



JEWS: A CANADIAN STORY

IN PICTURES



INTRODUCTION

*Ships on foreign shores.
Open prairies. Busy markets.*

*Battlefields. Legislatures.
Theatres. Playgrounds. Protests.*

As with all newcomers, uncertainty greeted Canada's first Jews, who were not always welcomed with open arms. At times, the government limited Jewish immigration and there were Canadians who did not want to share cities, towns, and neighbourhoods with the newly-arrived Jews.

Nonetheless, Jews worked hard to participate in all aspects of Canadian life. Jewish communities grew throughout Canada - from East to West and from the city to the country. The photographs in this exhibit show slices of Jewish life in Canada throughout our nation's history: the first settlement, establishment of communities of all shapes and sizes, and activities that went beyond the community to influence Canada's evolution as a country.

ARRIVAL

“ We cannot bring all the Jews here, but whoever chooses to come can be sure of receiving a hearty welcome. ”

- Canadian Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, 1905

WHO WERE CANADA'S FIRST JEWS?

Jews who came to Canada in the century and a half before confederation in 1867 settled throughout what was then known as Lower and Upper Canada.

The first Jews who were said to have come to Lower Canada may have been of Portuguese origin, in 1697.

Other records mention Ferdinande Jacobs, a Jewish trader for the Hudson's Bay Company, who came to Lower Canada in 1732. Many British Jews came from other parts of the Empire – including the 13 colonies of the United States – and settled in Canada by 1760. Soon after, British, German and American Jews began to make their homes here. Later, some were part of the hordes drawn to Canada by the prospect of finding gold in the Northern Interior. The temporary enticements of the fur trade and the gold rush faded, but the Jewish settlers remained.

WAVE AFTER WAVE

Between 1881 and 1901, a time when thousands sought refuge in Canada from the violent pogroms in their Eastern European homelands, Canada's Jewish population increased from 2,443 to 16,401. Steamship agents arranged passage across the Atlantic Ocean to Pier 21 in Halifax and some remained in the East. Others made but a brief stop there before settling in large cities like Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Winnipeg, in some cases reuniting with families and friends who had already established new lives. Others, encouraged by the government and Jewish philanthropists, came to Canada to join farm colonies in the West.

Following the implementation of the 1919 Immigration Act, the Canadian government tightened immigration restrictions and kept many Jewish refugees from seeking asylum in Canada – even during the Holocaust. After 1947, however, Canada once again opened the doors to Jewish immigrants. More than 1,000 displaced Jewish children came to Canada as a result of the War Orphans Project, started in 1948.

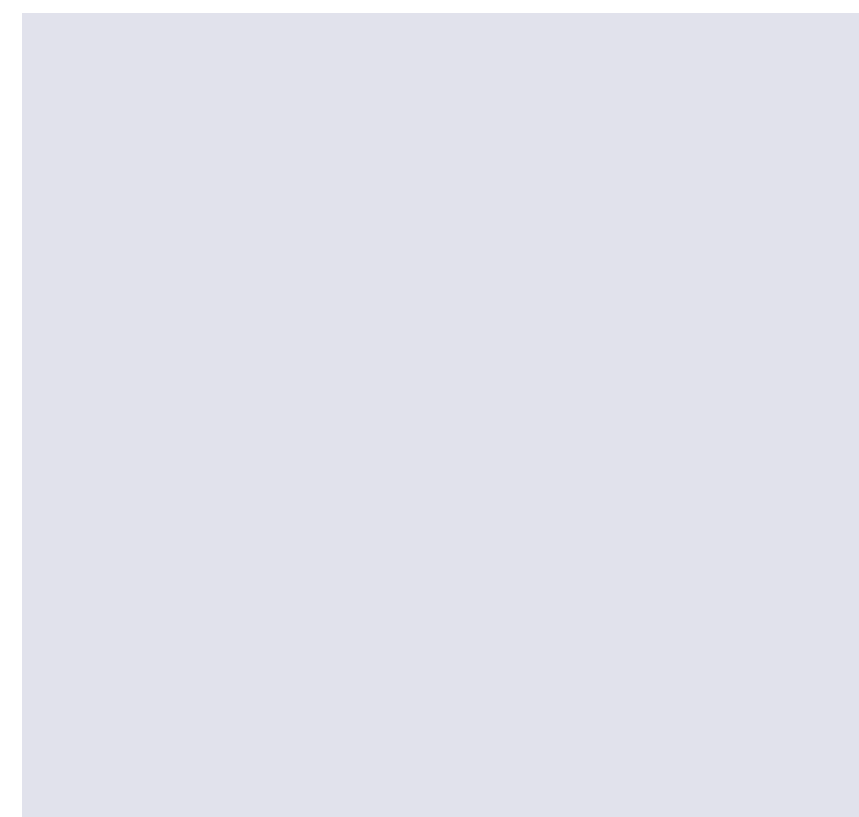
In the post-war era, many Jews continued to arrive from Europe, especially those fleeing communist regimes. Immigrants also came from Northern Africa, Israel, Russia and South Africa to forge new lives in Canada.

