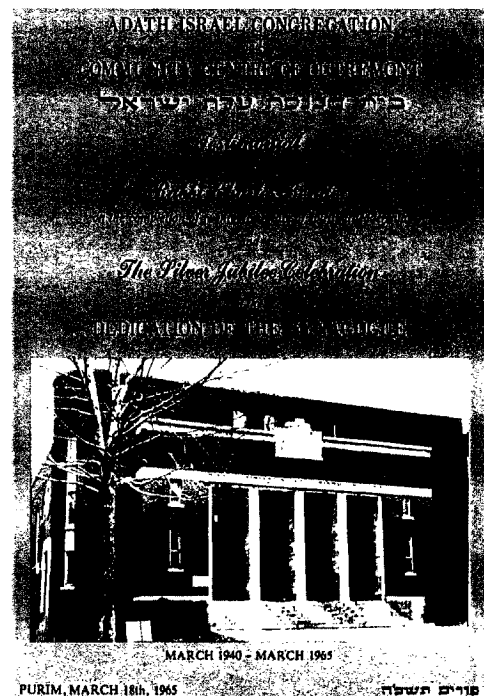
“Even when his friends began to move out of the neighborhood,” his granddaughter relates,” he stayed in his house on Waverly near the Folks Shule which was so dear to his heart. My grandfather was in the school every single day. When he died, the school actually took over his whole funeral. There was a procession past the school and a large banner-photograph was hung above the building.”

Joseph Parnass, the youngest brother, lived until the age of 105 and carried on both the tradition of family benefactor and community activist. His daughter Helen Constantine lauded her father as “the mainstay of the family” who invested both emotionally and financially in the family’s welfare. Emulating the tradition of the highest level of *tzedakah*, his donations were anonymous and made in honour of his parents. He was one of the founders of Canadian Jewish Congress and a founding member of the Rabbinical College of Canada.

The Parnass family, having immigrated to Montreal in 1903 and now established after twenty to thirty years, exhibited concerns beyond those of the immediate welfare of immigrants. The synagogue can be seen as both the focal point and the extension of their aspirations to foster a fully developed community. They were as equally willing to support the Lubavitch Yeshiva as they were committed to the Labour-Zionist oriented Jewish People’s School. They helped establish the Jewish National Worker’s Alliance even while they were themselves prominent merchants. The communal institutions which they founded and supported were not replicas or replacements for those which they had left behind in Europe. These institutions served the diverse social, cultural, political, and educational needs of developing Montreal Jewry.

## The Synagogue as Community Centre

Theoretically, the idea of the synagogue centre has been attributed to Mordechai Kaplan, the founder of the Reconstructionist movement. Practically, the efforts of the Reform movement both predated and implemented his ideas and came to be adopted by both Conservative and Orthodox rabbis who sought to reconcile the tensions between Judaism and the social aspiration of modern Jews. The synagogue center movement, fully conceived in several large congregations in the United States in the early part of the century and through the twenties, attempted to converge all aspects of Jewish life into a single facility which might have included a library, a gymnasium, and a school, multiple meeting rooms, and multi-function halls, even swimming pools. Following World War II, the center movement spread to the suburbs where decentralized Jewish communities could utilize larger plots of land to create new centers of activity merging religious with social functions. As David Kaufman has summarized in his study, *Shul with a Pool*, the success of the synagogue centre was dependent less upon the ideologies of the rabbinic elite than upon the energies of the laity. It was dependent upon three



*Adath Israel Congregation and  
Community Centre of Outremont*

converging factors: aspirations of the second generation, their solid middle class status, and the physical opportunities in new neighborhoods. Kaufman concludes that “the synagogue centre is the first synagogue type without precedent in the European past. It is originally and quintessentially American.”<sup>16</sup>

The Adath Israel congregation was probably the first in Montreal to conceive of itself as a synagogue and community centre. The congregation was incorporated in 1938 under the name of the “Adath Israel Congregation and Community Centre of Outremont.” The architect’s preliminary plans for the synagogue were labeled “Outremont Jewish Community Centre.” This is the only synagogue within this study of the four consecutive areas of settlement that is not located within close proximity to several other synagogues. It was located in the heart of Outremont, a free standing building, in an entirely residential community. The lot was sufficiently large to accommodate future expansion. Built in 1940, its congregants and leaders certainly included a large proportion composed of second generation Canadians. The anniversary publication indicates no particular country or place of origin of its founders. The members were probably those residing in this middle to upper middle class neighborhood. Established in 1930, and initially utilizing a rented hall several blocks away, this is the only one of the “shuls,” the larger synagogues, in this study that did not originate in the first area of settlement.

Despite the self definition as a community centre, one searches in vain for the pool within this shul in the architectural drawings. The YMHA, just over two kilometers away, probably adequately served the recreational needs of the community. The plans allow for little more of the multi-functional spaces than were already available in the

other large synagogues. The lower level contains a multipurpose auditorium and kitchen as well as an apartment for the caretaker and a meeting room for the ladies auxiliary. The sanctuary level also has a chapel and office with additional offices above including a rabbi's study and library. The congregation's primary definition of "community centre" then would seem to focus on the establishment of a school. The original elementary school facilities were in the basement and it was, according to the anniversary publication, not only the first congregational day school in Montreal, but also only the second in all of North America. By 1947, a school building was constructed in the adjacent rear lot which was extended in 1952 to accommodate Montreal's first Jewish high school day school.

While not providing space for all the functions that the idea of synagogue-centre implies, the building, nevertheless, marks a significant transition in Montreal synagogue architecture from traditional to modern, or more specifically, from the historic eclecticism of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century to modernism. Though the brick building was thoroughly traditional in terms of building materials and techniques, its design was influenced by the geometric simplicity of volume and form as exemplified by the Bauhaus movement. It is both interesting, and exceedingly rare, that we have an early non-built architectural proposal by architect H.W. Davis. Though it appears to be influenced by modernism in its volumetric simplicity, verticality of arched windows, and minimal ornamentation, the overall impression is still in keeping with traditional religious architecture in Montreal in which such details as the brickwork and the series of arches punctuating the roof line are prominent. The plan which was ultimately chosen was designed by Jewish architects, Eliasoph and Greenspoon. Its shape

is entirely rectilinear broken only by a semi-cylinder on the north-west corner which houses a stairwell. The arched fenestration, which typically characterized the synagogues of Montreal, is replaced by narrow rectangles topped with circular clerestory windows. The entranceway, as well, is neither peaked nor arched but is articulated as a prominent rectangle divided into four bays by three square pillars devoid of any ornamentation. The building is marked as a synagogue by Hebrew inscription above the entrance topped by the tablets of the Ten Commandments which are flanked by a lion and an eagle. This is the only such iconographic symbol on a synagogue in Montreal. It has been suggested that it represents the quotation from *Pirkeh Avoth*, the Ethics of our Fathers: Devotion to God should be as “the speed of an antelope, the strength of a lion, the perseverance of a leopard, (and) the swiftness of an eagle.”<sup>17</sup>

The interior is replete with iconographic and custom details of which the stained glass is the most important. Both the style and the content of the visual details are modern and do not rely upon traditional prototypes. Aside from the usual *magen david*, stylized elements suggest stalks of wheat or the biblical species of plants and indicate a renewed connection to “the land” and its agriculture. The chapel features leaded windows whose grid work forms multiple *magen davids*. The light fixtures in the sanctuary, incised with *magen davids*, are not unusual. The attention to iconographic detail extends, however, to the door knobs which are embossed with a *magen david* superimposed on a seven branched *menorah*.

The design of the *aron hakodesh* is a departure from the traditional “temple” form of peaked pediment flanked by columns. References to oriental influences are still evident, though in a modernized form, in the prominent niche which forms the space

housing the ark, especially in the intricate lattice work above the ark reminiscent of Islamic decorative elements.

In the layout of the interior we still find the traditional central *bimah* in this modern orthodox synagogue. But the overall division of space represented a first in the context of these “immigrant synagogues.” As in the earlier Shaar Hashomayim in Westmount, the women’s galleries had been abandoned in favour of a women’s section which is only a few steps up from the central, men’s section. There were no railings or curtains obstructing the women’s view. Both the proximity of the women and the central *bimah* imply a sense of spatial intimacy that is perhaps consistent with the notion of communality.

The first indication of a modernist approach to synagogue architecture appeared as early as 1903 in the conceptual drawings for a competition for design of a synagogue in Trieste, Austro-Hungary. But actual construction of synagogues in a modern idiom in Europe did not take place until the late twenties and thirties. It was only with the arrival of Jewish architects fleeing Nazi Europe that modern designs began to be considered for synagogues in the United States.<sup>18</sup> It may well be then that the Adath Israel synagogue, built in 1940, has an architectural significance beyond the context of Montreal alone.

If the space itself does not seem to have provided for a diversity of functions, the organizational structure of the Adath Israel indicates that there was considerable opportunity for communal involvement. A men’s club, sisterhood, choir, and junior congregation, or in this case, the young people’s service club, were part of the structure of many synagogues. The day school also provided opportunity for participation in a home and school association. But the boys and girls scout troops established in 1940 and



41, as congregational groups, had, of course, nothing to do with Judaism and everything to do with integration within the Canadian social milieu. On a wall of the synagogue one more item served to indicate that by 1945 this congregation was perhaps more Canadian than it was Eastern European. An honour roll listed the names of eighty-nine members who had serviced in the Canadian armed forces during World War II.



The four congregations bordering on and in Outremont represented a maturing immigrant community whose focus was no longer on that which was left behind but on building a future that was both Jewish and Canadian. Accolades in the Beth David anniversary publication laud a congregation that is “modern and progressive” and whose values represent a “loyalty to Canadian ideals...in keeping with Jewish tradition.” In retrospect, even the founders, “men of light and learning,” were seen as “Jewish Canadians in the best sense of the term.” After fifty years of existence, the leadership consciously strove to foster “a point of view of Jewish life which would look forward to an integrated Canadian Jewish community instead of perpetuation of distinctions based upon lands of origin.” The purchase of “this beautiful edifice” in a then new part of town allowed the Beth David to become “a Jewish centre in Montreal...gaining greater and greater importance in Jewish social life.”

