To the memory of
David Rome (1910-1996)
and
Abraham Arnold (1922-2011),
who broke new ground
in the field
of Canadian Jewish Studies

Contents

Preface

This book has been many years in the making, and there are a number of people who have had a hand in its creation. Speaking, however briefly, of the people and experiences that shaped this book will, I think, help the reader make some sense of how it came to be and why it is structured the way it is.

I came to Canada from the United States thirty-two years ago with a better-than-average knowledge of things Canadian—for a non-Canadian, that is. In other words, I knew little and understood less. However, I had two factors in my favor. First of all, one of the major areas of my scholarly interest and publication was the Jewish community of the United States. This sensitized me, however imperfectly, to the possibilities of research on Jewish communities elsewhere in North America, and hence to the possibility that there might be something of interest in the study of the Canadian Jewish community. The second was that I knew the languages—English, French, Yiddish, and Hebrew—necessary to read the documents in which the history of the Canadian Jewish community had been written.

Even then, however, I am not sure that I would have gone in the scholarly direction I did were it not for the intervention of two special men who gently but firmly directed me toward the relatively new and developing field of Canadian Jewish studies. This volume is dedicated to them. Their memory is a blessing. One of them was David Rome (1910-1996), who from his post in the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives did much to assemble the raw material out of which the serious study of the Canadian Jewish community could be built. With his typical indirect direction, Rome recruited me and drew me in to the Archives and its activities. David Rome, therefore, had a hand in the launching of my scholarly interest in Canadian Jewry, which has borne considerable fruit so far. The other was Abraham Arnold (1922-2011), who was largely responsible for reviving the Canadian Jewish Historical Society in the early 1990s and for the launch of a new journal dedicated to the study of Canadian Jewry in all its variety, *Canadian Jewish Studies*. In one of his trips to Montreal to drum up support for this cause, he invited me to help in his task, and this invitation led me to take a part in the organiza-

tional support system for Canadian Jewish studies that has continued to function, in various ways, until the present.

The volume that you are about to read was originally the suggestion of Igor Nemirovsky, director of Academic Studies Press, who asked me whether I would be interested in preparing a volume for a series of books he contemplated entitled "Jews in Time and Space." He has given me wide latitude in preparing this volume, and it is my hope and conviction that the finished product will not fall short of his vision. I want to also thank the editors at Academic Studies Press, Sara Libby Epstein and Sharona Vedol, whose work with the manuscript in its various stages has done so much to improve its quality.

As I began to conceptualize the way this volume would come into being, I proceeded from several governing assumptions. The first of them was that I alone could not begin to do justice to the complexity of the Canadian Jewish community. In general, contemporary scholars have come to the realization that the best way to present a complex whole is not to have any one scholar to go it alone, but rather to let specialists in different fields and periods deal with the subjects and issues they know best. My long-term association with the Association for Canadian Jewish Studies and its journal has brought me into contact with some of the best scholars engaged in the study of this field. Directly or indirectly, all of them have nourished the vision that resulted in this book. Many of them appear in this volume. Like Mark Twain's character Tom Sawyer, who persuaded his friends that whitewashing a fence was a lot of fun, I have persuaded them that helping me to complete this task of mine would be worth their while. I gave the contributors relatively little initial direction, other than to tell each one that the finished article should summarize the current "state of the art" on the assigned topic. The contributors have responded with verve and imagination. It is to be expected that styles and approaches differ between authors and articles. As the editor, I have generally tried to let the scholars say what they wish to say in the way they deem best. I do not think that conformity for its own sake would well serve this book and its readers. My editorial hand, beyond ordinary copy-editing, was largely involved with avoiding, or at least reducing, the inevitable overlap between articles. The articles written by Chantal Ringuet and Yolande Cohen were originally written in French and translated into English by myself.

