

Background – Montreal's Jewish Community

Montreal's Jewish community is Quebec's oldest minority culture. Itself diverse and composed of several different cultural, linguistic and religious variations. The community grew in successive waves of immigrants: British Sephardic Jews after New France was conquered by Britain in 1760, German and British Ashkenazi Jews from 1840-1880, Eastern European Ashkenazi (mainly Romanian and Russian, including Polish and Ukrainian) from 1881-1914 and lastly the Holocaust survivors post-1945. The community is further diversified with the arrival of North African Jews starting in the mid-1960s, Ethiopian Jews starting in the late 1970s and Former Soviet Union Jews starting in the early 1990s.

Montreal's Jews established a self-supporting network of services – many of which still exist today – especially during the third-wave immigration period of 1881-1914. These agencies were and continue to be almost fully financed within the community despite shifts in demographics.

The community's population now sits at approximately 52,200. An increasing portion of that number consists of an aging population, recently arrived immigrants and a growing Chassidic population. The community suffered somewhat during the early 1990s as it lost a large portion of young adults and families who moved for better economic opportunities and also in part due to the political climate of Quebec. There now exists in the community the perception of rising intermarriage rates, continued loss of young adults to the United States, Toronto and Vancouver and a concern that young families have no affiliation with the "community."



The community celebrates the opening of the JPL in 1953.

Background – The Yiddish Folks Bibliotek

The People's Library is a People's institution, founded by the People for the People.

In 1914, the Montreal Jewish community welcomed its first public library. Starting as early as 1888, various organizations within the community attempted to run libraries for their members; anarchists, Zionists, labour Zionists, socialists and members of the Baron de Hirsch Institute had access to Yiddish and Hebrew reading material through their memberships. It was not until the founding of the Folks Bibliotek though that the community enjoyed the privileges of affordable access to reading materials, culture and education. The Library was the centre of Yiddish culture and education for Montreal's Jews, taking on the role of the preserver of cultural identity.

95 years later the Library remains true to its Yiddish roots while arguably being one of the most flexible agencies of Jewish Montreal – changing in response to the community's needs and identities. No part of the Library is a greater reflection on this community change than the Archives. Its collections capture the growth of the community and its perception of its own identity over the last 200 years. Direct lines can be drawn between the tangible heritage of the archival collections and the present situation and identity of the community.

Experience Heritage Project

- Established in 2006 as part of the long-term revitalization of the JPL Archives programme.
- Prioritization of education and outreach.
- School programme that emphasizes community heritage, media and information literacy and archive advocacy for middle and high school students.
- Teaching goals include heavy emphasis on personal connection to community identity, a celebration of origin.



Experience Heritage students show off their work, Jewish Public Library Archives

Defining Factors – Identity Elements in the Jewish Public Library Archives (JPL-A)

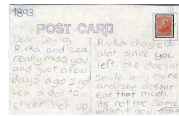
- Whether the element can be traced and explored by archival material in the JPL-A
- Student and teacher comments (informally collected during activities) of aspects of community heritage
- Engagement interest from both the Jewish and non-Jewish community (how others see us)

Defining Factors – Identity Elements in Federation CJA (FED CJA)

The latest major project from FED CJA that specifically targets identity, Gen J, funds projects based on "five critical gateways through which meaningful and engaging Jewish experiences are being developed... formal Jewish education; camps and youth programming; family and adult programming; Israel experiences; and arts and culture." The first projects to receive funding are: tuition assistance to Jewish day schools; a drama, music, and culture curriculum through the Segal Centre; delivery of free Jewish books and magazines to families with young children, cost coverage for Jewish summer camps, and activities for young adults returning from their first trip to Israel.

These "gateways" contain elements of group identity often repeated in community planning and social welfare over the past 60 years. The purpose of surveying past documents related to community identity is to attempt to chart changes of attitude towards that identity. Given that the Archives preserves the organic records of the community's agencies – and its families and individuals – these shifting attitudes would also be reflected in that material. This places the Archives in a unique position to possibly support current identity trends by using the original material that led to those trends. The Archives believes that this exploration of identity supports a greater connection between individual and community – the celebration of origins to explain and maintain heritage and tradition.

Experience Heritage student work



Identity in Transition

Jewish Public Library Archives of Montreal

Research Goals

An examination of community identity in transition; how to reconcile identity elements as defined in an archival outreach programme and the identity promoted by a community parent agency. The word "heritage" is often used in literature produced by the parent agency when discussing identity, yet what role does actual Montreal heritage play in providing shape to the imagined community?

Motivation

- The JPL-A is taking it upon itself to use results to assist the community in promoting an identity that is adaptable for the changing demographics but still sustains the needs of the community.
- The JPL-A is poised to provide benchmarks and leadership for cultural sustainability promoting identity based in part on celebration of origins.

Procedure

Phase I (and the subject of this poster):

- Survey and review of past efforts to discuss changing community identity in FED CJA documents from 1950 onwards.
- Identify-continuing or changing elements of what FED CJA used as community identity.
- Comparative discussion of elements of past documents with recent efforts from FED CJA and the efforts of the JPL-A to promote identity.

Phase II

- Full implementation of *Experience Heritage* programme, live lectures and on-line resources.
- Survey and discussion of student and teacher expectations and reflections on identity.