The contrast between the tiny Parnass Shul and the imposing Beth David is striking. In its modest and practical approach to furnishing its shul, the Parnass Shul was identical to the *shulelach* of the second and third areas. But this is not a *landsmanshaft* shul. The generosity which the Parnass family exhibited in serving a neighborhood

through this synagogue was extended in its vision to build a multi-institutional Jewish community in Montreal.

Finally, the last synagogue in this study represents, physically and conceptually, a transition between old and new. It was located on the very edge of the last area of concentration of the immigrant community; its style is more modern than any previously built synagogue in Montreal; and it had adopted a synagogue model, the synagogue-centre, which though not yet fully conceived, was based upon American and not European prototypes.

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<sup>1</sup> Israel Medres. *Between the Two World Wars*. (Canader Adler Press, Montreal, 1964) p.22. translated from the Yiddish by Sara Tauben

<sup>2</sup> Judith Seidel. "The Development and Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal." (a master's thesis, Department of Sociology, McGill University, 1939.) The areas which I have designated correspond geographically to Seidel's areas but the numbering varies. She does not include the first area of settlement because she is describing the area sociologically, as it existed in 1939, and not historically. Therefore, her areas one and two are my areas two and three. Seidel's area three is my area four and her area four refers to Westmount and N.D.G. which I continue to refer to loosely as "uptown."

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Poliger, taped interview

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Krinsky, pp. 22,49, 111

<sup>5</sup> Confirmed by Edward Caplansky in phone conversation April 19, 2004

<sup>6</sup> M. Ginzburg. "Fifty Years of the Beth Congregation," pp 78-80, translated by Sara Tauben. "The Beth David Congregation-Its Origin and History," 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary publication, Outremont, Quebec, 1938. JPL Library Archive/synagogues/Beth David

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. author not noted, "The Beth David Congregation-Its Origin and History," p.9

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. R. Abramovitch, p. 13

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Ginzburg

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Louis H. Rohrlick, "The President's Message," pp.3-5

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. "Beth David Congregation," Rabbi S. Herschorn, "Our Jubilee," pp12-13

<sup>12</sup> R. Yehoshua Halevi Herschorn, "In Honour of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of a Small Shul," "Congregation Anshei Ozeroff, Silver Jubilee and the Opening of our Newly Erected Building, 1918-1943, 5244 St. Urbain."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. "The Beth David Congregation," Yehoshua Halevi Herschorn, "The Contributions of Roumanian Jewry to Rabbinic Literature..." pp.74-77, translated by Sara Tauben

<sup>15</sup> The constitution of the synagogue is on the first page of the *pinkas*, the synagogue record book. Only a handful of entries follow the constitution. The book is in the hands of family members. The Hebrew word for "sons" can also be translated as "children" including both male and female. As the charter clearly includes Raizel's daughter, Haya Sara, as well as her four sons as the responsible heirs of the synagogue, I have used "children" instead of "sons" in the translation. Thanks to Professor Ira Robinson for his assistance in the translation of this poem.

<sup>16</sup> David Kaufman. *Shul With a Pool*. (Brandeis University Press, University Press of New England, Hanover and London) p.2

<sup>17</sup> David Rome, former archivist of the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, David Rome synagogue file

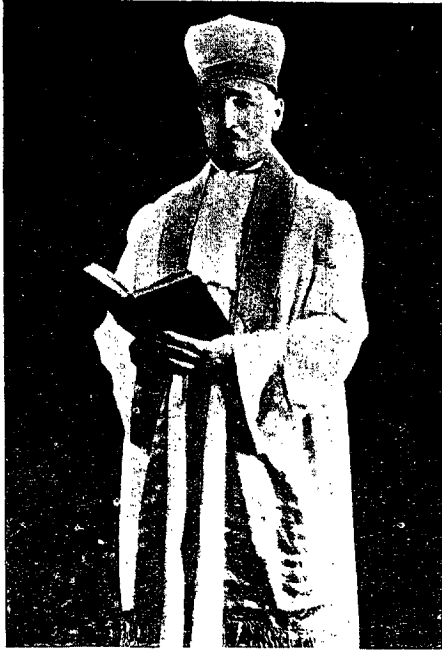
<sup>18</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer. *The architecture of the European Synagogue* (The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1964) pp.xxx-xxxii & Samuel Gruber. *The American Synagogue* (Rizzoli, New York, 2003) pp.84-116

**Beth David, 1929**  
422 Boulevard St. Joseph



View of wedding ceremony on the "stage" with combined ritual spaces of Torah Ark, in the former altar space, reading table and pulpit



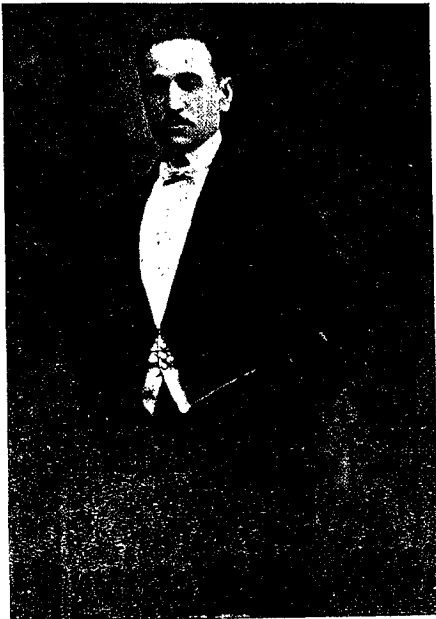


סעמועל קענמער, וועלט פאריכטער מענאָר



*Lawrence 'Sonny' Popliger*

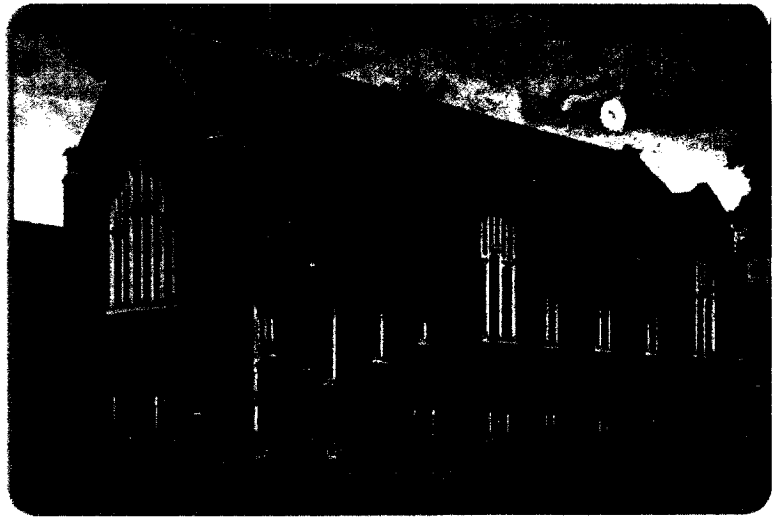
1932



SAMUEL KANTER  
WORLD FAMOUS TENOR

**Chevra Kadisha, 1927**  
5213 Avenue Hutchinson

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Fairmont Avenue Methodist Church



Chevra Kadisha Synagogue

**Chevra Kadisha, 1927**  
5213 Avenue Hutchinson



Ukranian Federation



Annex building with plaques  
formerly containing the tablets of  
the Ten Commandments

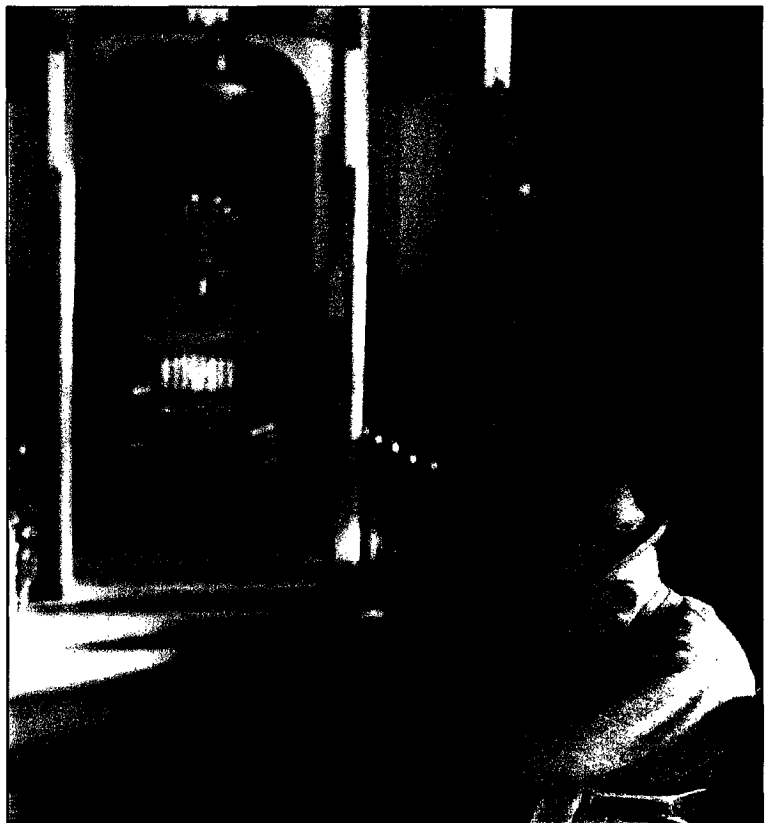
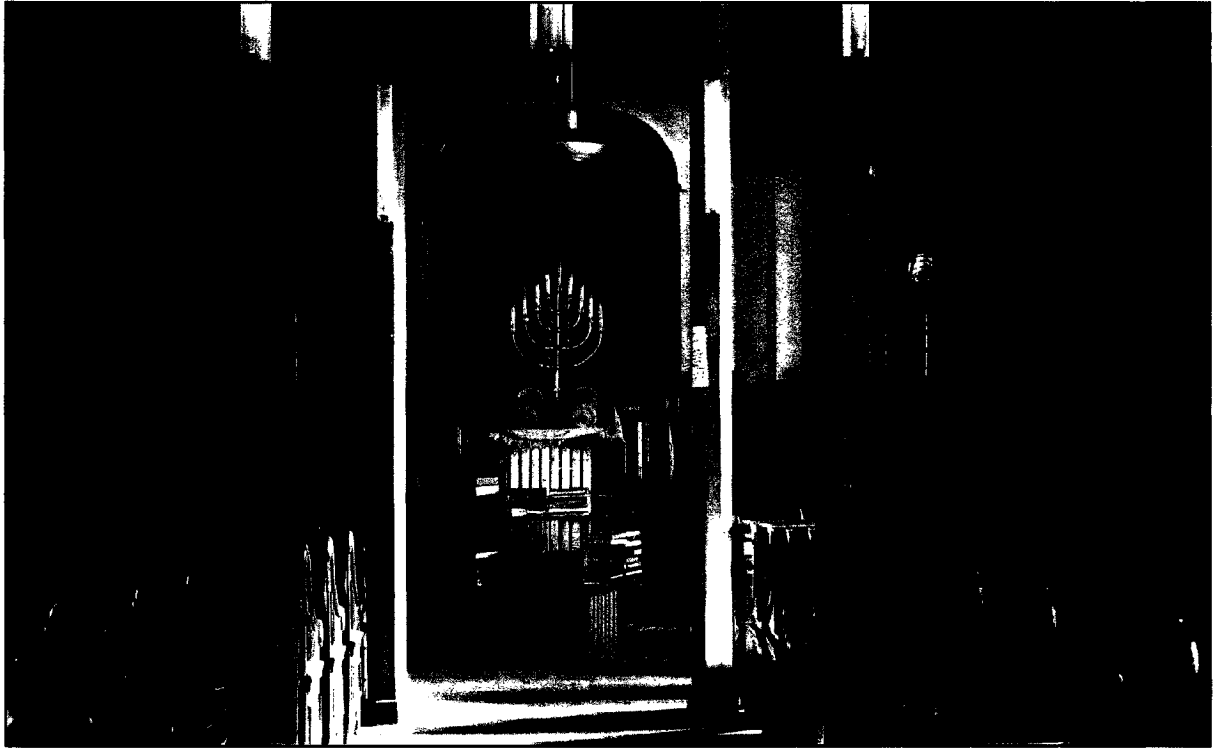