This book is structured in three parts. The first deals in seven chap-

ters with Canadian Jews and their history from earliest times to the post-World War II period. The second looks at Jews in contemporary Canada. After two initial chapters on the general demographics and politics of contemporary Canadian Jewry, seven additional chapters in this section speak to the contemporary experience of Jewish life across Canada. The third section, with its nine chapters, discusses Judaism in Canada as well as Canada's Jewish languages, literatures, and cultures.

Taken as a whole, this book thus constitutes a comprehensive, if necessarily imperfect, portrait of Canadian Jewry in time, space, and spirit. As such, it can be utilized as a textbook for courses in Canadian Jewish studies to supplement the excellent histories and readers currently available, and can also be used as a reference book. It will be of interest to scholars, students, and readers of both Canadian and Jewish studies. Its readers will benefit not merely from the articles themselves, but also from the suggestions for further reading appended to each article. Those publications which made their appearance in more than one article were placed in a general bibliography at the end of the volume. A glossary of foreign language terms is also found at the end of the volume.

Chapter 20 is a revised version of Richard Menkis' article, "Both Peripheral and Central: Towards a History of Reform Judaism in Canada," which appeared in *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* 51, 4 (2004), pp. 24 – 36. It is reprinted with permission.

Ira Robinson
Montreal, August 28, 2012

SECTION I

In Time: Canada's Jews and Their History

I
Jews and New France

Following the first voyage of the French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1534, the French crown began to establish permanent settlements in North America, first in Acadia in 1604, and then in the St. Lawrence Valley in modern-day Quebec in 1608. The main goal of the French explorers and colonizers Samuel de Champlain and Pierre Du Gua de Monts, and of their sponsors in Paris, was to control the major waterways leading to the Great Lakes, in the hope that they would prove to be a passage to the Orient and its fabled riches. When this proved elusive, fur trade with the Amerindians became, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the most lucrative activity of the French colony then known as New France or Canada. This gave a strategic value to those colonies situated along the major river route leading to the interior of the continent, where fur producing animals could be found in abundance.

The French had colonial ambitions in many parts of the world. Colonies and outposts were opened by the French crown in not only North America, but also in India, Africa, the West Indies and South America. The *colonies du Canada*, however, were the only ones situated so far north that a plantation economy based on slavery could not be sustained. The best that could be hoped for in the St. Lawrence Valley was a form of subsistence economy in which the *habitant* was expected to produce by himself what was needed to survive the harsh winter conditions. This distinguished Canada from Guadeloupe, Martinique and other West Indies islands where rum, sugar, and cotton could be profitably exported to the European market in return for finished commodities. This also almost guaranteed that the population of New France would grow at a very slow pace for most of the seventeenth century. The mercantile companies active in New France for most of the century often yielded little profit and were mostly a drain on the resources of the French state. Thus, when a young Louis XIV became king in 1661 there were no more than 2,500 French people in the colony.

The history of New France in its first sixty years was influenced by a series of political decisions made by the royal administration in Paris

determining who would be given monopoly access to the colony and on what terms. When Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal de Richelieu, began his long career in the service of France in 1624, he sought to use the overseas colonies as an instrument of French power. In 1627 he founded *la Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France*, of which he was a shareholder, for the purpose of exploiting the riches of the colony and structuring its development as a French enclave in North America. In exchange for proprietary rights over all the land in Canada, and direct supervision of all economic activity taking place within its yet-unsurveyed boundaries, the *Compagnie* had to cover the costs of establishing a Catholic clergy in the colony and seeing to the well being of its inhabitants. One of Richelieu's key long term policies in all of his work involved limiting the military and economic power of Protestants. For this reason, in 1627 he specifically forbade non-Catholics from immigrating to French colonies. This measure, aimed mostly at keeping the wealthy Protestant merchants of La Rochelle and other Atlantic ports from profiting from the fur trade of the St. Lawrence Valley, perforce included Jews. In New France itself though, this decree hardly affected the embattled colonists, who were trying to gain a foothold on the continent amid very unfavourable conditions. In that decade the European settlers in the St. Lawrence Valley numbered less than 300.

