

OSTROPOL ON THE ST. FRANCIS: THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF SHERBROOKE, QUEBEC— A 120-YEAR PRESENCE

Michael Benazon

Champlain Regional College, Lennoxville.

It is generally agreed that the small Jewish communities of Canada are diminishing and disappearing. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the Province of Quebec. With the exception of Ste-Agathe and Quebec City, there are now no organized Jewish congregations outside of greater Montreal. This was not always so. At various times small communities existed in Joliette, Three Rivers, La Macaza, Rouyn, Shawinigan, Sorel, St-Hyacinthe, and St-Jean.¹ Unfortunately, only a very few documents and press accounts have survived to tell the story of these communities.² In the case of Sherbrooke, the subject of this paper, the Synagogue minutes books, name lists, correspondence, ledgers, bills, documents pertaining to the cemetery, and various other papers are divided between two collections, one in Montreal and one in Sherbrooke;³ numerous short reports in the local press, both in French and in English, may be consulted in the archives of the Société d'histoire de Sherbrooke;⁴ while three longer but incomplete unpublished accounts, one in French and two in English, are available though not easily accessible.⁵ All these proved to be helpful in this study.

Since the history of Jewish settlement in Canada has been discussed elsewhere, there is no need to summarize it here.⁶ Yet it is worth considering, if only briefly, why the Jews migrated to certain small towns but not to others during the period of mass immigration from 1890 to 1930. The pattern of Jewish settlement in the West is instructive in this regard. Apart from those who opted for Winnipeg or settled on farms, Jewish pedlars and small businessmen moved to the villages and towns springing up along the newly opened railway lines. These settlements were undergoing rapid development as the surrounding lands filled up with farmers. There was a need, first for general stores and later for more specialized shops. It may be supposed that the Jews were well

adapted to be merchants and shopkeepers because they knew, or were able to learn, the languages of the settlers, or because many had taken part in small independent businesses back in the old country.⁷ Another reason may be that Jewish immigrants assumed they would be subject to discrimination if they sought work with gentile employers. In Montreal, where many took jobs with Jewish bosses, they did not have to worry about discrimination and were free to observe the Jewish sabbath and holy days; on the other hand, they were obliged to work long hours under poor working conditions for relatively low pay.⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that for many job-seekers any form of self-employment, no matter how far afield, would be deemed preferable to wage slavery in a factory.

COMMUNITY ORIGINS

In some respects, the situation in Sherbrooke of the 1870s and 1880s resembled that in the West. The Eastern Townships, though no longer a frontier region, was undergoing rapid population growth as French-Canadians moved into the region to work in the asbestos, copper mining, pulp, paper, and textile industries, or to take up farming. As the census reveals, by 1871 Sherbrooke had a French-Canadian majority. Sherbrooke was at the centre of the Townships' economy because of its hydro-electric power facilities and burgeoning textile industries; it was also on the main rail line from Montreal to Portland, Maine. By 1891, it had a population of 8,500, almost double what it was in 1871. This rapid growth presented an opportunity for the bold, resourceful, and energetic to open shops and businesses.⁹

Who were the founders of the Jewish community of Sherbrooke? During the 1870s, there were five Jewish adult males resident in Sherbrooke: an advocate, a tailor, and three merchants, one of whom ran a general store and news agency, while the other two focused on clothing, shoes, or dry goods.¹⁰ However, these men departed well before the official founding of the congregation in 1907.¹¹

The city directories and census reveal that in the 1880s, there were eleven adult Jewish males resident in Sherbrooke,¹² more than enough to constitute a *minyan* (the ten adult Jewish males needed to hold a prayer service). According to these sources, the Jewish population consisted of a bookkeeper, a pedlar, a merchant tailor, a clerk, a general store owner, and six clothing, shoe, or dry goods merchants. Only two of these men, Joseph Rosenbloom and Thomas Vineberg, were still present when the Congregation was legally constituted in 1907.¹³

In the next few years, the community grew to roughly twenty adult males, most of whom were accompanied by wives and children. We

now find one tailor, one bookkeeper, one student, two pedlars, two clerks, two people with unidentified professions, three junk dealers, and eight retail merchants specializing in clothing, shoes, and dry goods. Men who began as clerks or pedlars were only a few years later operating shops on Wellington Street in the heart of downtown Sherbrooke.¹⁴ Those who did not advance their careers apparently left the community.¹⁵ Thus we can deduce that, almost from the start, the Sherbrooke Jewish community was relatively prosperous. To the Sherbrooke core may be added the scattering of Jews living in Lennoxville, Compton, Coaticook, Megantic, Thetford Mines, Windsor, and other nearby small towns, who would get together with their Sherbrooke brethren for the important religious services.¹⁶ By the mid-1890s, we have in place the founders of the congregation, together with other people who could constitute a *minyan* and who were in a position, materially and spiritually, to support the future community.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the period when the land for the cemetery was purchased and the congregation established, we find sixty-three male householders listed in the census, the city directories, and the Synagogue Register.¹⁷ The community was by this time much more diversified. It consisted of one man who acted as rabbi, *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and cantor, a clerk, an upholsterer, a shoemaker, an employee, a watchmaker, a jeweller, a student, a clothes cleaner, two furniture dealers, two grocers, nine scrap metal or junk dealers, nine people with unidentified professions, ten tailors, ten merchants (mainly shoes, clothing, or dry goods), and thirteen pedlars.¹⁸ The relatively large number of those with unidentified trades, pedlars, and junk dealers probably reflects the sudden immigration of men who often had no clear profession, no capital, and an imperfect mastery of English and French. Given the influx of people, the founders were justified in establishing a congregation on 7 May 1907;¹⁹ it would only be a matter of time before they were ready to abandon their rented quarters in the Griffith Block on Dufferin Street and build a synagogue.

What was the nature of the old Sherbrooke Jewish community? Its origins are similar to the beginnings of other small Jewish communities in Canada. In at least one respect, however, its situation was a little different and deserves some comment. This difference has to do with the ethnic mix in Sherbrooke. In the 1870s, when the first Jews arrived, Sherbrooke had just acquired a French-speaking majority. Nonetheless, as Ronald Rudin explains, political and economic control remained for some years in the hands of the English-speaking elite.²⁰ As they had done in Montreal, the Jews set out to learn English and to

send their children to the English Protestant schools. Since many of their customers were French-speaking, the Jewish pedlars, traders, and merchants learned as much French as would permit them to conduct their businesses successfully. Yet there was no doubt that, culturally speaking, the Jews were aligning themselves with the powerful English-speaking minority; and within a few years of their arrival, they settled side by side with the English-speakers in the middle-class North Ward of Sherbrooke.²¹

According to the census, those Jews who settled in Sherbrooke during the 1870s and 1880s were born in such places as Russia, Poland, Prussia, and the United States; yet the Synagogue Register reveals that they had lived for some years elsewhere in Quebec or Eastern Ontario before they drifted to Sherbrooke.²² In general, these early settlers do not appear to have been related to each other. However, Joseph Rosenbloom (arr. 1890) and Thomas Vineberg (arr. 1898) became brothers-in-law around 1896.²³ Kinship, as we shall see, was to become an important factor in attracting people to Sherbrooke and inducing them to stay. Thomas Vineberg stayed on for another twenty-five years, while Rosenbloom remained for the rest of his life. Interestingly, when Rosenbloom finally married in 1905, his choice fell on Anna Leah Aronowsky, the adopted daughter of Judah Lyon Vineberg (arr. c. 1890),²⁴ head of the first of the three Vineberg families to arrive in Sherbrooke.²⁵

To this point, Jewish migration to Sherbrooke had a rather haphazard, fortuitous quality to it. The pattern began to change with the arrival of Moses and Leah Echenberg and their two oldest children in 1893. The following summary of Moses' life is derived from the Echenberg family history written by Myron Echenberg and Ruth Tannenbaum for their family reunion in 1986.²⁶ Like the other early Sherbrooke Jews, Moses had been in Canada for several years, first in Lancaster, Ontario, and then in Montreal. Once he had accumulated enough money, he sent for his fiancée, Leah Smith, and they were married in Montreal in 1888, where his first two children were born.²⁷