Today's rear elevation reveals a boarded  
circular window which once illuminated  
the space above  
the *aron hakodesh*.

**Yavne B'nai Parnass, 1926**  
4690 Avenue Hutchinson



**Yavne B'nai Parnass, 1926**  
4690 Avenue Hutchinson



Joseph Parnass resting in his shul.



**Yavne B'nai Parnass, 1926**  
4690 Avenue Hutchinson

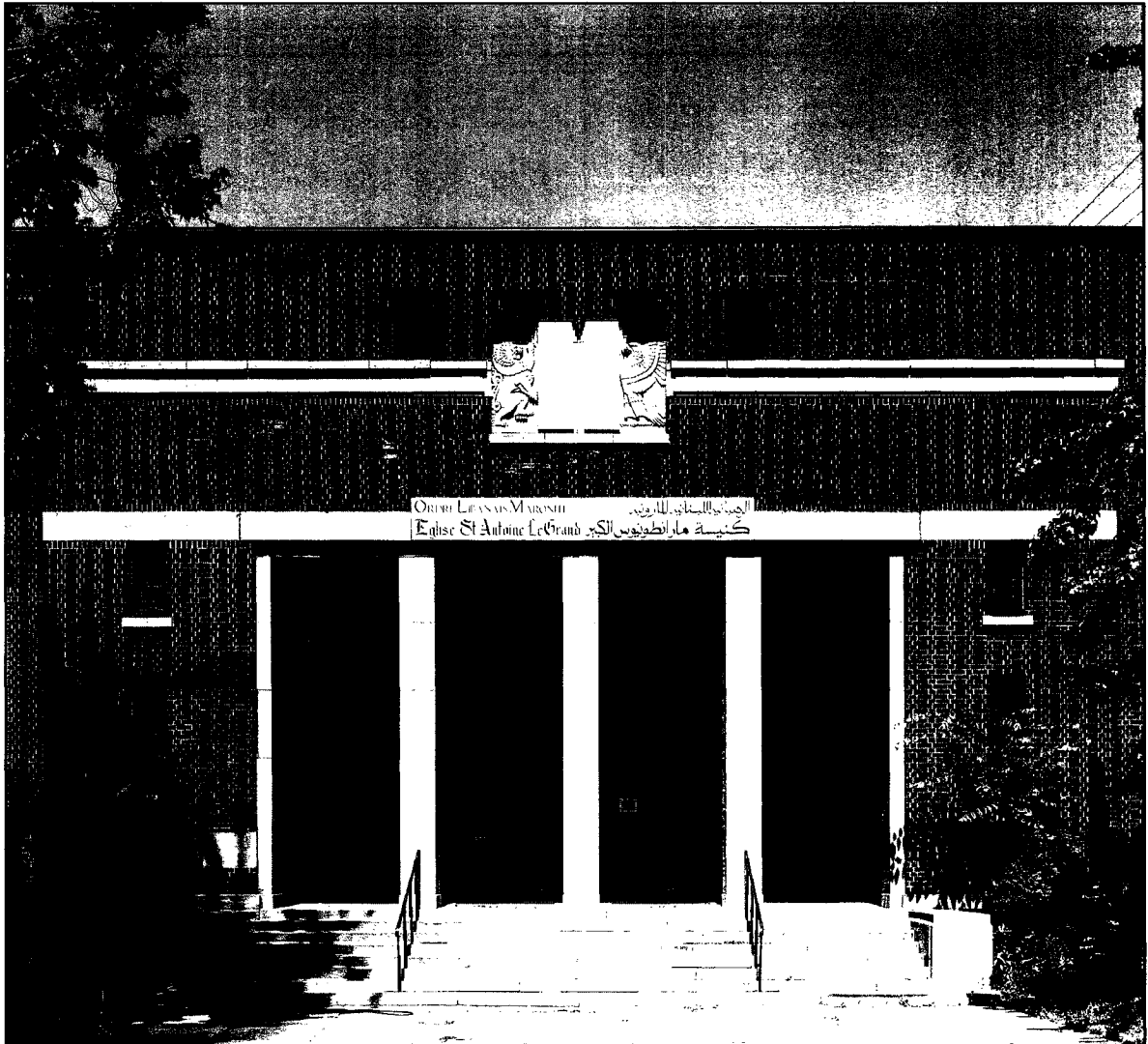
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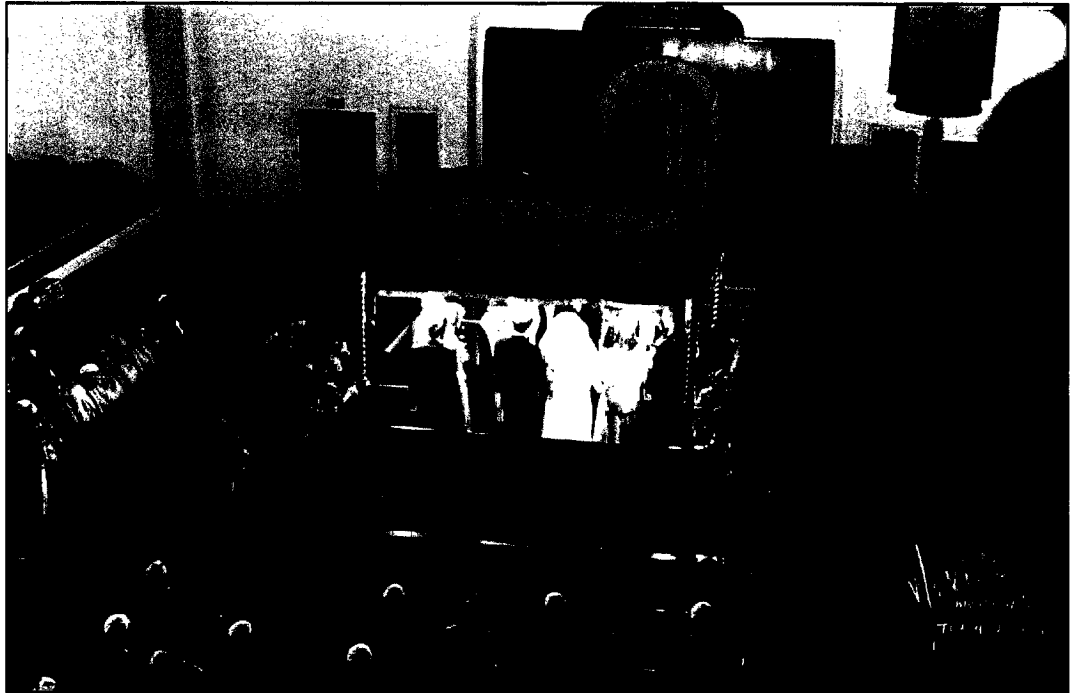
Parnass Family