Study Population (Phase II)

- School-aged children, approximately 10-12 years
- Visiting the JPL-A through school, camps, or bar/bat mitzvah classes
- Varying religious affiliation and practice
- Varying ethnic backgrounds
- Range from third generation (or greater) Canadians to recently arrived or first-generation immigrants

Next Steps

- Launch of beta testing of *Experience Heritage* programme
- Collection of survey data from students and teachers on identity elements and heritage
- Presentation of data to FED CJA executive

JEWISH PUBLIC LIBRARY ARCHIVES – EXPERIENCE HERITAGE		
Identity Category	Defining Elements	Resources
Written Word and Arts	-Emphasis on importance of Jewish education -Promotion and celebration of Jewish writers, artists, and entertainers	-Immigrant poets and writers -Jewish schools and Jewish School Question -Jewish student school strike
Philanthropy/Response to Crisis	-Community response to crisis, in and out of the community -Development and "corporatization" of fundraising campaigns -Emphasis on the social and cultural needs of the minorities of the community	-1917 Halifax explosion documents -Campaigns for Israel -Development of social welfare system and profession in the community
Immigrant and Ethnic Diversity	-Community origins, successive waves of immigrant groups -Emphasis in fundraising campaign literature	-Push and pull factors of immigration -Community's refugees -Immigrant institutions and fraternal organizations
Engagement in Society	-Specific events or persons from the community recognized outside the community -Contributors to Quebec and Canadian society	-Specific figures in the following spheres: -Politics -Economics and commerce -Sports -Arts and culture

Directly corresponding to the five "critical gateways" of the community's identity, as defined by FEDERATION CJA.

PARENT AGENCY – GEN J INITIATIVE		
Identity Category	Defining Elements	Resources
Importance of Education	-Jewish day schools -Summer camp experiences	-Individual schools and camps
Jewish art and culture	-Performing and visual arts instruction	-Individual schools -Segal Centre for the Performing Arts
Religious affiliation	-Identification of family with a Montreal synagogue	-Individual synagogue outreach -Promotion of Jewish law and religion in individual schools
Organizational Affiliation	-Support of FEDERATION CJA and its agencies -Membership or partnership in community agency	-Campaign canvassing by FED CJA -Outreach by individual agencies as part of GEN J programmes
Intermarriage	-Participation of at least one parent in the Jewish community, participation of children in the community	-Agency outreach through GEN J programmes
Connection to Israel	-Continued youth visits to Israel -Continued education post-visit	-Continued financial support from FED CJA of youth experiences in Israel

Criteria for Documents Surveyed

- Dating from ca 1950-current
- Period of increased social agency literature and large shift of demographics due to renewal of stalled immigration beginning with Holocaust survivors and refugees)
- Produced directly by FED CJA or its social agencies and not municipal, provincial or federal entities
- Related to varied elements of the community and how those variants effect the community's identity.

DOCUMENT SURVEY		
Study Category	Elements	Related to current identity elements?
Status of specific immigrant and/or ethnic groups	-Sephardic (Middle Eastern); Ethiopian; Hungarian; Chassidic community; Former Soviet Union	NO
Condition and needs of Jewish education	-Daycares; camps; Jewish day schools	YES
Community Engagement	-Situation of community under various governments, language laws -Attitude of Quebec Anglophones -Jewish school question (government funding)	NO
Youth/Young Adults	-Retention in province -Youth leadership -Vocational aid	YES
Aging populations	-Community care of aged	YES
Status of women	-Leadership in community -Use of communal services	NO

Document Survey Discussion

- Differences in traditions between various groups (orthodox vs. secular education, Yiddish traditions vs. modern Hebrew, etc.) are seldom discussed in literature. Instead, when examined, the groups were discussed as one unit with little exploration of the effects of groups on one another.
- Semantics of "heritage" in community identity literature rarely contains references to heritage institutions.
- The changing identity of the community (demographics) at the turn of the 20th century encouraged the founding of Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in 1914, as the community changed demographics again and again over the decades, that also shifted the priorities and structures of agencies.
- Discussions of minority variations in the community lessened over the past 20 years, instead the community is presented more as one unit.
- Variations of religious beliefs in the community are left to synagogues but religion itself is presented as a "tradition" to carry on.
- Identity elements from the various documents to the current GEN J programme only encompass those elements supported by current agencies, the programmes may only be successful in reaching already affiliated Jews in the community.
- The elements of identity promoted by the *Experience Heritage* programme support not only the GEN J initiatives and the initially funded programmes but also past elements of identity not currently represented but still present in the community.

Initial Observations

- Students have little knowledge of immigration of other groups outside of their family units in the community
- Students have little to no knowledge of how much impact the Jewish community has had on the city at large.
- Students have great interest in immigrant stories once presented to them in a dynamic way.
- Job of the Archive is to promote the community and lost elements of the community but perhaps not to initiate discussion on creating change in the community in regards to those elements.

Additional Considerations

- What structures and traits exist that are uniquely Montreal and that would benefit the community identity here?
- Stories of descent? Common traits and practices?
- Is it possible to promote a community identity based on criteria that are not necessarily inherent?
- Archives deal in the tangible, how do we then promote the imagined community?
- How far does the role of an Archive go in promoting a community memory?
- How do we define the borders of a community that is based on Diaspora?
- Is it possible to promote an imaginary community in order to preserve a geographic one?

Limitations of Research (Initial and on-going):

- Collecting and preservation behavior in FED CJA departments has been – and to a point continues to be – inconsistent. Numerous records were destroyed, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, because of cut-backs, space restrictions and high staff turn-over rates.
- Various Jewish day schools provide "Jewish history", based on biblical text up to the founding of Israel but then are also obligated to fulfill provincial requirements: the politicized history of Quebec mainly focused on the majority of which the community is not a part of. Students participating in activities in the Archives enter with little or no knowledge or personal connection with the specific MONTREAL Jewish community.