Moses and Leah were the first of a veritable horde of settlers from Ostropol, a small town in Volynia, in the heart of the Russian Ukraine. The atmosphere and living conditions in Ostropol in the second half of the nineteenth century are very well described by Echenberg and Tannenbaum.²⁸ Ostropol had a typical shtetl (an East European Jewish village community). Under Czarist rule, the Jews were subject to systematic discrimination, pauperization, and arbitrary conscription to the Russian army. Though history does not

record any pogroms or organized attacks on the Jews of Ostropol, it is clear they had good reason to fear that sooner or later they too would be the victims of anti-semitic violence. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that so many of the Echenbergs were to follow the example of Moses and Leah and leave for the new world. Ostropol was also typical in its devotion to Jewish learning. The men received good Jewish educations, and they took their Orthodoxy for granted. But there were some, including Moses Echenberg, who, by hook or by crook, had received some secular education and were therefore more open to the secular, democratic way of life they found in the new world.

Moses Echenberg's family were *balabatim*, i.e. people of "status and authority in the *shtetl* ..., leaders of Jewish life and especially of the obligation or *mitzvah* of charity."²⁹ Moses felt an obligation to become part of the community in which he had settled, which had treated him correctly and had enabled him to become prosperous in a relatively short period. One mark of this sense of social obligation, which also demonstrated the respect accorded him by the gentile community, was Moses' appointment as Justice of the Peace; his ties to the Liberal Party are another indication of his integration into the wider community.³⁰

The circumstances of Moses' arrival in Sherbrooke are somewhat different from those of his contemporaries. Having tried Montreal, Moses and Leah attempted to live out a long-term aspiration by buying a farm near Danville in 1891. Unfortunately the venture failed, and Moses and Leah drifted to nearby Sherbrooke in 1893. He began as a pedlar, while his wife ran a second-hand clothing and furniture shop from a shed behind their home close to the river, on what is today King Street East.³¹ It is surely not by coincidence that Moses arrived in Sherbrooke at the same time as his wife's brother, Isaac Smith. Obviously a close relationship existed between the two families. When, in 1898–99, Moses made what he thought would be a permanent move to the United States, he turned over both his home and his second-hand warehouse at 12 Bridge Street to Isaac Smith, as the city directory reveals.³² Moses was not fully established when, in 1894, he sponsored his brother's immigration to Canada. Menassa, twenty-three years old and unmarried, presumably left Ostropol to avoid military conscription. Menassa married in Montreal and lived for about three years in St. Hyacinthe.³³ However, he returned to Sherbrooke in 1900 and opened a junk business.³⁴ He was therefore in a position to invite Moses back to Sherbrooke to begin again. By 1901, the two brothers and their families were living together and working as partners in the business.

Thus Moses was closely connected to two of the future founders and leaders of the nascent Jewish community of Sherbrooke. Throughout his life Moses was tireless in his efforts to extricate all his relatives from Ostropol and settle them in Sherbrooke. It was not only the Echenbergs who arrived in a continuous stream up to 1922, but also other families linked to them by marriage—the Blitts, Budnings, Kushners, Smiths, and Weinsteins, as well as a number of friends and acquaintances. What this meant in terms of population origin is best summarized by Echenberg and Tannenbaum:

In the early 1920s the Echenberg extended family probably included 75 persons, while approximately 75 more Jewish residents of Sherbrooke were *landsleit* [fellow townsmen] from Ostropol; thus fully 150 of the 265 Sherbrooke Jews could trace their origins to Ostropol.³⁵

And so Ostropol was reincarnated on the banks of the St. Francis River.

By November 1906 Moses was sufficiently prosperous to afford the purchase of land for a community cemetery (which five years later he sold to the Congregation). According to the Synagogue records, the Agudath Achim Congregation was organized on 26 March 1907. When, in May 1907, it obtained legal recognition, Moses Echenberg was named as one of the trustees. His brother-in-law, Isaac Smith, was elected chairman. Also serving were two other members of the extended Echenberg family, Max Weinstein and Jacob Echenberg, thus “indicating the degree to which the Echenbergs had come to dominate Jewish affairs in Sherbrooke.”³⁶

We might well ask how the Jews were received by the majority gentile community. Unfortunately, it is not possible to fully answer this question. There is nobody alive today who can testify to the reception of the first Jewish settlers in Sherbrooke, nor are there any public or Synagogue records that throw much illumination on the subject. It is nonetheless possible to make a few observations based partly on practice elsewhere and partly on a single, all-too-brief comment dating back to 1907.

In the first place, compared to the situation in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century, it is clear that Canada was a model of enlightenment, decency, and democracy, and the Jews were quick to acknowledge their good fortune. However, the initial Canadian willingness to open the immigration gates in 1896 to the peoples of Eastern Europe was followed by a nasty, vociferous racism, evidence for which exists right across Canada during this period.³⁷ The effects of

this racism would be greater or lesser depending on the local situation. Thus, in an expanding market, the Jewish shop owner might not find himself in direct competition with the gentile shop owner; consequently, there were fewer reasons for ethnic tensions. There appears, moreover, to have been an unwritten, unspoken agreement that Jews were free to enter the scrap business, the men's and women's retail clothing trade, and several related enterprises, while staying out of such occupations as hardware, machinery, dairy products, and most service trades.

We can conclude from Morley Torgov's account of life in Sault Ste. Marie that some small towns were riddled with racism during the first four decades of this century, but the racism was not necessarily directed against Jews, particularly if they were a small community and kept a low profile. In his description of Sault Ste. Marie, Torgov points out that the east-end "Anglo-Saxons" were locked into a fierce struggle with the west-end Italians, and that the latter had little love for their neighbours the Ukrainians. In this situation, the forty or so Jewish families of Sault Ste. Marie were hardly noticed, and as long as they remained in the downtown core, they were left in peace.³⁸

A similar situation existed in Sherbrooke, a town founded by English-speaking people which almost from the start proved attractive to French-Canadians seeking employment in the burgeoning industries. With the English- and French-Canadians locked in a struggle for political control of the city,³⁹ there would be little point in either side trying to bully the small Jewish community—especially since it was ready to adopt English and support the Protestant School Board.

We may further note that, as in Sault Ste. Marie, the Jewish community at first occupied the town centre, close to where its businesses were located. Thus there was no direct challenge to English exclusiveness in living arrangements. In other places, Montreal for example, both the English- and the French-speaking populations were capable of anti-semitic attitudes and actions, and the Jewish ghetto felt squeezed between two powerful exclusive communities, a situation that continued well into the 1950s.⁴⁰

During the period of the 1870s and 1880s, practically all the Jewish businesses were situated on Wellington Street in the downtown core. The residences were for the most part located just a few metres farther along on the same street. The three families which did not reside on Wellington lived nearby. It would appear that in this period the Jews wished to live close to each other in rented premises, not far from their businesses.⁴¹

Despite the usually positive account the Sherbrooke Jews give of

their reception by the gentile community, there is one hint of a negative reaction when the Jews set out to found their own community. Writing in one of the Congress historical pamphlets, B.G. Sack observes:

In cases where tiny communities of Jews were suddenly faced by a rapid expansion, problems were bound to arise. In Sherbrooke, for instance, where in 1907 there were one hundred Jewish souls, it was necessary to institute legal proceedings to obtain permission to organize a congregation. The step was finally taken at a meeting presided over by a non-Jew, following a court injunction. The congregation thus founded was the Agudath Achim.⁴²

It has not been possible to find any confirmation of this possibly hostile step on the part of local authorities. The French-language newspaper of the time, *Le Progrès de l'Est*, merely reports on 2 April 1907 that the advocate, John Leonard, presented

une requête à M. le juge Hutchinson, au nom des Juifs de notre ville, pour leur obtenir la permission d'organiser une congrégation et ériger un synode. La requête a été accordée. M. J.-P. Royer a été nommé président d'une assemblée qui sera tenue le 7 courant, dans le bureau de M. Leonard, pour la nomination de 5 syndics.⁴³

In its edition of 8 May 1907, the *Sherbrooke Daily Record* gives a somewhat more generous coverage to the event and names the five trustees. In neither paper is there any hint of opposition to the establishment of a Jewish congregation, though it is clear that the chairman of the first meeting was not indeed Jewish. While there may well have been some behind-the-scenes opposition which compelled the budding Jewish community to seek a court injunction, it seems equally clear that there were decent people who were prepared to respect freedom of assembly. Despite a search through court records, it was not possible to find any further evidence of legal obstruction. Certainly the newspapers of the time were not shy about printing racist slurs and cartoons referring to Chinese and Japanese immigrants as well as to the "dregs" of Europe,⁴⁴ but neither the French nor the English Sherbrooke newspapers indulged in anti-semitic slurs.