ARRIVAL 1.1



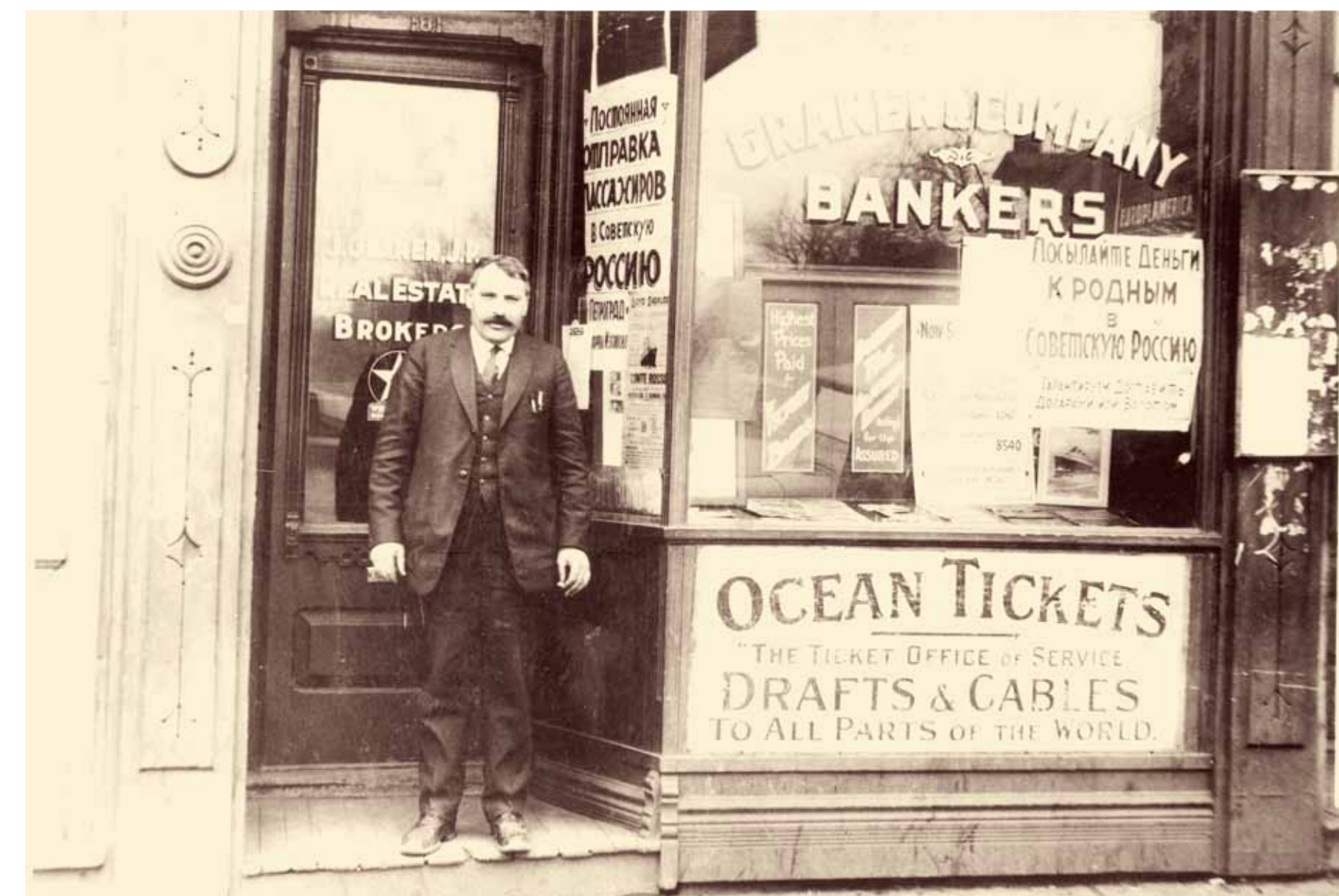
Group portrait of Polish Immigrants disembarking the U.S. military Ship "S.S. General Sturgis," March 28, 1949.