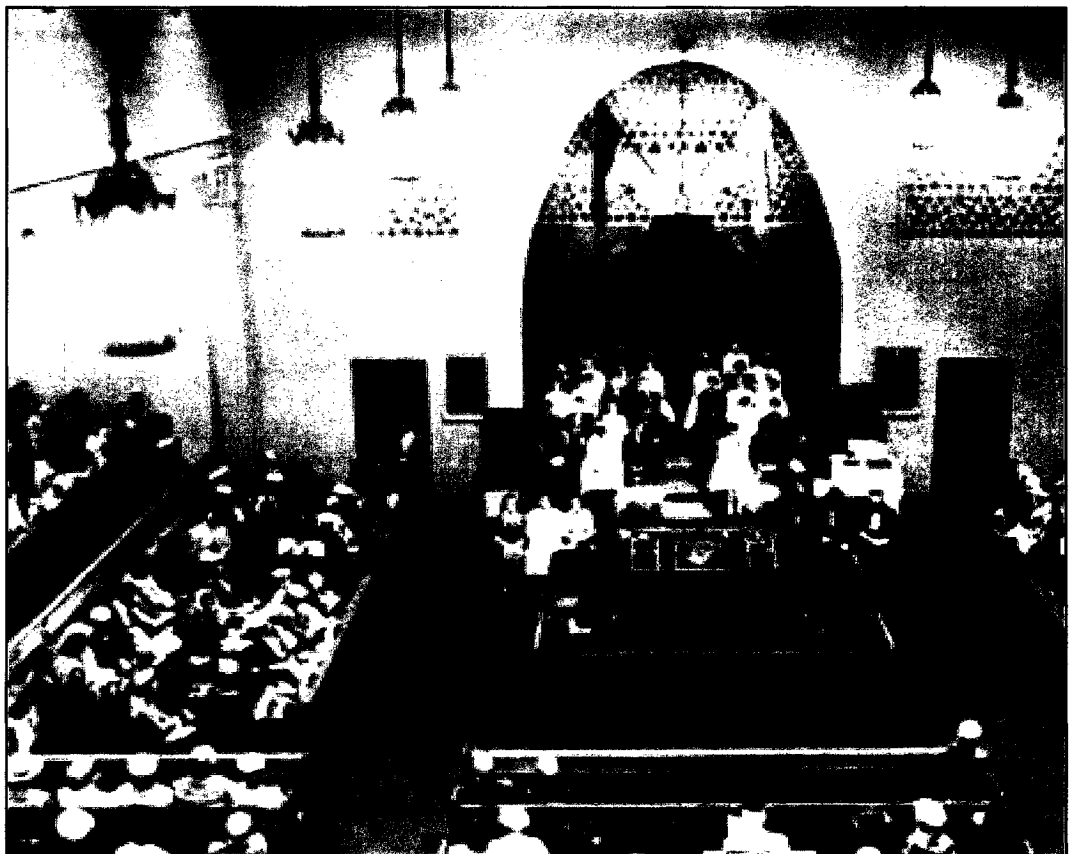
Abraham, Boris, Raizel, Motel, Pinchas (Paul), Harry, Sara, Joseph

**Adath Israel, 1940**  
899 Avenue McEchran





Wedding ceremony



High school graduation

**Adath Israel, 1940**  
899 Avenue McEchran

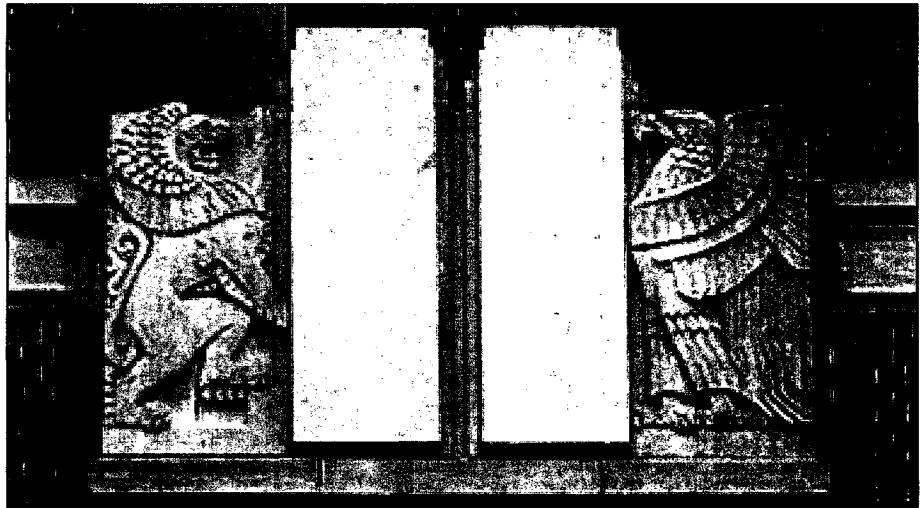


Stained glass windows on facade

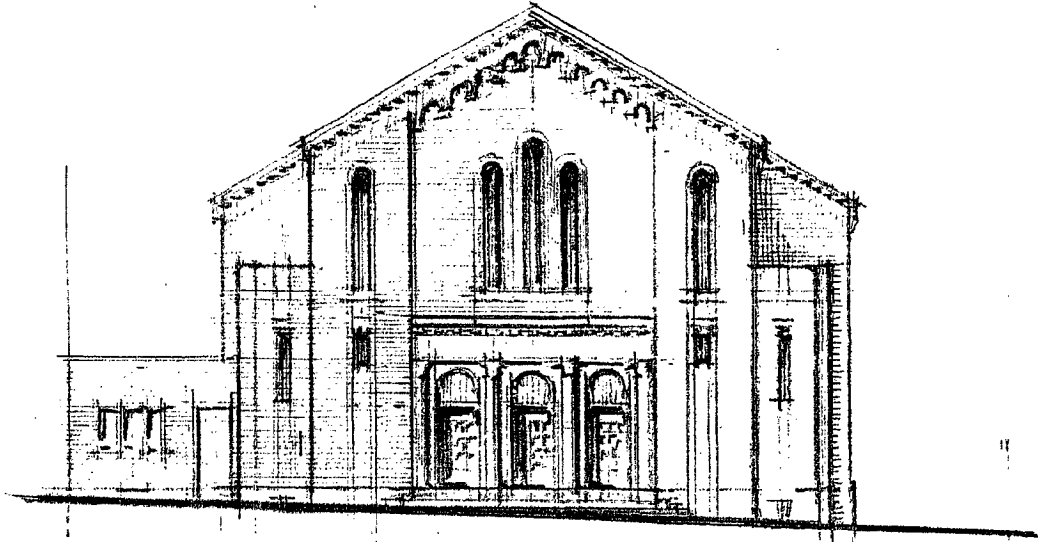
“The binding of  
Isaac,” one of  
several engraved  
phrases on rear  
balcony



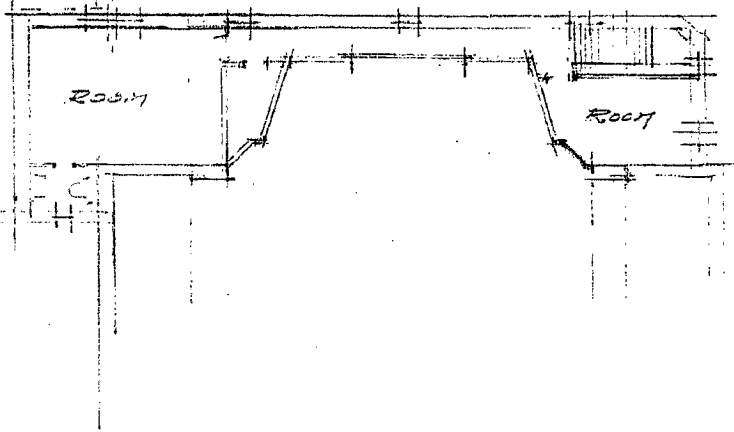
Sculpted  
relief over  
entrance way



Adath Israel, 1940  
899 Avenue McEchran



ELEVATION TO DOLLARD AVE.



210  
210  
105  
105  
-----  
630 SEATS.

DUCHALRIE AVE.

OUTREMOUPT.  
JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE.

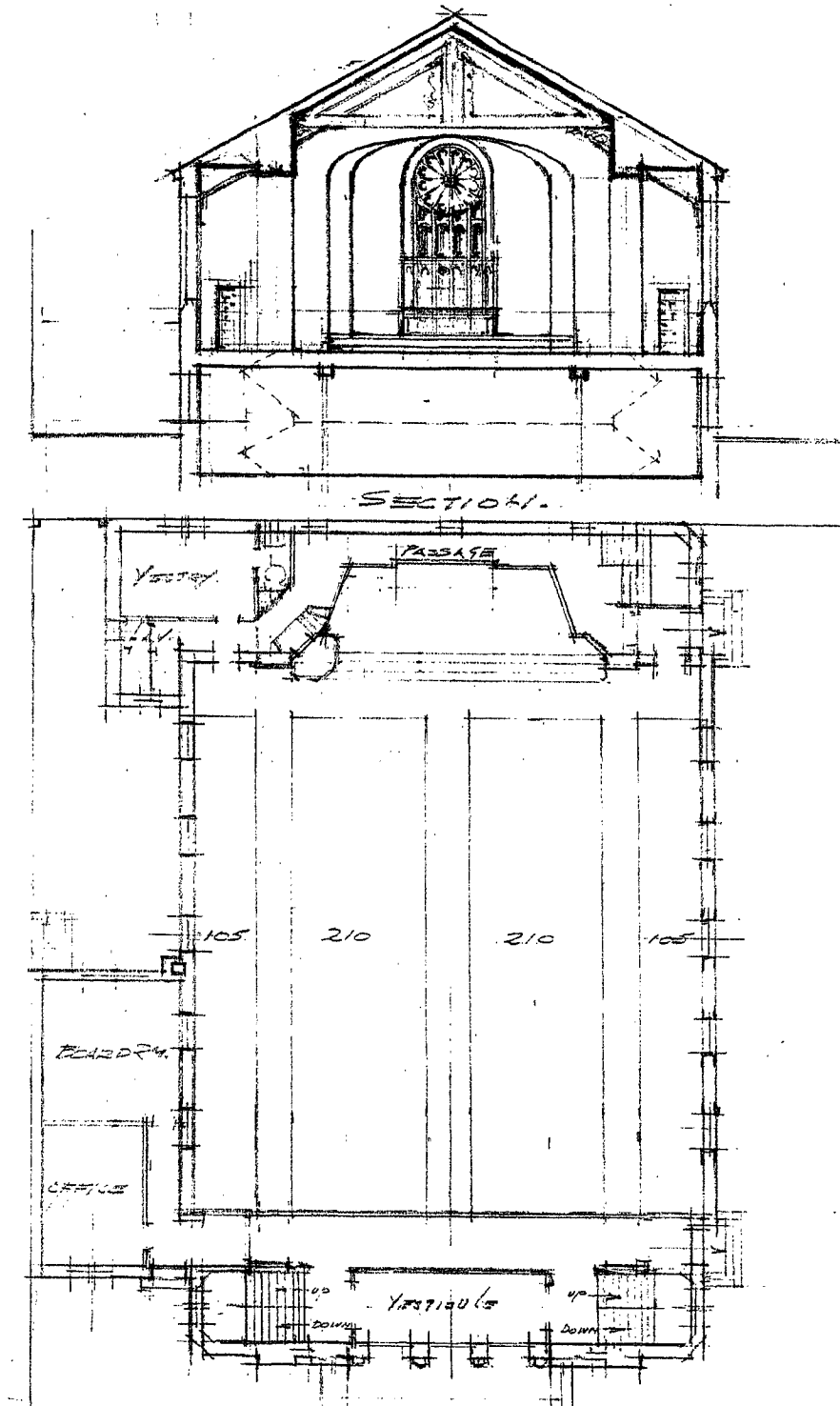
SKETCH PLANS.

SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"

MARTIN WOLFF  
P.E.S.

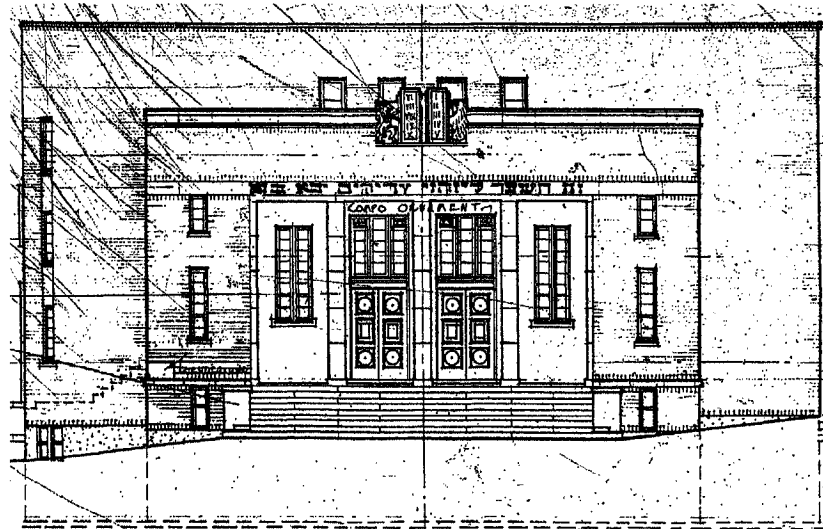
H. W. DAVIS B.S.  
ARCHITECT.

Proposed Façade

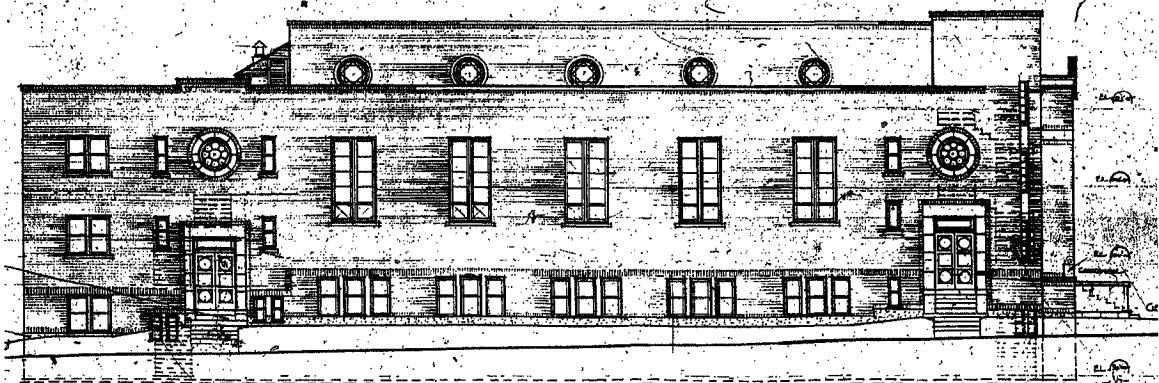


Proposed Plan with elevation of *aron hakodesh*

Adath Israel, 1940  
899 Avenue McEchran



McEACHRAN ST. ELEVATION



DUCHARME ST. ELEVATION

FRONT & SIDE ELEVATIONS		
Job No. 231	Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"	Drawn by A.E.C.
Dwg. No. 9-1	Date May 22/39	Checked by E.S.
SYNAGOGUE BUILDING ADATH ISRAEL CONGREGATION McEACHRAN & DUCHARME AVENUE MONTREAL		
ELIASOPH & GREENSPOON ARCHITECTS HARBOUR 648 DOM. BANK BLDG. MONTREAL, P.Q.		





## Conclusion: Shuls and Shulelach

The size of the building has emerged as a major theme throughout this story of immigrant synagogues as an indicator of identity and measure of aspiration of the congregations. It is obvious that a large building, of any kind, would communicate visibility and express confidence and permanence. In the context of an immigrant community, a large institutional building is a sign of integration, of transfer of identity from the mother country to the adopted home. The presence of small communal buildings is, however, not only a measure of lack of means but, perhaps, of a lack of desire, indicating, instead that the congregations valued intimacy and resisted change. This interpretation can be strengthened by way of comparison through the development of synagogues in Europe in the modern era. Residues of historic tension and even conflict between assimilationists and traditionalists in the modernizing Jewish communities of Europe might well be perceived in the contrast between *shul* and *schulechel* in the immigrant community of Montreal. But finally, the voices recorded in oral histories have served to colour such perception with yet another layer of complexity.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the era of emancipation, the very presence of monumental synagogues redefined Jewish presence in the cityscape, concretizing a new Jewish identity as citizen of the nation of residence and establishing the synagogue, as Dominique Jarrase wrote, “as the very symbol of the emancipation.”<sup>1</sup> He noted the words of Rabbi Isaac Levy on the occasion of the inauguration of a synagogue in 1861 in Switzerland.

Every time that one of our old synagogues disappears in order to make room for a larger and more beautiful one, it is the dark image of the past that fades in order that we can perceive the radiant face of modern civilization.<sup>2</sup>

As the immigrant community of Montreal matured, it too sought to build large, even monumental and opulent synagogues that asserted a presence. The Beth Yehuda was opened with “splendor and with glory,” having spared no expenses in erecting “such a fine building that is was the pride of all Montreal Jews.” The B’nai Jacob confidently constructed the first synagogue in a new neighborhood marking its façade with a majestic arch and inscribed Star of David. The aspiration of the Beth David to be a “modern and progressive” congregation, “a Jewish centre in Montreal,” was reflected in its well equipped synagogue whose reception facilities were designed to serve the social needs of the community. Ironically, its congregational rabbi, Rabbi Yehoshua Herschorn, decried such efforts, criticizing “the mistake that was made through grand buildings, and beautiful walls and carpets...” These are “errors only to be found in the large synagogues” while the “small shulelach maintain the true traditional Judaism without deviation and without modernizations.”

While the contrast between *shul* and *shulechel* reflects a distinction in orientation and perhaps aspiration, it does not suggest the same level of conflict as the confrontation between the *maskilim* of Galicia and the Hasidic *minyamim* or the *consistoire* of Paris and the Eastern European immigrant congregations where assimilationists sought governmental injunctions against the traditionalists. The social, cultural, and religious relations within the immigrant community of Montreal were probably far less polarized. Generally, those who chose to leave the Old World for the New, were not among the most traditional; the courage required to cross an ocean in order to establish a new life already implies considerable willingness to change and to challenge tradition. Even the small synagogues, despite the claims of their leaders, were not representative of a

particularly pious community and while some immigrants remained committed to their particular *schulechel*, others, especially over the course of time, would attend the one which was most convenient, offered the best price for holiday tickets, featured a talented cantor, or provided the most suitable space for marking a wedding or a bar mitzvah.

The recollections of ordinary people who used these synagogues and lived in these neighborhoods reveal a relationship to religion and between religious and secular ideologies that was far less polarized than one might expect. Lawrence Popliger attended the Beth David with his parents, but, contrary to orthodox practice, took the trolley on *Shabbos* to be with his grandfather at the more traditional Adath Yeshurun. Abraham Parnass, the eldest son of the founders of the family shul whose constitution forbid the introduction of any ritual reforms, supported Lubavitch Yeshiva but was particularly devoted to the Labour-Zionist oriented Jewish People School. Joseph Rappoport, the son of a rather wealthy capitalist, sang in the choir of the B'nai Jacob but was also a member of the mandolin orchestra at the near-by Workmen's Circle (the cultural and educational arm of the Bund, the Polish Jewish socialist movement) and participated in social events at the Young Communist League. Ben Zion Dalfen came from a very observant family who attended the Tallner Beit Hamidrash run by a Hasidic rabbi. Yet, he too visited the Center for the Communist Party, situated just around the corner, in quest of a good Ping-Pong game.

It is possible that the particular density of this neighborhood, which was not so crowded as to be alienating and yet populated enough to be ideologically diverse, may have accounted for a breaking down of barriers. That this might be a confluence of factors unique to Montreal would certainly be an interesting subject for further study.

Over the course of the first half of the century, Jews from different countries, cities and towns, religious Jews and secular Jews, union leaders and owners of businesses played together at the Y and listened to the same cultural programs at the Jewish Public Library. While the little *shulelech* welcomed their *landsleit* and provided a haven of familiarity, the neighborhood forged a new identity, that of the Montreal Jewish community.