The impression that the Jewish community of Sherbrooke lived in peace with its gentile neighbours is strengthened, if not explicitly confirmed, by sympathetic accounts in the *Sherbrooke Daily Record* of a double wedding and a festive box social held by the Hebrew Ladies' Aid in 1906.⁴⁵ Had the community felt uneasy, the celebrants would

probably not have invited the local press to cover these events. It is clear, moreover, that from its inception in 1889, the Sherbrooke Board of Trade (later renamed the Chamber of Commerce) welcomed the presence of Jewish merchants.⁴⁶

THE COMMUNITY TO WORLD WAR II 1907–1920

It would be interesting to present a detailed account of the Sherbrooke Jewish community from its formal establishment in 1907 through its years of maximum expansion and on into its gradual decline. Regrettably, the absence of comprehensive membership lists makes it difficult to establish exactly who the Synagogue members were and precisely when and why the membership began to decline.

Using the decennial census totals, the sociologist Louis Rosenberg claimed that the Sherbrooke community attained its maximum in 1921 with a total Jewish population of 265 souls.⁴⁷ The census figures do not of course reveal who was a Synagogue member, nor do Rosenberg's figures include another half dozen or so families living in the neighbouring towns, several of whom were active Synagogue members. We must also take into account 1) the high turnover rate, which meant that the Jewish population could fluctuate from year to year, and 2) the proclivity of some small-town Jews to retain synagogue membership privileges in a larger centre like Montreal. My own figures suggest that there were roughly 83 heads of households resident in the Sherbrooke area between 1911 and 1920.⁴⁸ These estimates provide a rough confirmation of Rosenberg's figures, with the usual caveat that not all Jewish householders were necessarily Synagogue members.

Both sets of figures reveal that by 1920 the Sherbrooke Jewish community had acquired a sufficient population to justify the building of a synagogue. The Synagogue minutes book indicates that the community began its fund-raising for the building in October 1916.⁴⁹ The trustees first acquired a property on downtown Frontenac Street,⁵⁰ but for some reason changed their minds. They then chose a site on Montreal Street, on the edge of the Old North English-speaking residential area where the more affluent members of the Jewish community were in the process of establishing their homes. Napoléon Audet, a local architect, was hired to design the structure.⁵¹ The neo-classical style is a little unusual; it implies that Congregation Agudath Achim sought to trace its origin to the foundations of Western civilization rather than to the traditions and norms of Eastern Europe, where most of the congregants had originated. It is perhaps not by chance that the Greek

revival design echoes the style of the prestigious Plymouth Trinity United Church prominently located at the bottom of Montreal Street. Significantly, two senior personalities of the Conservative Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue of Montreal attended the laying of the cornerstone on 9 November 1920.⁵² Congregation Agudath Achim, under the leadership of Joseph Rosenbloom, assisted by Moses and Menassa Echenberg, was thus allying itself to the most prestigious as well as the wealthiest Jewish synagogue in Canada.

1920–1940

In these early and middle years of the Sherbrooke Jewish community, the Echenbergs and their relatives displayed an intense commitment to the synagogue and its allied institutions. One after the other, the Echenberg men dominated the Synagogue executive just as their wives dominated the Ladies' Aid and Hadassah. Menassa Echenberg, for example, was congregational president from 1916 to 1920 and from 1926 to 1943.⁵³ This fidelity to place applies even to the cemetery, where row on serried row of Echenbergs assert their presence on into perpetuity.

Echenberg and Tannenbaum stress that as *balabatim*, that is, community leaders, the Echenbergs of the inter-war era took part in a wide range of community activities: the men belonged to various civic service clubs, and two of the Echenberg women, Leah and Rebecca, were prominent members of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. The Echenbergs had close connections to the Liberal Party, at both the provincial and the federal levels. Bertha and Rebecca Echenberg were students at Macdonald College in Montreal, and their younger sister Bessie was a graduate of Bishop's University. The moment of glory for this branch of the Echenbergs was that day in 1939 when Sam Echenberg (he who later became known as Colonel Sam) and his sister Rebecca were presented to the King and Queen on their visit to Canada, shortly before the outbreak of World War II.⁵⁴

Prosperous and confident in the future, the Canadian Echenbergs encouraged their remaining relatives in Ostropol to join them in Sherbrooke—often paying for their tickets and providing employment for them when they arrived. By 1922, the last of the Echenbergs had abandoned Ostropol.⁵⁵

One of the remarkable characteristics of Jewish life in Sherbrooke was family interconnectedness. As we have seen, the Rosenblooms were related to two branches of the Vineberg family. The Echenbergs were related to a host of others: the Blitts, Budnings, Cohens, Cresses, Horns, Kitners, Kushners, Linds, Holdengrabers, Niloffs, Shriars, Slaters, Smiths,

Vinebergs, and Weinstains, to mention only the most obvious. The same phenomenon, though to a lesser degree, is to be seen in some of the other Jewish clans. These family connections obviously had much to do with attracting people to Sherbrooke and holding them there through kinship, social ties, and employment possibilities.⁵⁶

Some of these ties were shaken and disrupted by the impact of the Depression. If a business failed, the proprietor might choose to start anew in another community rather than soldier on in Sherbrooke. However, the Sherbrooke Jewish community appears to have escaped the worst effects of the Depression by a stroke of luck, when Sam Rubin decided to relocate his clothing factory in Sherbrooke. It is not, unfortunately, a very edifying tale. The Rubin factory in Montreal employed mainly Jewish workers. In 1936, these workers were preparing to unionize. To forestall them, Sam Rubin decided to move the plant to Sherbrooke, where he knew he would find a more docile, more stoical labour force. In a letter written to A.J. Freiman on 3 December 1936, H.M. Caiserman, speaking for the Canadian Jewish Congress, expressed his consternation:

You probably know that the firm R. has decided to move their plant to Sherbrooke Que., thus putting three hundred Jewish families on the street.