[Jewish Public Library Archives #D06677]



Arrival of Russian Jewish Immigrants. Quebec City, Quebec, 1911.

[Library and Archives Canada, #3624258]



Exterior of Graner & Company bankers and steamship agents, Queen Street West, Toronto, c.1910-1930.

[Jewish Public Library Archives #D06677]



Moroccan Jewish immigrant family arriving in Canada. Montreal, Quebec, c.1960-1968.

[Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, PC 7/1/7A-4]

CREATING COMMUNITIES

“ Notice these people and compel them to keep their children off the streets...shouting, yelling, their little shops...selling openly on Sunday....Hundreds of decent people polluted with these poor Jews and other uncivilized barbarians. ”

- Anonymous Resident, Letter to the Toronto Daily Star, 1916

“ With regard to the complaint against the Jews in your issue last Friday...Does it seem fair that abuse should be fired on them by civilized Christians in this free and noble land of ours?...They are a loving, well-faring people and are deserving of friendship, not enmity. ”

- Jon Rosenberg, Letter to the Toronto Daily Star, 1916

URBAN LIFE

The population of Canadian cities grew dense with the influx of immigrants, Jewish newcomers among them. They often struggled at first to make a living. As immigrant families became more established, those who started as peddlers earned enough money to open shops of their own. In the cities and towns where Jews lived, storefronts included Hebrew and Yiddish translations of English or French signs. Synagogues, Jewish schools and Jewish cultural facilities appeared in almost every city in Canada.

ON THE FARM

Jews joined other Canadians as homesteaders in the West, forming close-knit rural Jewish communities in farm colonies that also had Jewish schools, synagogues, and cultural activities.

Within many small towns peppered throughout the country, a Jewish family would settle and others would follow, forming small clusters that thrived despite their modest size.

There were challenges. Many viewed the peddler as a nuisance. Farming in Western Canada depended on good weather conditions and modern tools and machinery, and the Jewish farm colonies often lacked both. Some businesses, clubs and academic institutions posted signs that said “Gentiles Only.” Despite such adversity, one could find thriving Jewish communities throughout Canada with distinct sights, smells, sounds and tastes.

BEYOND THEIR OWN BACKYARDS

UNITED LOYALTIES

“When Hearing the Country’s Call to Arms - WILL YOU pay heed to the call of the trumpet; will you line up to defend your own country against the Nazi beasts?”

“When Hearing the Cries of Horror from the Devastated Jewish Communities on the European Continent - Will you, as Churchill said, ‘do your best’ to avenge the murders and brutality practised in all Jewish communities?”

— Leaflet, *“A Yom-Kippur Message”* created by the Canadian Jewish Congress, 1942

One of the defining events in Canada’s history was the Second World War. Thousands of Jews and non-Jews rallied around the cause of defeating Hitler and freeing Europe from Nazi occupation. Canadian forces liberated the Netherlands, and Jewish servicemen and women felt a sense of personal responsibility to aid Dutch survivors of the Holocaust, boosting their spirits and helping them rebuild their lives and their country. Jewish men and women also contributed to the war effort on the home front, working in munitions factories, sending care packages to soldiers, and paying their respects to those overseas who were killed in combat.

During the war, misguided questions of Jewish loyalty resurfaced. Some enlistment centres discouraged Jews from joining the military. Jewish refugees from Europe who were sent to Canada as “enemy aliens” were forced into internment camps. Jewish participation in the Second World War reflected a dual identification as Canadians and Jews; although distrust was a painful part of the story of the Second World War, it did not dissuade those determined to answer the call to arms.

FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS

“Dear Moses, I should...be glad you [if you were] elected a member of the House. But what I do not like is...that you will be opposed as a Jew.”

— Aaron Hart, 1796, merchant, in a letter to his son, Moses, who was an unsuccessful candidate for the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada

Canadian Jews fought to gain acceptance in the political world. In 1807 and then 1809, elected member of the Assembly of Lower Canada Ezekiel Hart was barred from taking his seat because he was Jewish. His siblings and descendants were instrumental in lobbying for what would ultimately be known as the Emancipation Act of 1832. The Speaker of the House of Assembly of Lower Canada and leader of the Patriotes Party Louis-Joseph Papineau was instrumental in bringing about the Act, the first legislation in the British Empire to grant Jews full rights as citizens, followed only 27 years later by a similar event in Great Britain. The act was only the beginning of many victories for other aspiring Jewish politicians, who have played roles in municipal, provincial and federal governments over the last two centuries.