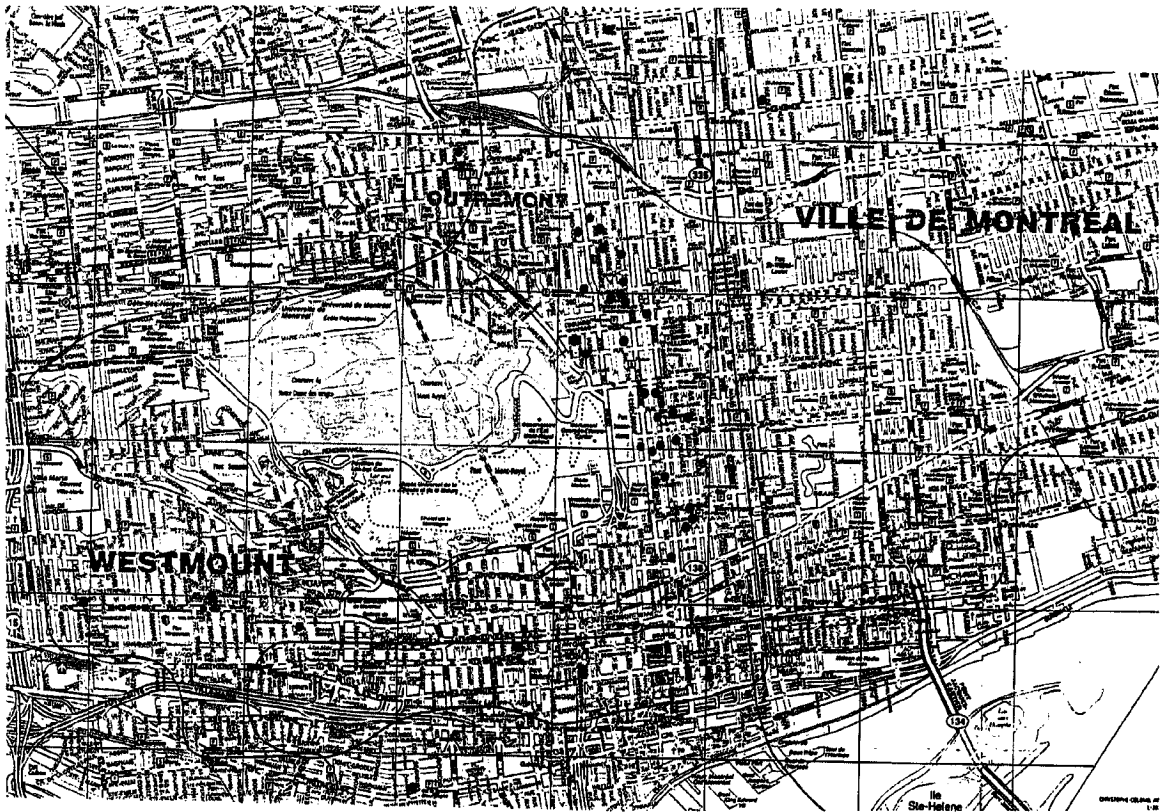
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<sup>1</sup> Dominique Jarrasc. *Synagogues*, Société Nouvelle Adam Bris, Paris, 2001  
English version, Vilo International, Paris, 2001, p.138

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Synagogues of Montreal-circa 1945

1



Our old orthodox synagogues [are] monuments of our past that are now disappearing....The traces of the role that these orthodox synagogues played in local Jewish life must not disappear. <sup>2</sup>

B.G. Sack

In 1945, there were about 45 synagogues in Montreal, at least thirty of which were clustered in the area of greatest concentration of the Jewish community comprising an area of not more than two square kilometres. This study has tracked the movement and location of the synagogues as they were established northward along the major artery of Blvd. St. Laurent and then westward filling in the streets between St. Laurent and Avenue de Parc and into Outremont. The picture that emerges is accurate but can never be complete. Even the most punctilious methods applied by heritage architects have missed out on a congregation here and there. Their methodology relied on city maps which were

compiled in different years and sometimes over the course of several years. The information on the maps was then corroborated with listings in directories for the same years. Consequently, gaps in information were unavoidable. In the course of my study, I would come upon documents, letters, or newspaper articles that would incidentally mention the location of a synagogue, the year of dedication, or the fact of amalgamation of congregations. It was, as a result of an interdisciplinary approach and the application of diverse methodologies that the documentation has been able to proceed thus far.

During the war years, and immediately following, the community had begun moving west into newer neighborhoods and in the late fifties and sixties into the post-war suburbs. The synagogues of Plateau Mont Royal and Outremont absorbed the arriving Holocaust survivors, among them various sects of ultra-orthodox. It is the Haredi community who remain visible along the streets east and west of Avenue de Parc today. In the manner typical of Hasidim, they took over some of the smaller *shitibels* vacated by the original congregations. The smaller and larger synagogues, however, were sold from the late fifties and into the late eighties, for the most part, to subsequent groups of immigrants as houses of worship, assembly, or community centres. Small prayer rooms in triplexes and duplexes and in business premises have reverted to residential and commercial use. While about fourteen Jewish houses of worship can still be counted in these neighborhoods, only two represent the original pre-World War II congregations.

A handful of regular members continue to attend the Nosach Ha-ari on Jeanne Mance and Temple Solomon, the Bagg Street Shul. Some of the older congregants still live in the surrounding streets. Some younger worshipers have rediscovered the charms of the area and live in these newly fashionable neighborhoods. But others find their way

there from more remote parts of the city seeking perhaps a greater sense of intimacy and authenticity which has been lost in the large, modern, now all “uptown” synagogues. Temple Solomon, has in the last few years benefited from a government grant for restoration and renovation in recognition of its heritage status.<sup>3</sup> But most of all these buildings probably owe their survival to Joe and Max, Joe Brick and Max Rothman, who guard the keys and continue to look after their shuls. They see to it that the windows are repaired, the floors are mopped now and then, and occasionally arrange for *kiddish* after services. They continue to open the door to visitors exploring the footprints of the past.

While only physical traces of Montreal’s Jewish religious heritage remain in the old neighborhoods, the legacy of the congregations remains vibrant. Congregation Chevra Shaas Adath Yeshurun Hadrath Kodesh Shevet Achim Chaverim Kol Israel d’Bet Avraham represents an amalgamation of five former “downtown” congregations. Likewise, Zichron Kedoshim is an affiliation of Anshei Ukraina, Beth Matesyohu, Beth Moishe, and Beth Israel and Samuel, all congregations from the old neighborhoods. In fact, as the congregations

*Amalgamated congregation*



left their original synagogues, moving into Snowdon, Cote St. Luc, and Hampstead, they amalgamated with each other and remained Orthodox. The pattern of early synagogue formation in neighborhoods of Eastern European Jewish immigrants is probably similar to others in urban centres in Canada and the United States, but their unanimous continued affiliation with orthodoxy is unique to Montreal. While this is one of the most interesting questions to arise from this study, the response remains a matter of further inquiry and material for another story.

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<sup>1</sup> The point furthest west represents the Shaar Zion synagogue on Claremont and Sherbrooke which burned down in 1935. The congregation rebuilt in 1947 at 5575 Cote St. Luc Road where they still reside. I have chosen to represent it at its earlier location.

<sup>2</sup> CJCNA/synagogues ZG/B'nai Jacob, B.G. Sack, "Our Old Orthodox Synagogues," *Canader Adler*, October, 19, 1958

<sup>3</sup> Le Foundation de Patrimoine Religieuse de Quebec



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## Synagogues Established in Montreal Pre- 1945

### Alphabetical Listing

Synagogue	Est.	Date Incorp.	Location	Date	Present Name & Location
Adath Israel	1930 4	1938 3	1357 Van Horne 4 1500 Ducharme Ave. or 899 McEchran	1930-1940 4 1940-1981 4	Adath Israel-Poele Zedek 223 Harrow
Adath Yeshurun, Hadrath Kodesh	amalgamation 1930 5		4459 St. Urbain 1b, 9	1916-1956	Chevra Shaas... 5855 Lavoie
Adath Yeshurun	1908 7		St. Laurent & Pine 7	1908-1916 7	Chevra Shaas... 5855 Lavoie
Ahavas Achim	-1901		St. Charles Borromé 5		
Ahavath David			50 Villeneuve Street W.1a	-1936	
Ahavath Shalom- Anshei Galicia	1915 3		5035 Clark 1b,9	1915-1966 7,8a	Nosach Haari II 8a 5583 Jeanne Mance
Anshey Moroshe	-1926 2				
Anshei Ozeroff	1918 5	1942 3	34 de Montigny St. 5c 3847 St. Dominique 9 3833 St. Dominique 1a,1b,10 5244 St. Urbain 9,4 5360 Bourret	1930-43 10 1943-60s 1960s-2003	Adath Israel-Poele Zedek 223 Harrow Road
Beth Aaron	-1936	1949 3	1088 St. Lawrence 1a		
Beth David	1886-8 5	1900 3	89 Chennenville 422St.Joseph1a, 1b	1890-1929 5 1929-1964 5	Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem 6519 Baily Road
Beth Haknesh Anshei Ukraina			1927 3 St. Lawrence 1a 5116 St. Urbain 1b,9	1940-1965	Zichron Kedoshim 5215 Westbury Ave.
Beth Hamedrash Chevra Shaas	-18995d		Cadieux 5d 76 Lagauchetiere 5g 4170St.Urbain 1a,1b	-1920 1920-1970	Chevra Shaas.... 5855 Lavoie
Beth Hamedrash Hagadol	1917 5		1887 NotreDame1a1b McKenzie@Lavoie	1917-1949 5 1951-1999	Shomrim Laboker... 6410 Westbury
Beth Hillel		1921	4414 St. Lawrence1b,9		Beth Hillel 6230 Coolbrook
Beth Israel (of Lachine)		1919	116 9 <sup>th</sup> Ave.8g	1924-?	
Beth Israel of Montreal		1903 3	Dorian and St. Catherine1a		
Beth Israel & Shmuel		1925 3	3732 de Boullion1a, 1b,5 5424 Jeane Mance, 1c 5258 St. Laurent, 9	-19655g	Zichron Kedoshim 5212 Westbury