I understand that Rabbi Abramovitz has used his influence to persuade Mr. R. from taking such a step. I also understand that the Minister of Labour of the Province of Quebec has promised to recommend that the agreement between Mr. R. and the Sherbrooke municipality should not be confirmed.⁵⁷

The move nonetheless went forward. Rubin appointed his brother Jack as manager; a number of other Montreal Jews followed him over the years to Sherbrooke, where they worked as managers, salesmen, skilled workers, or foremen overseeing a French-Canadian workforce. Rubin provided employment for close to twenty-five Jewish men who settled into Sherbrooke with their families; the majority soon became ardent, if not permanently committed, members of their adopted community.⁵⁸

Most of these men were not earning high salaries, and they may have felt somewhat out of place in the predominantly middle-class Jewish community that emerged in Sherbrooke, especially after World War II. Perhaps their low status partly explains the relatively high turnover of Rubin's Jewish employees. Several, however, became executive members of the Synagogue⁵⁹ and of the local B'nai B'rith Lodge;⁶⁰ their wives played equally important roles in the Ladies' Aid and Hadassah.⁶¹

The principal jobs on the Synagogue executive were held by the most prosperous members of the community. These were the men who had a stake in the community and whose business acumen was needed to manage the sometimes complex financial affairs of the Synagogue. Needless to say, they could be counted on to contribute generously to the Synagogue, later to the annual drives for War Relief, and later still to the Bond and United Jewish Appeal drives. Their wives in the Ladies' Aid and Hadassah were even more involved in fund-raising activities. Little wonder then that a Synagogue president was chosen for his generosity, his business skills, and his energy, forcefulness, and dedication, rather than for his learning. Though newcomers were sometimes drawn into the Synagogue executives, by and large the same men were re-elected year after year, although not always to the same positions.⁶²

The Synagogue was nominally Orthodox. This allegiance can no doubt be traced back to the wish of the original settlers to maintain the traditions they had grown up with in Ostropol. But of course there was a different reality in Canada, which gnawed away at a strictly Orthodox outlook. For one thing, some of the early Jewish settlers were mildly secular in their views, ready to co-operate with the gentile community. The signal for this approach was provided by Moses Echenberg himself, a strong anglophile who encouraged members of his family to take part in the affairs of the wider community. It is also clear that the Jewish education provided by the Synagogue could do no more than teach the boys to take part in the prayer service. Since relatively little learning took place after Bar Mitzvah at age thirteen, the new leadership was not well educated in Jewish lore. Many of the congregants maintained *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws) at home, but outside the home it was another story. The Synagogue minutes books record the repeated pleas of various frustrated rabbis calling for Synagogue attendance on Saturday mornings. People would come to a Bar Mitzvah service, but apart from special occasions it was difficult to tear the men away from their businesses. So in fact Agudath Achim was closer to Conservative Judaism than to Orthodoxy. Why then didn't the Synagogue officials select Conservative rabbis who would provide a more appropriate orientation? One answer is that no self-respecting Conservative rabbi was willing to work for the salary the congregation was prepared to offer him.⁶³ Since the Orthodox rabbi, cantor, *shochet*, or Hebrew teacher would work for next to nothing, Congregation Agudath Achim remained steadfastly and resolutely Orthodox.

Meanwhile, members of the community prospered in the retail trade. Roughly half the shops on Wellington North from the 1920s

to the 1950s were run by Jews—many of whom were Echenbergs. The principal businesses were men's and women's clothing shops, but Jews were also involved in the sale of furniture, scrap metal, shoes, and furs. The directories indicate the presence of several pedlars, tailors, and employees, as well as a sprinkling of clerks, grocers, doctors, salesmen, dressmakers, students, and managers.⁶⁴ It seems that nobody in those days admitted to being unemployed.

As noted earlier, the first Jewish settlers maintained their residences above or very close to their shops on Wellington Street in downtown Sherbrooke. In the 1890s and early 1900s, we find that several Jewish merchants set up shops and residences on such streets as Alexander and Gillespie, in a residential area not far from the downtown core. The frequent changes of address suggest that people were working and living in rented property, and they changed addresses as their fortunes improved or their family size increased.⁶⁵

Joseph Rosenbloom was one of the first to move to the north end of the city. In the second decade of the century he was followed by Moses Echenberg and a couple of others. But it is during the 1920s that the affluent members of the community began to shift to the newly developed North Ward, where the English-speaking middle class was also settling. The migration continued even during the 1930s and was largely completed by the end of the 1940s.⁶⁶

WORLD WAR II

The Sherbrooke Jewish community had reason to be proud of its war effort. Though accurate figures are not available, anecdotal evidence indicates that the enlistment rate was very high. This was no doubt partly due to patriotic fervour in the anglophone community. The young Jewish men would have identified with the feelings of their gentile friends and classmates. In addition, there was the example of Sam Echenberg, the second highest-ranking Jewish officer to emerge from World War II. As Echenberg and Tannenbaum explain, Sam quit McGill at the beginning of World War I,

to volunteer for overseas duty as an enlisted man. He served in France and by war's end in 1918 had been promoted to sergeant. On his return to Sherbrooke, Sam devoted far more energy to his military vocation in the militia reserves than he did to his job as salesman in the furniture store. His rise in the reserves was remarkable, to captain, major, and finally, colonel and commander of the Sherbrooke regiment.... Many of the Jewish men of Sherbrooke served under Sam in the regiment, and, after 1939, saw active duty.⁶⁷

Sam Echenberg's presence and example showed the way for the young Jewish men of Sherbrooke.

The adult community responded to the war and its effects on European Jewry by participating in efforts to raise money for the United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies. The correspondence between Abe Bronfman in Montreal and Menassa Echenberg in Sherbrooke shows that the campaign was under way as early as 1940 with Menassa as chairman. The correspondence does not reveal how much money was actually collected each year, though it does suggest that the amounts ranged from as low as \$2 to as high as \$300 for wealthy men like Joseph Rosenbloom. Menassa evidently had some trouble in inducing people to part with their money—perhaps because in 1940–1941 the consequences for the Jews of a German victory were still uncertain.⁶⁸

The war came close to the Jews of Sherbrooke in one other respect. In 1940, the British Government decided to arrest so-called enemy aliens and then to transport them to Canada where they could be interned. Among these detainees were a number of German-Jewish young men whose parents had sent them to England to escape Nazi persecution. The Canadian Government hastily established several internment camps, one of which was located in Sherbrooke. Many of these internees were Jewish. They spent the next two years perfecting their English and educating themselves. The camp commandant occasionally called on Becky Echenberg to deal with the problems affecting the Jewish prisoners. She was apparently successful in arranging for two youths, Fred Kaufman and Eli Morgenstern, to be adopted by the Mittleman and Vineberg families and educated in the local schools.⁶⁹ Fred Kaufman later became a Justice of the Quebec Supreme Court. Unfortunately another young man died in the camp in 1941 and was buried in the Sherbrooke Jewish cemetery.⁷⁰

THE POST-WAR ERA

The late 1940s and early 1950s were happy years for the Sherbrooke Jewish community. The people were prosperous and secure. It seemed to be a good time to build an addition to the Synagogue. The congregation felt it needed classrooms for the *Talmud Torah* (a day school for Jewish children). And why not, at the same time, add a hall and kitchen for receptions, banquets, shows, etc., as well as meeting rooms for the Synagogue executive and B'nai B'rith? In the end, it was decided to build a two-storey addition for a cost of \$50,391.⁷¹

In retrospect, there appear to have been some warning signs that were not heeded. How many classrooms, after all, would really be

needed for the small number of children who would attend the school? The community was not increasing in size; people were not becoming more religious; and, more ominously, a number of members were defaulting on their membership fees and failing to make good on financial pledges they had made. Nonetheless, the project went forward, and in May 1955, amidst fanfare and high hopes, the new addition was formally inaugurated.⁷²

At first all went well. Through various appeals and fund-raising strategies, the building was paid for. But then in 1956 a disaster struck the community: Sam Rubin sold his factory to an American company; the next year, as the Quebec clothing and textile industry began its slow decline, the American owners decided to shut down their Sherbrooke operation,⁷³ and the workers had to look elsewhere for employment. Most of the remaining Jewish employees left town. The Synagogue minutes book records the loss of eight members, two through death.⁷⁴ Clearly the collapse of Rubin's meant immediate resignations from the Synagogue. On 26 October 1958, the General Meeting decided to raise pew rentals and weekly payments as Synagogue expenses "skyrocketed."⁷⁵ In the years that followed, the executive had to wrestle with a drop in attendance at the general meetings, lack of a *minyán* at Saturday morning services, dissatisfaction with the incumbent rabbi, rising heating and maintenance costs, and on-going difficulties in the collecting of dues and pledges.⁷⁶ After 1960, the Synagogue minutes book ceases to report the losses and gains in membership, but members lost through death and out-migration were not being replaced by newcomers.