There were also battles to be fought in Canadian cities. While some Jews owned factories, especially in the garment industry, Jews also made up a significant percentage of the factories’ labourers. The inter-war period saw the rise of union activity, notably the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 and the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union strike in Montreal in 1937. Inspired by similar organizations in Eastern Europe, Jewish workers were heavily involved in unions and activism, alongside non-Jewish union members. Their participation played a part in ultimately bringing about significant changes in labour laws.

EXPRESSION AND RECREATION

“On the field of Sport, the man in the Jew, as well as in the non-Jew, reveals himself, and behold, both sides discover that they are much more alike than they suspected.”

— Young Men’s Hebrew Association Annual Review, 1932

A nation like Canada demonstrates its ideals and values not only through politics and activism, but also through its culture and pastimes. Jewish Canadians participated in the same sports beloved by Canadians from all backgrounds - from basketball to boxing to baseball to figure skating, and of course, hockey. Amateur and professional Jewish athletes emerged from those pursuing their passion on the rinks, courts and fields throughout Canada.

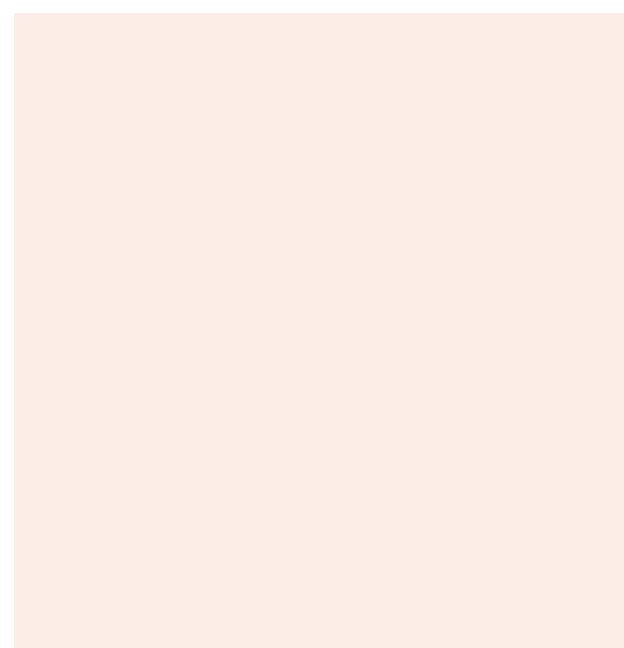
Sometimes facing exclusion from local facilities, Jews created their own athletic and cultural institutions. Theatres born out of necessity gained widespread appeal. Theatrical activity in Canadian cities grew in part due to Jewish participation, and Jewish writers and thinkers changed the Canadian intellectual landscape.

BEYOND THEIR OWN BACKYARDS 3.1



Canadian Jewish Congress recruiting office on St. Laurent Boulevard. Montreal, Quebec, 1939.

(Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, PC 01-00-53)



Jewish internees at Camp "T" skating and playing hockey. Île aux Noix, Quebec, c.1940-1943.

(Jewish Public Library Archives, #012700)



A celebration of Passover, the Jewish holiday commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, at a servicemen's centre. Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1944.

(Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, PC 01-02-0594)