Richelieu's decision would, however, have significant long term consequences. It left a lasting imprint on the religious identity of French-Canadians, who created a society shaped nearly exclusively by Catholicism. It also meant that no public Protestant or Jewish place of worship could exist in New France. Likewise, the colony would never accept public expression of Protestantism or Judaism. Whereas the English and Dutch colonies to the south did acquire small Jewish populations in the seventeenth century and witnessed the founding of Jewish religious institutions, New France never harboured visible Protestant or Jewish communities in any form whatsoever. It would be a mistake, however, to think that the absence of Judaic communal structures in Quebec and Montreal necessarily reflected a particularly hostile state of mind on the part of Quebec's inhabitants vis-à-vis Jews: their exclusion was essentially a matter of a doctrinal and political pronouncement by the French authorities. With very few exceptions, ignorance and indifference were the local responses to the official absence of Jews in New France.

While the French colony of Canada remained relatively untouched

by religious conflict in 1627, Catholic France was rapidly moving in the direction of a major confrontation with its Protestant minority. The legal status of the Protestant Huguenots in the kingdom, following the Wars of Religion of the previous century, had been settled by the Edict of Nantes, signed in 1598 by Henri IV, a Protestant who had converted to Catholicism to ensure his accension to the throne. Protestants were allowed freedom of conscience and offered a number of guarantees concerning their civil status. However, these concessions were gradually eroded in the seventeenth century under pressure from the Catholic clergy and from those determined to unify the kingdom under one faith. The climate of persecution and distrust against non-Catholics, which became systemic under Louis XIV, extended to the small Jewish population of France, which unlike the Protestant population did not possess any form of legal protection. The attacks on Protestants culminated in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 by Louis XIV, and the promulgation of the Edict of Fontainebleau, whose punitive and repressive approach openly aimed at eradicating Protestantism in France. Protestants were forbidden to assemble to celebrate their faith, pastors were banned from residing in the kingdom, and all Protestant children had to be educated in the Catholic faith. These radical measures convinced between a quarter and a third of the Huguenots to abandon their country, many emigrating abroad. It is reasonable to assume that the Jewish population of the kingdom would have felt threatened by the clearly expressed hostility of the authorities to non-Catholics.

This raises the question of the situation of the Jews in France at the time of the founding of New France. There had been several expulsions of Jews from the territory of France during the Middle Ages, the last major one taking place in 1394. This banishment officially lasted well into the modern era, and was renewed as late as 1615. Essentially, Jews practicing their religion remained legally only in lands under direct papal authority, such as Avignon, Carpentras, and Cavaillon. Meanwhile, some Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century had found refuge in the south-west of France, living officially as "New Christians," mostly settling around the regional capital of Bordeaux. Some of them eventually established a formal Jewish community. Anxious to attract foreign capital to the kingdom, the French authorities granted special privileges to these newcomers from the south and allowed them to prosper unmolested.

On the eve of the French Revolution of 1789 there were some 40,000 Jews in all of France, including the territories of Alsace, which became officially part of the kingdom only with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, and Lorraine, which was annexed in 1766. In these two provinces there were possibly up to 25,000 Ashkenazi Jews in the 1780s. In the mid-eighteenth century, Paris had perhaps 5,000 to 6,000 Jews, mostly newcomers whose status remained uncertain until the Revolution. Bordeaux had a community of some 2,500 Sephardim and Bayonne an equal number, almost all of them immigrants from Spain or Portugal and their descendants. While the south Atlantic region of France had fewer Jews, and harboured mostly communities without deep historical roots in the country, the wealth and influence of these newer communities was much greater than that of the more established Jewish centers of Strasbourg and Metz. Bordeaux Jews had acquired commercial privileges, of which they took full advantage, and were able to participate freely in the Atlantic trade with a status equivalent to that of French merchants and ship-owners. They were the only Jews in the kingdom at that time in a position to gain access to the French colonies in North America. While their financial and economic resources were abundant and their skills as merchants well adapted to international trade, they would nonetheless contribute little to the population of Quebec.