Various ways of raising revenues were discussed and implemented. Expenses were cut by hiring a Hebrew teacher and cantor instead of a rabbi. Nonetheless, the costs continued to rise at a time when there were fewer people around to pay the bills. Even more disturbing was the decline of Jewish businesses in Sherbrooke, for these people had been the financial backbone of the community. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a small influx of Jewish doctors, teachers, and researchers who worked in the local universities, colleges, and hospitals. Although the majority of them became Synagogue members, they did not have the commitment to the Synagogue that the businessmen had. It was partly an unfamiliarity with small-town ways and partly a sense that the Synagogue belonged to the oldtimers rather than to the newcomers. By the late 1970s, the Synagogue had ceased to hire even a Hebrew teacher, and a cantor was asked to officiate only on high holy days, or for special events.⁷⁷

The sale of the building began to be discussed in the late 1970s, but

the Synagogue executive, reluctant to surrender an institution their parents and grandparents had worked so hard to build, and ever hopeful of a membership renewal, postponed the evil day. The building was put up for sale in 1978, but to the consternation of the executive, no buyer could at first be found. Finally in August 1983, the unthinkable was overtaken by the inevitable: the Synagogue was sold to the Pentecostal Church.

By this time it was too late to consider moving into smaller premises. The bulk of the older community had left. Those who stayed on were a mixed group of oldtimers, middle-aged professionals, and a number of men and women with gentile partners. The younger people, who had children to educate, also had the energy, resourcefulness, and knowledge to undertake the education of their children by themselves. With little money but with lots of enthusiasm, they organized Sunday School classes in their homes and arranged community gatherings or parties at Bishop's University to celebrate Hanukah and Purim. Disinclined to follow traditional religious procedures and conventional Jewish practices, these men and women participated equally in organizing the programme and teaching the children. The result was an interesting interlude of parent-child cultural and educational activity that was rewarding to all who took part in it. Unfortunately, once the children reached thirteen, the parents ceased to have the same concern; and, in any case, the numbers of Jewish professionals in the Sherbrooke area began to decline as diminishing career opportunities, a limited social life, and the desire to further their children's educational and social prospects induced people in mid-career to seek employment elsewhere.⁷⁸

This informal group (they never believed it necessary to elect an executive) ran the show from about 1983 to 1990. Since then, the remnant of the community has functioned on two levels. The Agudath Achim Congregation, existing as a legal entity, operates the local cemetery from Montreal. One of the last of the oldtimers still records the occasional burial in the Synagogue Register. On another level, interested people organize a yearly Hanukah celebration, usually in somebody's home. All the known or declared Jews of the Sherbrooke area, their spouses and children, are invited for a festive meal. The last such gathering in 1996 drew together roughly two dozen adults and children.⁷⁹

It is difficult, awkward, and unsatisfying to attempt an assessment of the achievements or contributions that an ethnic group makes to the wider community of which it is a part. Clearly certain individuals,

irrespective of their community affiliation and ethnic origin, are attracted to community activities while others are not. In part, community involvement is determined by a person's wealth, status, upbringing, education, string of social contacts, and amount of leisure time available. A new immigrant is likely to have only a short supply of these no doubt desirable attributes. He or she may not feel at ease with a group of citizens who have known each other for years, and they in turn may not welcome the input of someone they regard as an outsider or stranger, who is unfamiliar with the local conventions or rules that govern social interaction, and whose command of the dominant language is more than likely deficient.

Consequently, it would not be reasonable to expect that the early Sherbrooke Jewish community should have a distinguished record of community involvement. These people were too busy trying to make a living in what must have been to them a very foreign environment. Also, given the anti-semitism that many of the early settlers had personally experienced in the old country and the more modern forms of anti-semitism that erupted in the 1930s and 1940s, it is little wonder that some of the oldtimers, if questioned, will admit to a profound distrust of their gentile neighbours.⁸⁰

This being said, it is noteworthy, perhaps even remarkable, that the Jewish community did interact with and contribute to the wider community in a variety of ways and relatively early in its history. We have noted that Jewish merchants were members of the local Board of Trade as early as 1889. We have also seen that Moses Echenberg, his wife, and his children served as examples of what could be done in Sherbrooke, but they were not the only ones. Leah Rosenbloom was active in the Red Cross, the IODE, and the Victorian Order of Nurses, and served as pianist for the Gaelic Society and the ladies' section of the Sherbrooke Snowshoe Club.⁸¹ Her husband Joe was a charter member of the Sherbrooke Rotary Club⁸² and their son Lewis was, for many years, its president.

The younger generation, those born in Sherbrooke, attended local schools, participated equally in the various activities for young people—Brownies, Cubs, Girl Guides, Scouts, etc.—and often distinguished themselves as athletes, debaters, student leaders, and scholars.⁸³ Many of them formed close attachments with their gentile classmates, and these sometimes developed into lifelong friendships.⁸⁴ The Jewish young people gave of themselves and in turn were enriched by a familiarity and understanding of the nature of Canadian life that was unavailable to Montreal Jewish youths who tended to associate with their co-religionists in and out of school.

Though most members of the community were retailers or employees of S. Rubin, there was a sprinkling of professionals: doctors, pharmacists, and later on researchers and teachers. Here it is difficult to measure contributions. Can we legitimately argue that a doctor or a teacher contributes more to a well-ordered society than a farmer, a journalist, a plumber, a businessman, or a factory worker? The people who labour in these various occupations rarely do so for strictly altruistic reasons, and the contribution they make depends on their individual energy, imagination, and talent. The members of the Jewish community were law-abiding, decent, responsible people, devoted to their families and to their synagogue. They gave something back to Sherbrooke; but, just as important, the English-speaking community was tolerant, welcoming, and fair-minded to the strangers in their midst. They created the conditions that made the Jews of Sherbrooke feel they were valued and respected.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE SHERBROOKE JEWISH COMMUNITY

As the figures assembled by Louis Rosenberg reveal, the decline of the Sherbrooke Jewish community began in the 1920s.⁸⁵ It climaxed on 31 July 1983, with the sale of the Synagogue. The virtual disappearance of the community is part of a country-wide trend that has been going on since World War II. This period has seen the decline of manufacturing and industrial enterprises located in small towns and their displacement either to the cities or to other countries. Retail outlets of all kinds that once characterized Jewish business enterprise, particularly in small towns, were increasingly challenged by chain stores and shopping malls in the post-war years.⁸⁶ Some Jewish businessmen began to transfer their shops to the cities at the end of World War II, while others decided to create new enterprises in the larger centres.

Nowhere is the process of small-town depopulation more obvious than in Quebec. Smaller centres throughout the province have been losing ground as the ambitious and the unemployed seek work in the cities. The textile industry, which once flourished in the Eastern Townships, has all but disappeared. As we have seen, the collapse of Rubin's textile factory in the late 1950s meant that a number of Jews associated with this enterprise were forced to look elsewhere for work; thus at one stroke roughly 20% of the Jewish community was forced out. Furthermore, having traditionally aligned itself in language and culture with the anglophones, the Jewish community was dismayed to discover that anglophone culture in Sherbrooke was disappearing and that as a result it would be increasingly isolated.

It is also clear that Canadian Jews have consistently sought out urban centres where they can more easily lead a Jewish life. If, in the early part of this century, numbers of Jews established themselves in small towns all across Canada, it was a case of economic considerations taking precedence over social and religious imperatives. It is therefore not surprising that many Jews began their move to the cities during the 1940s and 1950s, when economic opportunities were good. Parents often made the move in mid-career in order for their children to receive a Jewish education and make Jewish friends in the big city. These parents were opposed to assimilation and wanted their children to associate with Jewish youth, among whom a suitable mate would eventually be found. Even when parents remained in the small town, they encouraged their children to pursue their studies in the cities and to marry there. Given the low Jewish birthrate, there were usually not more than two or three children per family, and if the son or sons pursued an education, there would be no one to take over the family business. When the parents were ready to retire, they usually sold the shop to a gentile and followed their children to the cities.

