

**Montreal Synagogue Sisterhoods (1900-1949):
A Female Community, Culture, and Religious World**

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Abstract
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Synagogue sisterhoods were formed and evolved in the twentieth century along with other women's volunteer organizations. These sisterhood organizations had their own characteristic structure and purpose. While research into the role of Jewish women in voluntary organizations has only recently commenced in Canada there is a lack of investigation of the sisterhoods. Their history merits documentation as a notable organization unto itself.

This study traces the formation and early development of the sisterhoods in Canada, focusing on the three oldest and prominent synagogues in Montreal. Each represents a different denomination; Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. It considers women's expected roles within the separate "female sphere" and the extension of those boundaries that the sisterhood organization afforded. Questions, such as why and how they were initiated and formed, are explored. This thesis describes the kinds and purposes of activities that were performed, the reasons women joined sisterhoods, and the ways the sisterhoods differed from other Jewish women volunteer organizations. It especially examines the scholarly debate whether the early sisterhood organizations changed women's power and position in the social structure of the synagogue and that of the larger Jewish community. A vital component of this investigation is the uncovering of the experience and voice of the sisterhood women to permit a view of their world from their perspective and vantage point.

The story of the Montreal synagogue sisterhoods narrates the creation of a distinct female culture, community, and religious world and provides a better understanding of Jewish Canadian women's sphere. It also extends the story of the Canadian Jewish experience.

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Abbreviations

CJCNA: Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives

JPL: Jewish Public Library

SHCA: Shaar Hashomayim Congregation Archives

NCJW: National Council of Jewish Women

NFTS: National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods

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Chapter 1: Prelude

Introduction

Jewish women and their volunteer associations have played an important role in Jewish life. They have made significant contributions to Jewish community life. Their involvement in copious aspects of social work, welfare programs, and fundraising projects has been a vital asset in the effectiveness of community organizations. Energetic and committed, they brought their skills and roles as homemakers into the public arena. However, it is generally believed that it is the Jewish male who built, financed and managed Jewish institutions. Women's volunteer services in the community have not been appropriately recorded or noted. Communal histories usually include only cursory references to women's volunteer services commending these women for their dedication to the community. Historians of Jewish communal life are also guilty of only brief mentions and descriptions of women's roles in the synagogue and philanthropic organizations. Basically their labours and contributions have more or less been taken for granted. A historian as recently as 1976 does acknowledge women's role:

....the story of the synagogues of the United States gives clear testimony that the survival of Judaism has been enormously helped, perhaps even made possible, by the dedication, the devotion, the directed energy of American Jewish women. Only very recently has their contribution been acknowledged.¹

However, the problem lies, as June Sochen notes, in the lack of detailed description. The inner dynamics of women's organizational life had not been described in the past as a

¹ Joseph L. Blau, *Judaism in America; From Curiosity to Third Faith* quoted in June Sochen, *Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of American Jewish Women 1880-1980* (Albany: State University of New York Press) 47.

force that helped shape women's development and affected their status and roles. Women experience the community and define it differently from men. They bring their own gender linked concerns and experiences to communal activities.

During the course of my studies I found that the voices and experiences of American Jewish women had begun to be recorded, examined and analyzed but the equivalent exploration had not yet begun in relation to Canadian Jewish women. Women are an important component of the Canadian Jewish experience. However, their historiography and experiences have been submerged within the history of the Canadian Jewish community as a whole. This is akin to what occurred to their American counterparts as historian Paula Hyman describes, "The perceptions, achievements, and institutions of men define the historical record of U.S. Jewry."² Hyman rightly claims that the development of the field of women's history has made us aware that women's historical experience is distinct and differentiated from men's. Gender has taken its place as an essential category of historical analysis alongside class and ethnicity.³

Canadian Jewish women have the ancillary problem of often being thought of as identical to their American peers. However, there are those that claim that Canadian Jewish women have had their own particular experiences and development and that their distinctiveness needs to be explored. This notion parallels the problem that has existed in Canadian Jewish historiography in general. It has often been assumed by historians of

² Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Detroit: Michigan: Wayne State University Press 1991), 220.

³ This is evident in surfacing studies. It is an immensely growing field. See for example; *Jewish Women in America: an Historical Encyclopedia Vol. 1 & II* ed. Paula Hyman & Deborah Moore (New York: Routledge, 1997); *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1991); Renee Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel: The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); *Women in the Holocaust* ed. Dalia Ofer and Leora J. Weitzman (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1998); Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Canadian Jewry that the Jewish experience in the United States can serve as a model for the understanding of Canadian Jewish history. It has not been until the late twentieth century that historians have acknowledged the uniqueness of Canadian Jewry and commenced the examination of the differences between the two Jewish communities and the reasons for Canada's uniqueness. Historian Irving Abella notes that when the distinct factors that influenced the Canadian community to develop differently are identified, "Not surprisingly, in Canada there has evolved a Jewish community that is more traditional, more unified, closer to the old country, and more culturally homogeneous than in the United States."⁴ Drawing on Abella's assertion and those of other historians of Canadian distinctiveness, Canadian women's experience should be distinguishable from that of their American counterparts.