However, the Bordeaux and Bayonne Jewish communities did develop a significant relationship with New France. When Denis Vaugeois began doing research on this subject, he was led to explore the Bordeaux community archives, where he found clear evidence of the involvement of the Jewish merchant Abraham Gradis (1699-1780) in the affairs of New France.

Proof of the arrival of Jews to the ports of New France remains sketchy and inconclusive. There would definitively have been no interest on the part of Jews, other than official converts to the Catholic faith, in declaring themselves of Jewish origins, or even in alluding to a recent Jewish past. There is also no likelihood that people conscious of their Jewish origins would wish to attract the attention of the authorities in New France by opening houses of worship, consecrating cemeteries, or practicing public forms of Judaic ritual. We cannot, however, conclude from this lack of evidence that New France did not harbour persons conscious of their Jewish origins. Until 1664 and the creation of the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales by Louis XIV, the local government

of New France was so precarious and disorganised that little effective control was exercised over the identity of new arrivals. Although this situation later improved, the immensity of the territory and the paucity of state control within its boundaries would have made it easy for secret Jews to somehow "disappear from sight." For people of Jewish origins who were already used to living publicly as Christians in France, Spain, or Portugal, crossing the Atlantic safely, rather than convincing the authorities upon landing to allow them to join the colony as tradesmen and artisans, was probably the greatest danger they faced.

In a short article published in 2003 in *La voix sépharade*,[1], Jean-Marie Gélinas, a Québécois with a Catholic heritage, explains how he retraced the origins of his family name in the region of Aquitaine, and more precisely in the city of Saintes, situated about sixty miles from the Atlantic seacoast. Much to his surprise, he discovered that one ancestor, then bearing the name Gellineau, had arrived in Quebec around 1660 with a definite non-Catholic background. Originally the family name was spelled Jullineau, a local distortion of the surname "Juif Élie." This led Gélinas to discover that in the middle of the seventeenth century Saintes harboured a small Jewish community, and that the first person to bear his name in North America had explicit ancestral ties to Judaism.

Not all people with Jewish pasts made it past the official controls, however. In the summer of 1738, a sailor named Jacques Lafargue was found to be a Jewish woman, Esther Brandeau, in disguise. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what her purpose was when she arrived in Quebec City, and why she left her home region of La Rochelle for America. Hers is the only recorded case of a Jewish person actually reaching New France and being officially considered a Jew by Governor Gilles Hocquart and by the king's representatives in Versailles. The young woman was sent to the *Hôpital general de Québec*, administered by the Augustine sisters, where she was instructed in the Catholic faith in the hope that she would eventually convert. When this hope did not materialize, she was sent back to France the following year at the king's expense.

The Brandeau affair does not preclude the possibility that a certain number of Jews may have landed incognito in New France and prospered there by avoiding all mention of their religious origins. If their descendants were raised as Christians, as was the case with Gellineau

1 Jean-Marc Gélinas, "Un secret bien gardé," *La voix sépharade* 33: 2 (December 2003): 32-33.

from Saintes, much of their Judaic heritage would have been quickly erased in the almost unanimously Catholic context of French Canada. Detailed study of the genealogies and places of origin of the French settlers in New France would likely yield more evidence, but rarely have researchers examined the documents with this possibility in mind.