These trends have recently been exacerbated in Quebec by the rise of Quebec separatism. Nervous about the possible effects of ethnic nationalism, many Jews have left Quebec for points west and south. It is hardly surprising that most of the Jews of Sherbrooke have done the same thing. The young, the ambitious, and the educated leave. Those who have businesses that cannot easily be moved, who have safe jobs, or who are waiting for retirement bide their time. As long as Bishop's University, Champlain College, and Université de Sherbrooke flourish, a tiny remnant of Jewish academics will hang on, but if we may judge by recent experience, most of them will leave the area when they retire.

The last word belongs to Dr. Eli Einbinder of New York, who was born and spent his formative years in Sherbrooke. He retains the fondest of memories for the people and the town he left behind. In his 1994 speech to the graduating class at the local high school, he put his finger on the underlying ambiguity that gnawed away at the heart of the Sherbrooke Jewish community:

I was part of an organized Jewish community that really has ceased to exist. It consisted of families most of whose parents were first generation Canadians although some were immigrants themselves. In truth, they would have all preferred to live in a metropolis with more Jewish life, but economic necessity or opportunity found them living here, working, and raising families. Although they felt that they lived in an environment where

they were somewhat excluded, it is also the opposite that was true. They were pretty clannish, and especially after the war, they had considerable anxiety about the safety of having to do much with the non-Jewish communities around them. There were a few exceptions, but generally I believe this description is accurate. Their message to their children was simple—you should work hard and study and be successful and move to the big city and marry Jewish girls. The pressure, as you can imagine, was horrendous. Here we youngsters were, surrounded by beautiful country and lakes and people, but our commitments were to be temporary from the beginning. In a sense, this was a way station for immigrants or immigrants' children waiting to fulfill what they thought must be their destiny. We were discouraged, to put it mildly, from planning a long-term future here. Well, a psychologist might say that our parents were doing to us—quite unconsciously—what their and their fathers' fates had done to them—raising us to think of the majority community as unwelcoming and to plan on leaving what was, in the larger picture, a place on the way to somewhere else.⁸⁷

And leave they did.

RESUME

L'étude retrace l'évolution de la communauté juive de Sherbrooke, Québec, depuis ses débuts dans les années 1870 jusqu'à sa désintégration et sa disparition, à toute fin pratique, dans les années 1990. La communauté fut en grande partie établie par des gens venus de la petite ville d'Ostropol situé dans l'actuelle Ukraine. Au cours des ans, ceux-ci ont créé une collectivité prospère, mais dans le subtil message transmis à leurs enfants, ils ont préparé la voie à l'ultime disparition de leur mode de vie.

APPENDIX I

A SELECTED LIST OF PRESS REPORTS CONCERNING
THE SHERBROOKE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND ITS MEMBERS

- "Interesting Jewish Wedding in Sherbrooke," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 4 July 1906, 4.
- "A very enjoyable evening...", *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 13 December 1906, 4.
- "Sherbrooke," *The Jewish Times* (Montreal), 25 January 1907, 78.
- "Mr. John Leonard, K. C. ...," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 1 April 1907, 4.
- "M. John Leonard, C. R. ...," *Le Progrès de l'Est* (Sherbrooke), 2 April 1907, 3.
- "Sherbrooke Jewish Congregation Formally Organized According to Law," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 8 May 1907, 1.
- "Sherbrooke," *The Jewish Times* (Montreal), 17 May 1907, 206.
- "Agudath Achim Sherbrooke," *Der Keneder Adler* (Montreal), 11 November 1910, 7.
- "Une historique cérémonie juive à Sherbrooke," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 6 November 1920, 1.
- "Corner Stone of Synagogue Will Be Laid," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 6 November 1920, 4.
- "Dédicace de la synagogue de la rue Montréal," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 10 November 1920, 1, 5.
- "The Corner Stone of Jewish Synagogue on Montreal Street Was Laid Yesterday...", *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 10 November 1920, 1, 5.
- "La part des Juifs à nos progrès," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 9 January 1930, 3.
- "Banquet Held in Honor of Col. Echenberg," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 5 August 1942, 3.
- "60 membres se réunissent régulièrement à la Synagogue Juive de la rue Montréal," *La Tribune des Romantiques Cantons de l'Est: Cahier historique* (Sherbrooke), 1943, 112.
- "La colonie juive fête les 75 ans de M. J. Rosenbloom," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 24 January 1944, 3.
- "Banquet Held in Honor of J. Rosenbloom," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 24 January 1944, 3.
- "B. Math Again President of B'nai B'rith," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 2 March 1944, 3.
- "'Burning of Mortgage' Ceremony Is Held by Local Jewish Congregation," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 15 January 1945, 1.
- "Le col. S. Echenberg à sa retraite après une belle carrière militaire," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 28 January 1947, 8.

- "Mort subite de M. Abraham D. Smith, à l'âge de 53 ans," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 7 January 1948, 3.
- "La firme Rosenbloom fondée il y a 50 ans aujourd'hui," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 1 May 1948, 3.
- "M. Jack Echenberg est en affaires depuis 40 ans," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 6 July 1948, 10.
- "Jewish Community Tendered Dinner to Local Couple," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 13 January 1950, 9.
- "Leah Echenberg Chapter of Hadassah," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 4 January 1952, 8.
- "Confirmation Ceremony Held at Synagogue," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 2 February 1952, 8.
- "Mrs. A.S. Mittleman and Mrs. David Echenberg received...," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 2 February 1952, 8.
- "M. J. Rosenbloom, marchand bien connu, meurt accidentellement," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 3 November 1952, 3.
- "Impressive Ceremony Marks Breaking Of Ground For Local Synagogue Extension," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 31 May 1954, 3.
- "Impressive Ceremonies At Synagogue Hall Event," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 9 May 1955, 3, 5.
- "Dedication Issue," *Bulletin of Congregation Agudath Achim*, 2.8 (May 1955): 1-2.
- "Sherbrooke, Que. Prepares for Israel Bond Dinner January 19th," *Israel Bond Community Newsletter*, 6.1 (January 1958): 2.
- "Synagogue Center of Jewish Activities," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, n.d. 1958, n.p.
- "Le monde des affaires est dans le deuil," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 2 August 1958, 3.
- "Humoriste américain à Sherbrooke, demain," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 24 January 1959, 3.
- "Funérailles de madame S. A. Vineberg," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 7 October 1961, 2.
- "Sherbrooke Hadassah," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 18 January 1962, 8.
- "M. Henry Echenberg est conduit à son dernier repos," *La Tribune* (Sherbrooke), 6 February 1962, 5.
- "Sherbrooke Hadassah," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 17 July 1964, 8.
- "Happy Bar Mitzvah ceremony marks a new maturity," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 10 January 1966, 3.
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- "Archbishop heads representatives visiting at Synagogue and banquet." *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 11 May 1967, 1.
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- Goldstein, Wesley. "Sadness marks closing of Sherbrooke synagogue." *Canadian Jewish News* (Montreal), 11 August 1983, 18.
- Catchpough, Charles. "Sherbrooke Synagogue Closed." *The Outlet* (Magog), August 1983, 4.
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- Einbinder, Eli. Personal interview, 12 November 1996.
- Levin, Moe. Personal interview, November 1996.
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16 and 18 December 1996, 28 November 1997.
- Shimelman, Judy. Personal interview, 6 December 1996.
- Steinman, Sonny. Personal interview, 30 November 1996.
- Tannenbaum, Ruth. Personal interview, 14 May 1996.
- Vineberg, David. Taped interview, CJC Archives, 9 May 1990.
Personal interview, 24 December 1997.
- Vineberg, Sally. Personal interview, 26 November 1996.