In examining the immigrant experience of Montreal Jewish women from 1900-1949 it became apparent that the volunteer experience of the women was missing. In the past two decades awareness of the significance of Jewish women's volunteerism and their organizational activity has prompted research in the United States. However, a paucity of material exists on Canadian Jewish women's organizations and activity as does on Canadian Jewish women in general as discussed above. Paula J. Draper and Janice B. Karlinsky have investigated the organizations Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, and Pioneer Women in their article "Abraham's Daughters: Women, Charity, and Power in the Canadian Jewish Community" as well as Sarah Filotas in her master's

⁴ Irving Abella, "Canadian Jewry: Past Present and Future" (inaugural lecture presented for the J. Shiff Chair for the Study of Canadian Jewry at York University Centre for Jewish Studies, Toronto, Ontario, Fall 1998) quoted in editorial "Distinctly Canadian Jews" *Canadian Jewish News*, 2 September 1999, p.4. I will discuss the influences that affected the different Canadian development in a later chapter.

thesis and Esther Carmel-Hakim in her Phd. Dissertation.⁵ Norma Baumel Joseph gives an overview of Canadian women's roles in various sectors of communal life in her article "Jewish Women in Canada: an Evolving Role". She maintains that although it may be perceived that Canadian women are 'behind' American women in their evolving role they are not. This misconception most likely surfaced from the fact that their historical experience and role has not been well documented.⁶

More recently, the examination of the historical role and ways in which women are involved in religious affairs and organizations has lead to the exploration of synagogue sisterhoods in the United States. My investigation further revealed that research on Canadian synagogue sisterhoods is acutely lacking.⁷ The nature of each form of volunteerism is different. All types of volunteer activity have frequently been grouped together indiscriminately. However each category of activity and each organization serves different purposes and responds to different needs of the Jewish community at multiple levels of organization.⁸ Correspondingly, each woman's organization serves a distinct purpose not only to the community but to the individual women themselves.

⁵ Paula J. Draper and Janice B. Karlinsky, "Abraham's Daughters: Women, Charity, and Power in the Canadian Jewish Community" in *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Community in Canadian History, 1840's-1960's*, eds. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper, and Robert Ventresca (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Sarah Filotas, "Les organisations féminines de la communauté montrealaise, 1918-1948" (M.A. thesis, Université de Montréal, 1998); Esther Carmel-Hakim, "Agricultural-Vocational Training for Women in the Yishuv with the Assistance of Jewish Women's Organizations 1911-1929," (Phd. diss., Haifa University, 2003).

⁶ Norma Baumel Joseph, "Jewish Women in Canada: An Evolving Role" in *From Immigration to Integration* eds. Ruth Klein and Frank Dimant (Institute for International Affairs, B'nai Brith Canada 2001) 182.

⁷ In 1994 Susan Landau Chark, as a research assistant, undertook some research regarding the establishment and structure of various sisterhood congregations across Canada. Minimal sisterhood histories were gathered for the purpose of the study. The reason for this may have been due to the lack of response from the congregations and/or from the deficiency of information about the individual sisterhoods. Only seven congregations from across Canada submitted data. It was notable that there were no submissions from Montreal, home to numerous congregations.

⁸ June Sochen, *Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of Jewish American Women 1880-1980* (Albany: State University Press, 1981), 47.

Synagogue sisterhoods were formed and evolved in the 20th century alongside other women's volunteer organizations. They had their own characteristic organizational structure and purpose which continues today notwithstanding some changes. They seem to have possessed a particular niche in Jewish institutional and religious life. They played a role in the creation of a female culture, community and religious world. Thus, it is important that the history of the synagogue sisterhoods in Canada be recorded as noteworthy in itself and as part of the overall movement of Jewish women's organizations in Canada. It is vital in the understanding of Canadian Jewish women's sphere and sense of community, identity and religion. Moreover, their experiences and voice contribute to the much needed historiography of Canadian Jewish women. In addition, the sisterhood is part of the institutional structure of North American Jewry and therefore can further the religious institutional history of Canadian Jewry and modern Jewry in general.

The void of Canadian historiography on the subject of Jewish women's participation in community life necessitates the presentation and utilization of American historical sources and resources. Connections, resemblances and variations certainly exist between the two. The American experience can provide background material and reflection where there are Canadian deficiencies and assist in a better illustration of the Canadian one.