Beth Itzchak	1904 5f	3880 Clark8b,9	-mid 50s 5f	Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem 6519 Baily Road	
Beth Joseph	-1926 2	1929 3			
Beth Matesyohu		3996 St. Dominique 1a, 1b	-19655g	Zichron Kedoshim 5212 Westbury	
Beth Yehuda	1890 4	1908 3	Cadieux 4 St. Laurent/Lagauchetier 214 Duluth 1a, 1b	1902-1906 4 1906-19234 1923-1960	Shomrim Laboker.... 6410 Westbury
B'nai Israel		1930 3	151 Fairmount 7	- 1932 7	
B'nai Jacob	1886 4	1890 3	41 St. Constant (later Cadieux St., later de Bullion St.) 172 Fairmount	1886-1918  1918-1956 4	Chevra Kadisha B'nai Jacob 5237 Clanranald
Chaverim Kol Israel		1911 3	6663 Cartier 5b		Chevra Shaas, etc 5855 Lavoie
Chevra Kadisha	1893 5	1901 3	18 St. Lawrence St. Urbain & St. Catherine Jeane Mance & Milton 5213 Hutchinson	1893 5  1903 5  1920 5 1927-1956 5	Chevra Kadisha B'nai Jacob 5237 Clanranald
Chevra Mishnayoth	1926 3		4232 St. Dominique 1a, 1b		
Chevra Thilim Linath Hatzedek	1903 5	1925 3	Mt. St. Charles Place4 St. Phillip 4 De Bullion 4 St. Laurent 4 4299 Clark 4,9	1924-1957 4	
Hadrath Kodesh	1920's 5		1125 St. Dominique 3929 St. Dominique	early 20s later 20s	Chevra Shaas.... 5855 Lavoie
Israel Bal Shem Tov	-1926 2				
Kahal Yeshurun	1904 5c	19103	St. Catherine & Colonial 4 136-8 Fairmount 1a, 1b	-1936-1959 5f	Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem 6519 Baily Road
Kerem Israel	-1926 2		4335 St. Dominique 8c	1910-	
Knas Bnai Israel		1928 3			
Knesset Israel Anshey Poland			21 Roy 1a, 1b		
Machzike Hadath Ohel Avraham	merger 1935 5		4189 Colonial 1a, 1b		

Me'or Hagalah Yeshiva			201-3 St. Joseph 7		
Metzudath David - 1926			4463 de Bullion 7		
Nosach H'ari	1910 3		100 Pine 1a,1b		Located in Beth Rivka School 5001 Vezina
Nosach Ha'ari II	1933 3		5583 Jeanne Mancel 1a1b		Amalgamated with Ahavas Shalom, 1966 8a
Pinsker Kinyan Torah	1903 5	1920 3	4259 de Bullion St.5		
Poale Zedek		1917 3	7161 St. Urbain 1a1b	1910-885	Adath Israel Poale Zedek 223 Harrow Cres.
Shaare Tefilah	1892 11	1926 3	129 Milton W. 1a1b	-1915-1959	Shomrim La Boker... 6410 Westbury
Shaar Hashomayim (Corporation of English, German, & Polish Jews)	1846 4	1902 3	41 St. Constant McGill College 450 Kensington	1859-1886 4 1886-1922 4 1922- 4	Shaar Hashomayim 450 Kensington
Shaare Zion	1925	1926 3	2120 or 386 Claremont? 575 Cote St. Luc Road	1925-1939 5 1947-	Shaare Zion 575 Cote St. Luc Road
Sheveth Achim d'Beth Avraham	-1926 2	1938 3	1174 deBullion 1a1b (274 Cadieux) 5340 Jeanne mance 5929 Cote de Nieges	1926 4 1946 4 1952 4	Chevra Shaas ... 5855 Lavoie
Shlomo Beth Zion	-1926 2		3867 de Bullion 7		
Shomrim La Boker	-19085a	1914	250 or 259 Cadieux? 3675 St. Dominique 1a,1b 617 Park Ave. (branch) 1a	- 1908? 5a 1913-1957 8e	Shomrim Laboker... 6410 Westbury
Shearith Israel or Spanish and Portuguese	1768 4		St. James St. & NotreDame St. Chenneville St. 1445 Stanley St. 4894 St. Kevin	1777-1825 4 1838-1888 4 1890-1946 4 1947- 4	Spanish and Portuguese 4894 St. Kevin
Stapineau or Stepiner			4109 St. Urbain 1a,1b 4115 St. Urbain 1c		
Tallner Shul	early 40s 8i		4817-19 Esplanade	-1955 9	
Temple Emanuel	1882 4		St. Catherine/Drummond Stanley/Cypress 4100 Sherbrooke	1882-1892 4 1892-1911 4 1911-	Temple Emanuel-Beth Shalom 4100 Sherbrooke
Temple Solomon (Bagg Street Shul)		1904 3	3623-27 St. Laurent 9 3919 Clark 1a,1b	1921 5	Temple Solomo 3919 Clark

Tifereth Israel	1905 5	1928 3	5390 St. Urbain 1a, 1b	1911 5	Shomrim La Boker, etc. 6410 Westbury
Tifereth Jerusalem	1904 5b		6627 Cartier St. 5b	1911-1965 5b	Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem 6519 Baily Road
Tifereth Joseph	- 1919 5		6599 De La Roche 1a, 1b		Shomrim La Boker, etc. 6410 Westbury
Tolner Shul			4345 Clark	-1939 9	
Yavneh B'nai Parnass	1926 5		4690 Hutchinson 1a, 1b	1926-1991	Located at the Hospital of Hope
Young Israel	1922 5	1945 3	Jeanne Mance & 5148 St. Lawrence 1a 5584 Park 1b	1922-1924 5 1924-1930 5 1938 ? 5	Young Israel of Montreal 6235 Hillsdale
Zeirei Dath V'Daath	1921 5		412 Henry Julien 4388 St. Lawrence 1a, 1b 5427 Jeanne Mance 5424 Jeanne Mance	1921-1921 5 1929-1940 5 1940-1970 5 1970-? 5	Zerei Dath VeDaath Van Horne and Victoria



## Synagogues established in Montreal pre-1945

### Legend and Notes

Congregation which amalgamated and still exists in another location.



Congregation which still exists in another location



Synagogue still functioning in pre-1945 location.

1. The Jewish Year Book: a. 1936, b. 1945, c. 1954
2. The Jew in Canada, published in 1926, includes a list of synagogues without addresses.
3. Records of petitions and charters granted to synagogues in the holdings of CJCA.
4. Celebratory booklets published by the congregations
5. Other archival material including newspaper articles and unpublished research.
  - a. A small newspaper clipping in Yiddish dated 1908 indicates some sort of an election taking place on at 250 or 209 Cadieux at the Shomrim Laboker and notes the establishment of the shul in 1906.
  - b. address on synagogue letterhead.
  - c. wedding invitation
  - d. Jewish Times, Dec. 1899
  - e. Figler. "Story of Two Congregations"
  - f. Bulletin TBDJ, July-Aug. 1980
  - g. Jewish Times, Dec. 1899 indicates location at Cadieux. A note in the CJCA file indicates 76 Laugauchetiere. Medres, "Montreal of Yesterday," indicates location on Laugauchetiere at Cote.
  - h. dedication invitation and publication
7. "Shuls-a study of Canadian Synagogue Architecture  
Synagogues of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces"  
Research document for the book "Synagogues of Canada"  
Sheldon Levit, Lyn Milstone, Sid Tenenbaum  
Pub. 1985
8. Interview
  - a. Ahavath Shalom-Nosach Ha'ari II: Conversation with Max Rothman, superintendent of the Nosach H'ari revealed that the two synagogues amalgamated in the sixties. Subsequent newspaper article in the CJN, March 16, 2000, indicates the date of 1966.  
Cornerstone of the building at 5583 Jeanne Mance indicates 1947, however, both the 36 and 45 Jewish Year Book indicate that the Nosach Ha'ari II congregation was at this location. The authors of "The Synagogues of Canada" indicate that this was a converted duplex.
  - b. Beth Itzhak-Joe Brick, the overseer of the Temple Solomon, which is on the same block, identified this building as having been the former Beth Itzhak. An archival photo in CJCA confirms this information.
  - c. Kerem Israel- The Jewish Year Book, 1945 incorrectly listed the address as 4535 St. Dominique. During an interview with Harry Stillman, I discovered, based on a photograph and sketch in his collection, that the synagogue was at 4335 St. Dominique. The building still exists today as a residence.
  - d. Shaare Tefilah- During an interview, Sara Jacobs related that her father was a founding member of the synagogue and served as president until his death in 1918. She did not know, however, when the synagogue was established or how long he had served.
  - e. Shomrim Laboker- During a visit to the existing building, out of which the Shtull family operates a dairy and egg distribution business, I was shown the original deed to the lot and building dated 1913. In subsequent conversation with Shulamis Yelin, she indicated that she attended the opening celebration of the synagogue on Simchat Torah as a five year old. Therefore, the renovated or rebuilt synagogue might have opened in 1918.
  - f. Helen Constantine, daughter of Joseph Parnass, indicated that the building was sold in 1991.
  - g. Leslie Lutsky, a fellow synagogue "hunter," provided this address and indicated that the building still exists. The address in the Jewish Year Book, 92 9<sup>th</sup> Ave, is incorrect.
9. University of Montreal study
10. minutes of the congregation
11. R. Frank, "Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue" (A History of Shearith Israel)

<i>adon ulam</i>	The closing song in the Sabbath morning prayer service in praise of “the Lord of the universe.”
<i>Aggadah</i>	Part of the body of rabbinic interpretive literature that is comprised of ethical teachings, legends, tales and folklore.
<i>aliyahs</i>	(Hebrew - “ascend”) Ritual honours in a synagogue. The individual (men only in orthodoxy) is called up to the bimah or the Torah Ark to perform a ritual honour.
<i>aron hakodesh</i>	The Torah Ark which houses the Torah scrolls. Traditionally, it should be placed on the wall of the synagogue facing Jerusalem. In the West, this is the eastern wall.
<i>bal kore</i>	A Torah reader, literally, a master of reading the Torah.
<i>bal tefilah</i>	A reader or chanter of prayers.
<i>bar mitzvah</i>	The coming of age ceremony for boys at age thirteen. It focuses on reading a portion of the Torah and HavTorah, a reading from the “Prophets” which corresponds to the weekly Torah portion.
<i>battei midrash</i>	Houses of study and worship.
<i>beit din</i>	Jewish court of law
<i>bimah</i>	The reading table in a synagogue upon which the Tora scrolls are unrolled and read.
<i>chanukos habais</i> <i>chanukat habeit</i>	(Yiddish and Hebrew) building dedication.
<i>chevra kadisha</i>	(Hebrew- “the holy association”) Burial society, traditionally an honorific and voluntary position.
<i>chulent</i>	(Yiddish) A slow cooking casserole mad with beans, potatoes, vegetables, and, usually, beef.
<i>chupa</i>	(Hebrew)The wedding canopy
<i>davin</i>	(Yiddish) to worship
<i>drash</i>	(Hebrew) An interpretation of Biblical text or law.