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

- Canadian Jewish Congress: National Archives, Montreal, Quebec.
- La Société d'histoire de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Quebec.
- Mrs. Sally Vineberg of Sherbrooke, Quebec, is the custodian of the Agudath Achim Synagogue Register, one of the minutes books, and various other documents.

Mr. Ray Whitzman of Ottawa has a computerized list of tombstones in the Agudath Achim Cemetery in Sherbrooke, Quebec.

Archives nationales du Québec, Sherbrooke office.

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NOTES

- 1 Louis Rosenberg, *A Gazetteer of Jewish Communities in Canada Showing the Jewish Population in Each of the Cities, Towns and Villages in Canada, 1851–1951* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, Jewish Communities Series, no. 7, 1951), 1, 8–9.
- 2 What remains has been collected in the archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress in Montreal.
- 3 The Canadian Jewish Congress Archive (hereafter CJCA) and the Sally Vineberg private collection (hereafter SVPC).
- 4 See Appendix I for a selected chronological list of press reports.
- 5 Jean Letendre and Rénaud Fortier, "Un siècle de présence juive à Sherbrooke" (Master's Class Project, Université de Sherbrooke, 1980); Myron Echenberg and Ruth Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs of Ostropol and Sherbrooke: A Tale of Two Shtetls* (Montreal: Echenberg Family, 1986); Lewis Rosenbloom, "Yikhus Grows on Our Family Tree: Stories of the Rosenblooms of Sherbrooke" (Sherbrooke, 1974).

- 6 See, for example, Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The Jewish Community in Canada*, vol. 1 (Toronto: M & S, 1970); B.G. Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada*, trans. Ralph Novek (Montreal: Harvest, 1965); Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Lester, 1992); Bernard L. Vigod, *The Jews in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984); Erna Paris, *Jews: An Account of Their Experience in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980).
- 7 Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939), 22–23; “The Decline and Disappearance of Very Small Jewish Communities in Canada, 1851–1951,” (Montreal: CJCA, Series DA2, Box 2, File 1, c. 1953), 6–9; “Some Aspects of the Historical Development of the Canadian Jewish Community,” *Publication of the American Jewish Historical Society* 50.2 (1960), 137; Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*, 158–172.
- 8 Sack, *History of the Jews*, 244–45.
- 9 Althea Douglas, “The Eastern Townships: Settlement,” *Canadian Genealogist* 10.2 (1988): 104–115; J.I. Little, “Watching the Frontier Disappear: English-Speaking Reaction to French-Canadian Colonization in the Eastern Townships, 1844–90,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 15.4 (1980–81): 93–111; Little, “The Catholic Church and French-Canadian Colonization of the Eastern Townships, 1821–51,” *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 52.1 (1982): 142–165; Aileen Ross, “French Influx Threatens Anglo Dominance,” *Sherbrooke Record*, 20 September 1978, 13; Ronald Rudin, “The Townships of Richard William Heneker, 1855–1902,” 19.3 (1984): 32–49; Rudin, *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec 1759–1980* (Quebec: IQRC, 1985).
- 10 See the 1871 and 1881 census for Sherbrooke and *The Eastern Townships Gazetteer and Directory for 1875–76*. In order to understand the composition of the Jewish community of Sherbrooke at any given time, it would be helpful to obtain accurate Synagogue membership lists. Unfortunately, there are no such lists. It has been possible, however, to compile both an alphabetical and a chronological list of presumed members on the basis of the Synagogue Register of Births, Marriages, and Funerals, the Synagogue Minutes Book 1916–28, (SVPC), the Synagogue Minutes Book 1928–69 (CJCA), the Synagogue Executive Minutes Book 1948–66 (CJCA), the list of cemetery interments, donors’ lists, correspondence, ledgers, press reports, the census, and the Sherbrooke city directories. While it is often difficult to know the first name of a Synagogue member, whether or not he had dependents, where he lived, how long he stayed, what his occupation was, and whether or not he paid

membership dues, a compilation of the various lists does provide a basis for establishing the Jewish population at any given time.

- 11 They do not appear in the Sherbrooke city directories nor in the census after 1900.
- 12 See the Sherbrooke city directories between 1882 and 1890 and the census of 1881. Using figures taken from the census, Louis Rosenberg, *A Gazetteer*, 1, 9 reported that there were no Jews living in Sherbrooke in 1871, 20 in 1881, 26 in 1891, 66 in 1901, and 188 in 1911. My own calculations—based on the Sherbrooke city directories, the census, and the Synagogue Register—give somewhat higher figures. The difference can be largely explained by my practice of including every male listed in the census, directories and Synagogue minute books, even though many of these people resided in Sherbrooke for no more than a year or two. I would not, however, question the general pattern and implications of Rosenberg's figures.
- 13 The city directories and the census of 1901 indicate that most of the original Jewish settlers had left, though others took their place.
- 14 See the city directories between 1890 and 1900 and the census for 1891. Several men, originally listed in the directories as pedlars or traders, are later listed as merchants.
- 15 The directories indicate a high turnover rate.
- 16 If certain names do not appear in the Sherbrooke census or in the city directories, but turn up in the Synagogue Register, the Minutes Book 1916–28, the cemetery roll, or donors' lists, we may deduce that they were residents of nearby towns.
- 17 Some of these people stayed for only a short while in Sherbrooke. It is possible that one or two families lived in neighbouring towns.
- 18 See the city directories between 1901 and 1910, and the census for 1901.
- 19 "Sherbrooke Jewish Congregation Formally Organized According to Law," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 8 May 1907, 1.
- 20 Rudin, "The Transformation," 40–41.
- 21 The city directories indicate that the original Jewish settlers lived downtown, close to their businesses. The move to the North Ward began in the 1890s with Judah Vineberg. The directories also reveal that Joseph Rosenbloom and Thomas Vineberg moved there in the first decade of the twentieth century and several others followed in the 1920s. Rudin, "The Transformation," 40, states that the North Ward was predominantly English-speaking.
- 22 Bernard Figler, *Rabbi Dr. Herman Abramowitz, Lazarus Cohen, Lyon Cohen* (Ottawa: CJC, 1968), 94–95.

- 23 The Synagogue Register records the birth of Reva Vineberg on May 21, 1897, daughter of Thomas Vineberg and Sarah Rosenbloom. Lewis Rosenbloom, "Yikhus Grows," 4, 9 confirms the relationship.
- 24 Rosenbloom, "Yikhus Grows," 3, 5–7.
- 25 See the 1891 census for Sherbrooke.
- 26 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*.
- 27 The Synagogue Register, SVPC.
- 28 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*, 2–11.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 22–23.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 18.
- 32 *Sherbrooke City Directory for 1898–99*.
- 33 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*, 18.
- 34 *Sherbrooke City Directory for 1900–01*.
- 35 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*, 22.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 37 See, for example, Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983); Simon Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates: A Review of Jewish Immigration, Colonization and Immigrant Aid Work in Canada, 1840–1940* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1966), Chapters 9 and 15; Fredelle Bruser Maynard, *Raisins and Almonds* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1972); Erna Paris, *Jews*; Morley Torgov, *A Good Place to Come From* (Don Mills: ON: Collins Publishers, 1976; first published Toronto: Lester & Orpen, 1974); John Barber, "History's Racial Barriers," *Macleans*, 13 October 1986.
- 38 Torgov, *A Good Place*, 16.
- 39 Rudin, "The Transformation," 39–41.
- 40 Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17.1 (1982):48–49. See also the frequent depiction of these attitudes in the novels, stories, and essays of Mordecai Richler.
- 41 See *Eastern Townships Gazetteer and Directory, 1875–76*, *Eastern Townships Directory for 1882*, and the Sherbrooke city directories from 1887 to 1890.
- 42 B.G. Sack, *Canadian Jews—Early in This Century*, New Series 4 (Montreal: CJC, 1975): 49.
- 43 "M. John Leonard, C. R. ...," *Le Progrès de l'Est*, 2 April 1907, 3.
- 44 John Barber, "History's Racial Barriers."