A debate has developed in modern Canadian historiography as to the exact role played by Abraham Gradis in the events leading to the successful British siege of Quebec in the summer of 1759, and the fall of New France. Was Gradis a faithful and courageous supplier of the French colony before its demise, or had he simply been one of a number of profiteers taking advantage of political connections and the desperate situation of France in North America? One thing is certain; Gradis began trading in Quebec in 1748, when his Bordeaux compatriot François Bigot was named *Intendant de la Nouvelle-France*, a position which guaranteed him a virtual monopoly on trade entering the French sphere of influence in North America. Gradually Bigot and Gradis came to control the flow of merchandise reaching Quebec from the port of Bordeaux, including food, spirits, and arms vital to the colony's defence, all transported on Gradis-owned vessels. Given the untenable military situation of Quebec after the start of the Seven Years War in Europe, the crown even offered after 1756 to cover all costs incurred by Gradis in the shipping of soldiers and their supplies to the St. Lawrence Valley, including the risk of enemy vessels intercepting his ships and losses due to seafaring conditions. These exceptionally advantageous circumstances for the house of Gradis came to an end with the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, which took place on September 13, 1759. Four years later, France ceded its North American possessions to the British crown, with the exception of the islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. Bigot was thrown into the Bastille in 1761 for his part in the alleged political corruption that had characterized the last years of French rule in Quebec, and bankruptcy awaited many local merchants who had no choice but to remain in the colony after the change of regime. Gradis himself easily survived the ruination of his lucrative enterprises in New France and continued after 1763 supplying other French colonies, thanks to his connection with the duc de Choiseul. To the house of Gradis, commerce with *les colonies du Canada* was but one episode in a series of international ventures which brought great prosperity to themselves and to the Bordeaux Jewish community.

The demographic contribution of people of Jewish origin who may have settled in New France remained at best marginal at this time, and traces of their existence have all but disappeared. It should also be noted that none of the Gradis settled permanently in New France, and that their connection with North America was quickly forgotten. This leaves only one person who dared declare a Jewish origin to Quebec's French authorities: Esther Brandeau. Because she appears to have confronted the *intendant* as a person of the Jewish faith and as a defiant woman originally dressed as a man, Esther Brandeau is remembered to this day as a heroine. Although we know next to nothing about her motives, and regardless of the fact that she was not heard of again after 1739, this young women has captured the imagination of later generations. Many novels have been written about Esther Brandeau in the recent past both in French and in English,[2] and she may well represent today the most tangible and lasting Jewish heritage of the period.

Pierre Anctil

2 See Pierre Lasry, *Une juive en Nouvelle-France* (Montréal: Les Éditions du CIDIHCA, 2000); Sharon E. MacKay, *Esther* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2004). See also Joe King's interpretation of Esther Brandeau in *From the Ghetto to the Main: the Story of the Jews of Montreal* (Montreal: The Montreal Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 9-12.

For Further Study

Anctil, Pierre. "La présence juive au Québec avant 1850: portrait d'une communauté en émergence." *L'Ancêtre*, 30 (printemps 2004): 197-203.

Ducharme, Nathalie. "Fortune critique d'Esther Brandeau, une aventurière en Nouvelle-France." Communication présentée au Congrès de l'ACFAS, Montréal, colloque Défis et curiosités de l'archive», 14 mai 2004, www.unites.uqam.ca/arche/alaq/publications/pdf/DUCHARME_article_Brandeau_Nouvelle-France_Alaq.pdf. Accessed September 2009.

------. "Esther Brandeau, le parcours fascinant de la première juive à résider en Nouvelle-France." *Tolerance.ca*, www.tolerance.ca. Accessed September 2009)

Greer, Allan. *The People of New France*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Menkis, Richard. "Patriarchs and Patricians: The Gradis Family of Eighteenth Century Bordeaux." In *East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870*, edited by Frances Malino and David Sorkin, 11-45. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

------. "Historiography, Myth and Group Relations: Jewish and Non-Jewish Québécois on Jews and New France." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 23: 2 (1991): 24-38.

Moogk, Peter N. *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada: A Cultural History*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2000.

Tisdel, Gaston. "Esther Brandeau." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* Online, vol. II, www.biographi.ca. Accessed September 2009.