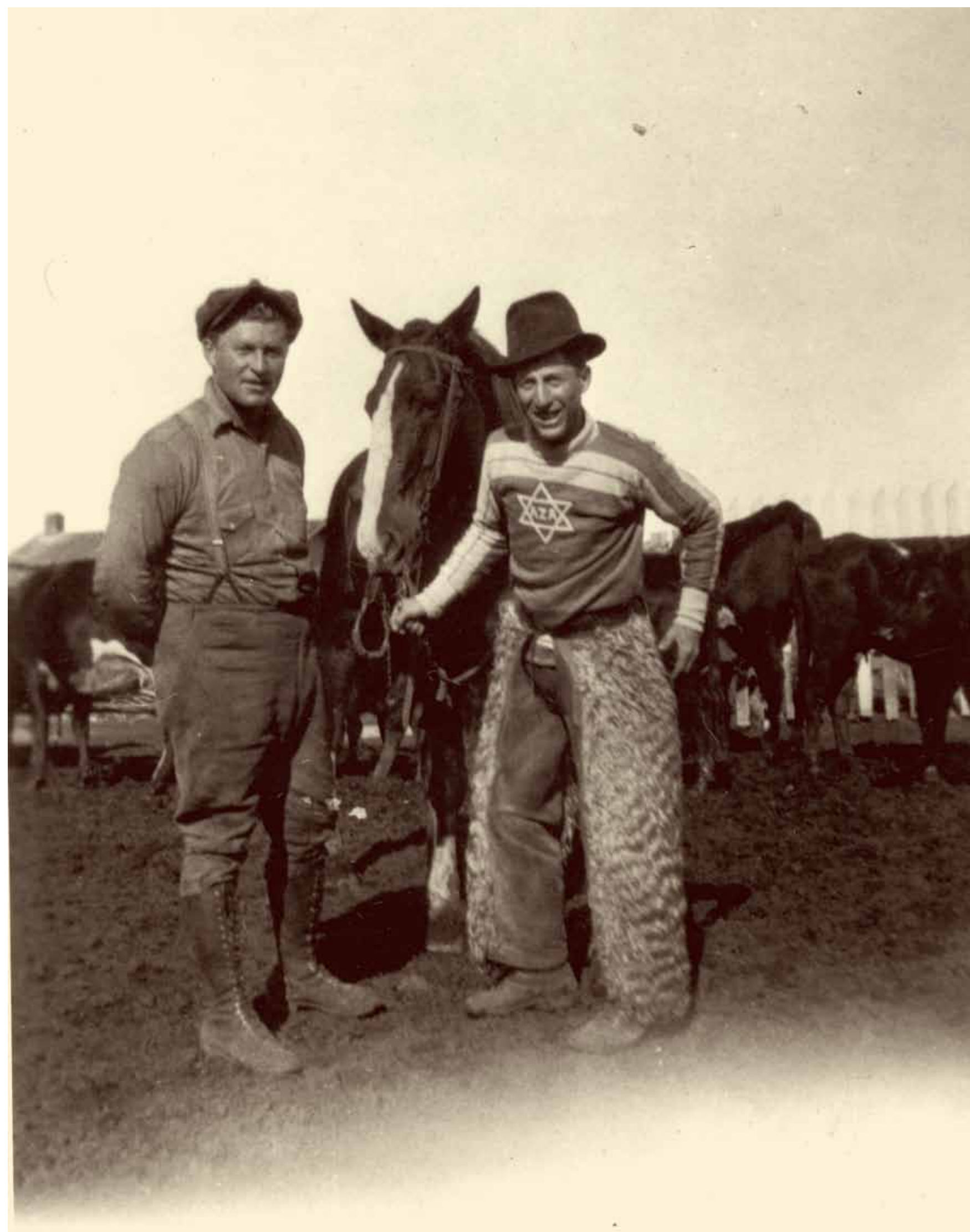
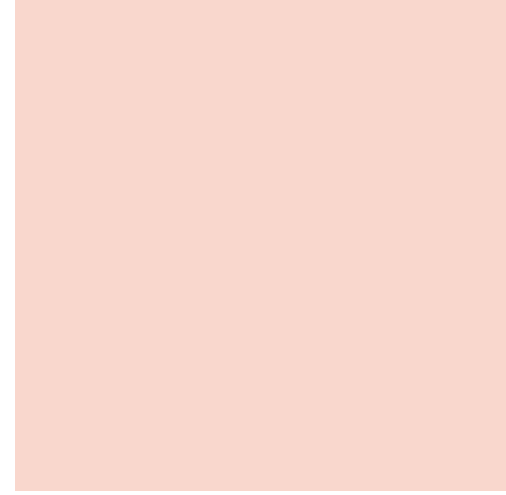
Corporal M. Freeman, Canadian Women's Army Corps and Captain Samuel Cass, Jewish chaplain, presenting a gift to a Belgian girl during a Hanukkah celebration. Tilburg, Netherlands, 1944.

(Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives)



Women from the Canadian Jewish Congress War Efforts Committee packing comfort boxes to be shipped overseas to Jewish servicemen. 1944.

(Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, PC 01-06-554)



*Rex the Horse and Curly Gurevitch (right), the "Cowboy from the Colony."
Rumsey, Alberta, 1930.*

[Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, #751]

CONCLUSION

Since the post-war era, there have been many changes to Canada's Jewish communities. Many have moved outward to developing suburbs, and few signs remain of the old downtown Jewish neighbourhoods. Some communities have seen their numbers dwindle or disappear entirely, especially in smaller towns and farm settlements. Still, a number of Jewish communities have expanded and thrived.

There was no single Jewish experience in Canada; no two Jewish communities were alike, and this still holds true today. The many images of Jews in Canada reflect the relationship between this nation and the diverse communities incorporated into the fabric of Canadian society, steadfast while ever-changing.