- 45 "Interesting Jewish Wedding in Sherbrooke," *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 4 July 1906, 4, and "A very enjoyable evening..." *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 13 December 1906, 4.
- 46 The Sherbrooke Board of Trade lists J. Landsberg, merchant, and H. Samuel, merchant, as members in 1889.
- 47 Rosenberg, *A Gazetteer*, 9.
- 48 Using the Synagogue minutes books, the Synagogue Register, donors' lists, the city directories, the census, and press reports, it has been possible to draw up a list of Jewish men and women active in the Sherbrooke community from 1871 to 1950. The absence of official membership lists and the rapid turnover means that such a list can only be approximate.
- 49 See the Synagogue Minutes Book, 1916–28, SVPC, entry for 1 October 1916.
- 50 *Ibid.*, entry for 28 January 1917.
- 51 See Christine Beaudoin, H  l  ne Liard, and Michel Sharpe, *Architecture des r  sidences de Sherbrooke* (Sherbrooke: La Soci  t   d'histoire des Cantons de l'Est, 1987), and *La Tribune*, 10 November 1920, 1, 5.
- 52 Rabbi Herman Abramowitz and Lyon Cohen. See *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 10 November 1920, 1, 5.
- 53 See Synagogue Minutes Book for 1916–28 and Synagogue Minutes Book for 1928–69.
- 54 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*, 25.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 12, 20.
- 56 See *ibid.*, 3, 18, 20, and family pedigree chart. The Synagogue Register also reveals these kinships.
- 57 Quoted in David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties: On Antisemitism in Canada, 1929–39*, Section 4 (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1978), 54–55.
- 58 The city directories and the minutes books indicate that these men came to Sherbrooke when Rubin offered them work and that most of them left the city when their jobs ended.
- 59 Using the donors' list from the 1941 United Jewish Refugee and War Relief campaign, together with information elicited in an interview with Moe Levin in November 1996, it is possible to draw up a partial list of Rubin's employees in the early 1940s. The Synagogue minutes books reveal that some of them were elected to the Synagogue executive.
- 60 The list of officers for the B'nai B'rith Sherbrooke Lodge in 1948–1949 includes the names of at least five Rubin employees.

- 61 The executive lists of the Leah Echenberg Chapter of Hadassah from 1945 to 1952 include the names of four wives of Rubin employees.
- 62 The Synagogue minutes books from 1916 to 1969 provide a complete listing of the members of the executive for those years.
- 63 As Mortimer Vineberg once remarked to me many years ago.
- 64 See the Sherbrooke city directories from 1920 to 1950.
- 65 If, for example, we compare the *Sherbrooke City Directory for 1894–95* with that of 1904–1905, we find that the Friedman, Levinson, and Samuel families have left. Moses Echenberg, Joseph Rosenbloom, Isaac Smith, and J.L. Vineberg have all changed addresses.
- 66 The *Sherbrooke City Directory for 1917–18* reveals that only seven families were living in the North Ward. The *Sherbrooke City Directory Directory for 1951* indicates that roughly two dozen had moved to the more affluent area.
- 67 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*, 25.
- 68 See Abe Bronfman’s letter of 3 January 1941 to Joseph Rosenbloom. This letter and other documents relating to the fund-raising campaign are in File 1, Box 1 of the Sherbrooke Jewish Community in the CJCA.
- 69 Echenberg and Tannenbaum, *The Echenbergs*, 26.
- 70 Dr. Heinz Meyerhof’s death is recorded in the Synagogue Register.
- 71 Synagogue Minutes Book for 1928–69, entry for 8 April 1956.
- 72 “Impressive Ceremonies at Synagogue Hall Event,” *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 9 May 1955, 3.
- 73 Moe Levin, telephone interview with author, November 1996.
- 74 Synagogue Minutes Book for 1928–69, entry for 23 February 1958.
- 75 *Ibid.*, entry for 26 October 1958.
- 76 See *ibid.*, entries for 26 October 1958; 1 February 1959; 5 November 1959; 20 January 1960; 17 February 1960; 20 April 1960; 19 April 1961; 30 January 1966.
- 77 The last entry in the Synagogue Minutes Book is dated 23 March 1969. The information in this and subsequent paragraphs is based largely on the author’s recollections of the situation in the Jewish community following his arrival in August 1972. See also “Sherbrooke’s Jewish Community struggles to continue,” *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 18 April 1967, 9, and Janice Arnold, “Sherbrooke’s synagogue carries a ‘for sale’ sign as membership declines,” *Canadian Jewish News*, 18 August 1978, 1–2.

- 78 The author frequently met with a number of the teachers, doctors, and researchers employed at Université de Sherbrooke and its teaching hospital during the 1970s. They had been initially attracted by the opportunity to work in a new and expanding institution. However, some of them felt that their French-Canadian colleagues were indifferent or cool to them. There were no social contacts, and they soon came to perceive that they would not be able to develop professionally. Since their talents and knowledge were much in demand, they took jobs elsewhere.
- 79 The author continues to attend these functions whenever they take place.
- 80 Two of the oldtimers, who shall be left nameless, admitted to this in the interviews. In the speech quoted at the end of this article (see note 87), Dr. Eli Einbinder briefly alludes to this form of anxiety in his parents' generation.
- 81 Rosenbloom, "Yikhus Grows," 7.
- 82 Ibid., 8.
- 83 I am indebted to Myron Echenberg for this and other informed comments about the Sherbrooke Jewish community.
- 84 For example, Eli Einbinder's friendship with Robert McConnachie.
- 85 Louis Rosenberg, *The Gazetteer*, 9.
- 86 Alphonse Saumier, interviews with the author, December 1996.
- 87 Eli Einbinder, "Speech to the Graduating Class of Alexander Galt Regional High School," 11 November 1994.

MONTREAL – The once flourishing Jewish community of Sherbrooke is making a modest comeback with the establishment of the Jewish Community Centre of the Eastern Townships. Isaac Romano at the launch of the Jewish Community Centre of the Eastern Townships. The centre's founder is a newcomer, Isaac Romano, a Seattle, Wash. native, who moved to Sherbrooke seven months ago. The area has not had an institutional Jewish presence since the Agudath Achim Synagogue, founded in 1917, ceased functioning in 1983. Unable to find any organized Jewish activity, Romano tested the waters by holding a Chanukah p Hershel of Ostropol (Yiddish: חֶרְשֶׁל אֶסְטְרוֹפּוֹל, romanized: Hershele Ostropol, Little Herzhel of Ostropol; 1757–1811) is a prominent figure in Jewish humor. Hershele was a prankster from Ostropol, Crown Poland (now Ukraine), who lived in poverty and targeted the rich and powerful, both Jew and Gentile. Common folks were not safe from his shenanigans, either, but usually got off lightly. He is also remembered by Ukrainian gentiles as something of an ethnic folk hero, who could take on establishment Michael Benazon, "Ostropol on the St. Francis: the Jewish Community of Sherbrooke, Quebec" a 120 Year Presence, JOURNAL OF EASTERN TOWNSHIPS STUDIES 12 (Spring, 1998), pp. 21- 50. Pioneering Research on Sherbrooke Jewish Community Published. Lennoxville, 2 September 1998. In an absorbing and thoroughly documented narrative, Dr. Benazon presents findings from ground-breaking research conducted in private family papers, synagogue and other archives, and local newspapers, among other sources. He reveals that the Sherbrooke Jewish community was in large part founded by people from Ostropol in the Ukraine who created a prosperous community that today has nevertheless all but disappeared.