<i>gabbai</i>	In European traditional communities, an elected, unpaid communal leader responsible for various communal organizations. In a synagogue, he manages the affairs of the synagogue and is responsible for distributing ritual honours.
Gemara	See Talmud
<i>goyim</i>	Non Jews.
<i>Halachah</i>	(Hebrew - “walk” or “way”) Jewish law comprised of “written law,” that which is derived from Torah, and “oral law,” according to tradition that which was received by Moses and passed on orally from generation to generation. It was eventually written as the Talmud and includes as well the entire authoritative rabbinic tradition. See Talmud and Torah.
<i>Haredi</i>	(Hebrew -tremble) A member of the ultra-orthodox community or the noun designating the community itself.
<i>Haskalah</i>	(Hebrew-“education”) The Jewish Enlightenment
<i>heder</i>	(Hebrew-“room”)A religious school for young boys.
<i>kehillah</i>	(Hebrew-“community”)A traditional Jewish community in Eastern Europe at times having official government sanctioned status.
<i>keter</i>	(Hebrew) Crown-a silver Torah ornament.
kiddish	(Yiddish from the Hebrew <i>kiddush</i> meaning blessing) The ritual meal following services which require the blessing over wine and bread but which is usually much more substantial.
<i>kigels</i>	(Yiddish) Casserole of noodles, potatoes, or other vegetables.
<i>knaidach</i>	(Yiddish) Matza balls, dumplings made from matza flour served in chicken soup.
<i>Kohanim</i>	Priests in the ancient Temple. Following the destruction of the Temple three lineages developed among Jews: Kohen, Levite, and Israelite. Kohanim and Levites, but particularly Kohanim, have ritual and religious obligations and privileges. Most Jews are Israelites.
<i>kreplach</i>	(Yiddish) Stuffed, usually boiled, dumplings, generally served in chicken soup.

<i>magen david</i>	(Hebrew-shield of David) Star of David. The six sided star was said to have marked David's shield.
<i>landsliet</i>	(Yiddish) Countrymen.
<i>landsmanshaft</i>	(Yiddish) Mutual aid society for people from the same town.
<i>latkes</i>	(Yiddish) pancakes, generally potato pancakes
<i>lernen</i>	(Yiddish) learning
<i>luach</i>	(Hebrew) calendar
<i>maskilim</i>	(Hebrew - "educated") Followers of the Jewish Enlightenment.
<i>mariv</i>	see <i>shacharit</i>
<i>michiza</i>	(Hebrew-"divider")A physical division between men and women in a synagogue.
<i>midrash</i>	(Hebrew - "interpret") The body of rabbinic interpretive literature that refers to interpretations of biblical law. <i>Aggadah</i> , interpretive teachings, legends, and folklore are considered part of the <i>midrashic</i> tradition.
<i>mikveh</i>	(Hebrew)Ritual bath.
<i>mincah</i>	See <i>shacharit</i> .
<i>minyan</i>	(Hebrew) A quorum of ten men (in traditional Judaism) required for a communal prayer service.
<i>Mishnah</i>	See <i>Talmud</i>
<i>mizrach</i>	(Hebrew – "eastern") In a synagogue it refers to the eastern wall or to a plaque or amulet attached to the eastern wall. The direction of prayer is prescribed as being towards Jerusalem. In the West, this means towards the East. The Torah ark is situated on the wall flanked by seats reserved for officers and other honoureees. This prescribed orientation of synagogues is not consistently adhered to. However, the wall housing the Torah ark is, nevertheless, referred to as the <i>mizrach</i> wall.
<i>mitzvot</i>	(Hebrew) commandments- There are 613 commandments, obligations of observance.

<i>mohel</i>	(Hebrew) Certified, ritual circumciser.
<i>Nosah Sepharad</i>	Sephardic ritual
oneg Shabbath	(Hebrew-“the enjoyment of Shabbath”)A gathering that takes pleasure in Shabbath-readings, communal song, ets.
<i>parochet</i>	(Hebrew) Curtain covering the door which opens the Torah ark.
<i>parnas</i>	(Hebrew –“leader”) An unpaid position sometimes synonymous with <i>gabbai</i> or in a synagogue with that of the president of the congregation. In Europe from the Middle Ages until early modern period, the <i>parnas</i> was the leader of the community.
<i>rebbe</i>	(Yiddish - “rabbi”) Generally refers to a Hasidic rabbi
<i>rebitzin</i>	(Yiddish) A rabbi’s wife.
<i>responsas</i>	Rabbinic responses to legal questions.
<i>rimonim</i>	(Hebrew- “pomegranate” or “finial”) Silver Torah ornaments which cover and decorate the handles used to unroll the scrolls.
<i>Shabbes goy</i>	A non-Jew, who performs services, usually for pay, for an observant Jew who does not wish to desecrate the Sabbath commandments.
<i>shacharit,</i> <i>mincha, mariv</i>	Morning, afternoon, and evening prayers.
<i>shammash</i>	A paid beadle or sexton in a communal institution, synagogue, or court. He was sometimes responsible for calling the people to shul. The “ <i>shulklaper,</i> ” would knock on people’s houses reminding them that services were about to begin. His role was also that of witnessing the signing of documents. He supervised the synagogue in a capacity that might be equivalent to today’s executive director.
<i>schochet</i>	(Hebrew)Ritual slaughterer of kosher meat.
<i>shtetle</i>	(Yiddish)Eastern European Jewish village.
<i>shtibele</i>	(Yiddish “small room” or “small house”) Small house of prayer, discussed in greater detail in the text.

<i>Shulchan Aruch</i>	(Hebrew-“an ordered table”)Codification of Jewish law by Sepahrdi Rabbi Joseph Caro in the 16 <sup>th</sup> century with commentary by Moses Isserles, an Ashkenasi rabbi.
<i>simchah</i>	(Hebrew and Yiddish with slight variance in pronunciation) a celebration
<i>succah</i>	(Hebrew)A temporary structure built during the eight days of the festival of <i>Succoth</i> in the spring. All meals are to be taken in the <i>succah</i> .
<i>tas</i>	(Hebrew)A silver shield hung on the Torah which has a place for a removable plaque indicating the name of the Torah portion that will be revealed when the Torah is unrolled.
<i>talit</i>	(Hebrew)Prayer shawl worn by men in synagogue. Women have also begun wearing <i>talitot</i> in liberal congregations.
<i>Talmud</i>	( from the Hebrew root meaning “teach”)The Talmud combines Mishna and Gemara. The term Gemara is often used synonymously with Talmud. The Mishnah was compiled and written by the <i>Tannaim</i> , rabbis of Palestine between 70 ce and the early 3 <sup>rd</sup> century ce as a record of rabbinic law up to that time. The Gemara, was composed by the Amoraim, by rabbis of Palestine and Babylon from 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> century ce as an explanation, discussion, analysis, and commentary on the Mishnah. That which was established in the Mishnah was understood as fact by the redactors of Gemara. Two competing Talmuds developed in antiquity. The Jerusalem Talmud was redacted by the mid 4 <sup>th</sup> century and The Babylonian Talmud by the end of the 5 <sup>th</sup> century at which time it is said that the Talmud was “closed.” However, the commentaries of Rashi (11 <sup>th</sup> century France) and his disciples were incorporated as side bars to the <i>mishnaic</i> and <i>gemaric</i> texts. Contemporary editions also add commentaries which, as the Steinsalz explains, become “an integrated exposition of the entire text.” (vol I, part I, p.X) I quote Steinsalz for a definition of the essence of Talmud. “Halakic rulings and practical application of the Torah laws are subordinate to the quest for the underlying truth of things. The ultimate purpose of the Talmud is not in any utilitarian sense-its sole aim is to seek out truth.” (The Reference Guide, p.2)
<i>Torah</i>	(Hebrew-“teach”)The Torah, as texts, contains the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch, which comprise the Written Law. But the concept of Torah includes as well Oral Law which came to be composed as Talmud.

<i>Tanach</i>	Torah plus 21 books of The Prophets ( <i>Nevi'im</i> ) and the 13 books of The Writings ( <i>Ketuvim</i> ) comprise the Tanach (an acronym of the first letter of the three works), the Jewish Bible.
<i>tzedakah</i>	(Hebrew - “justice”) Charity
<i>Vad Hair</i>	The rabbinic council of Montreal.
<i>yad</i>	(Hebrew - “hand”) A silver pointer used to point at and follow the reading of the Torah scroll.
<i>yarmulke</i>	(Yiddish. The Hebrew term-“kippa”) Skull cap, head covering worn by men in synagogue and observant men, outside of synagogue.
<i>a yiddisher yid</i>	(Yiddish-“A Jewish Jew”) An observant Jew.
<i>yiskor</i>	(Hebrew -“remembrance”) The annual commemoration of a death.
<i>yom tov</i>	(Hebrew-“good day”) Holiday.
<i>yontif</i>	(Yiddish) Holiday

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