Vaugeois, Denis. *Les Juifs et la Nouvelle-France*. Trois-Rivières: Les Éditions Boréal-Express, 1968.

II
Struggles and Successes: The Beginnings of Jewish Life in Canada in the Eighteenth Century

The historical connection of Jews with Canada dates back to the struggle for dominance between the English and French which culminated on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. The British defeat of the French facilitated the appearance of openly professing Jews in Canada, pioneers seeking economic gain and ultimately gaining something almost unprecedented in that era—a measure of political and social equality. The first recorded Jewish settlement in what is now Canada came into being in Halifax in the 1750s. Montreal, however, was the first Jewish community in Canada to achieve institutional permanence, though in the eighteenth century it remained relatively small.

There are a number of questions to be addressed regarding the beginning of the Canadian Jewish community. Which Jews came to this new land in the eighteenth century? Why did they come? Where did they settle? What were the challenges they faced? Most early Jewish Canadians came either directly from England or from other British North American colonies, and they tended to be unmarried young men. Many of them attained success and rose to prominence in the colonies. Less is known of the lives of Jewish women in this era. Some of the men went to England to marry Jewish women; others found Jewish wives in New York, Newport, and Philadelphia. Still others married local, non-Jewish women. They often had large families; the sons generally entered the family business, and girls were married off young. The women's work was primarily running the home and bearing and raising children, though there are instances of women working outside the home, such as the story of Phoebe David, a young widow with five children, who carried on her late husband's business.

Halifax did not possess an organized Jewish community in the eighteenth century, though a record of the Assembly of Nova Scotia (November 2, 1758) speaks of a Jewish burying ground that was apparently never used. Nevertheless, nearly from its inception, the city attracted numerous Jewish merchants to whom the governor gave grants of

land. A Jewish colonist named Israel Abrahams manufactured potash at Fort Cumberland and petitioned the Board of Trade in 1752 to grant him a monopoly in this business. He was also important in the textile, glass, and soap industries. There are records of a number of other Jewish mechants and businessmen in this era: Isaac Levi got permission to mine coal in Cape Breton. Samuel Jacobs, who was mentioned above, engaged in the liquor trade. Nathan Nathans also came in 1751, and with his family ran a mackerel fishery. Isaac DaCosta, an English Jew of Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese origin, owned land and financed the settlement of six other families. In Halifax, Jews were shopkeepers and traders, and even played a part in the public life of the colony as jurors. Samuel Hart, who is of no relation to Aaron Philip Hart and Ezekiel Hart of Quebec, was elected in 1793 to the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly for Liverpool and took his oath of office "on the true faith of a Christian." Because only Christians belonging to the Church of England were eligible for office in Nova Scotia, he was baptised an Anglican in the year he was elected.. Hart held this seat for six years, and assumed it fourteen years before the election of Ezekiel Hart of Quebec, who is usually consided the first Jew elected to public office in the British Empire. Samuel Hart is thus presumed to be the first Jew to be a member of the legislative assembly or parliament in any country under British rule.

After the American Revolution, trade with New England diminished and the Jewish population of Halifax dwindled. Some Jews continued to come to Nova Scotia, but most did not stay for long, and many of those who remained did not stay Jewish. By 1820, Jews had basically disappeared from Nova Scotia, and there is little evidence of any Jews living there until the last quarter of the century.

The acquisition of Quebec and its environs by the British Empire in the 1750s stimulated a need for experienced merchants and traders to begin to develop the country, and a number of Jews arrived as merchants and traders, supplying goods to the British army and the new settlers. Though not all of these traders stayed, those who did adjusted to the new environment and fit readily into British colonial society and commerce. They were resourceful, courageous, and adventurous, and able to endure and cope with the often hazardous frontier conditions, poor communications, and vast distances. They included Aaron Hart, a lieutenant in the English army, who came to Montreal with General Jeffrey Amherst in 1760. Among the other Jews coming with Amherst