Some activity of synagogue sisterhoods has been recorded in the growing body of scholarly studies of Jewish women's organizations and volunteer activism. Examples of such treatment can be found in scholars' works which trace and interpret the club movement such as: William Toll's "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920); Beth S. Wenger's "Jewish Women and

Volunteerism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers”; June Sochen in her article “Some Observations on the Role of American Jewish Women as Communal Volunteers and in her book *Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of Jewish American Women 1880-1980*; and Paula Hyman’s “The Volunteer Organizations: Vanguard or Rear Guard”.⁹

Other scholarly literature focuses on Jewish women’s organizations in specific geographic locations describing their particular development and endeavours. A degree of sisterhood information is recorded within these historical accounts. In his article “From Domestic Judaism to Public Ritual” William Toll explores the women’s organizational charity work in the growing towns of the American West. He notes their differences from the east, especially New York, due to their lack of social infrastructures. Karla Goldman looks at Reform women’s congregational activity beyond the sanctuary in Cincinnati temples. Introduction of women’s integration into congregational and organizational life was delayed in Cincinnati as opposed to New York. This is surprising as Cincinnati was the birthplace of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. The formation of a sisterhood organization independent from the NCJW in Atlanta is explained in Beth Wenger’s description of the evolvement of Atlanta’s Jewish women’s clubs and women’s entrance into the public sphere in “Jewish Women of the Club: The Changing Public Role of Atlanta’s Jewish Women (1870-1930)”.¹⁰

⁹ William Toll, “A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women’s Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920,” *American Jewish Archives*, 41 (Spring/Summer, 1989): 7-26; Beth S. Wenger, “Jewish Women and Volunteerism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers,” *American Jewish History* LXXIX no.1 (Autumn 1989): 16-36; June Sochen, “Some Observations on the Role of American Jewish Women as Communal Volunteers,” *American Jewish History* LXX no.1 (September, 1980): 23-34 and *Consecrate Every Day: The Public Lives of Jewish American Women, 1880-1980* (Albany: State of New York Press, 1981); Paula Hyman, “The Volunteer Organizations: Vanguard or Rear Guard,” *Lilith* 5 (1978): 17,22.

¹⁰ William Toll, “From Domestic Judaism to Public Ritual: Women and Religious Identity in the American West,” in *Women and American Judaism* ed. Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 128-147; Karla Goldman, “The Public Religious Lives of Cincinnati’s Jewish Women,” in *Women and American Judaism* ed. Pamela Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover &

Several historians' research has focused specifically on the synagogue sisterhood phenomenon. Felicia Herman's concentration has been the predecessors of the synagogue sisterhoods, the structure that is most familiar as we know it today. She relates the historical story of the "The Sisterhoods of Personal Service" in New York City from 1887-1936. She claims that although their numbers were small, their existence and work was important and that they "constitute a notable early example of American Jewish women's demonstration of loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish people through very public activities." In her article "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Women: The Synagogue Sisterhood 1890-1940", Jenna Weissman Joselit chronicles the development of synagogue sisterhoods. In order to illustrate the trends she discusses the histories of three New York City sisterhoods of different denominations and offers conclusions as to the significance of the sisterhoods of that era. Pamela Nadell and Rita Simon examine the emergence of Reform synagogue sisterhoods in the early twentieth century and the founding of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS). Their conclusions as to the influence of sisterhood organizations in women's roles and power differ from those of Jenna Joselit. They claim that sisterhoods changed the expectations of Jewish women's proper behaviour and expanded their public religious roles whereas Jenna Joselit maintains that the sisterhoods did not challenge the predominant notions of women's place nor did they impact significant change in the synagogue structure or the Jewish community.¹¹

London: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 107-127; Beth Wenger, "Jewish Women of the Club: The Changing Public Role of Atlanta's Jewish Women (1870-1930)," *American Jewish History* LXXVI, no. 3 (March 1987): 311-333.

¹¹ Felicia Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess: Sisterhoods of Personal Service in New York City, 1887-1936," in *Women and American Judaism*, ed. Pamela Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press 2001), 149; Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Women: The Synagogue Sisterhood 1890-1940," in *The American*

Similar questions and issues examined and addressed in the American sisterhood studies should be pursued in the Canadian accounts. What is the background and/or the preceding societies of the synagogue sisterhoods? Why and how were they initiated and formed? What kinds of activities were performed and what were their purposes? Why did women join sisterhoods; that is, what were their motivations and goals? Did the early sisterhood organizations change women's power and position in the social structure of the synagogue and that of the larger Jewish community and if so by what means and in what ways? In the above mentioned studies certain topics were not dealt with that I think deserve attention and will consider in my study. For example, in what way did the sisterhoods differ from the other Jewish women's volunteer organizations? The voices of the women themselves should be heard through oral histories to add a dimension to the historical narrative of sisterhoods. It allows a more fully human conception of the social reality of the sisterhood organization.

I have chosen to begin the study of the history of Canadian synagogue sisterhoods by looking at the sisterhoods of the three oldest synagogues in Montreal each representing a different denomination.¹² The reason for such a focused control is that the study of one city and one history will enable a better comparison and provide an acute model for expansion of historical record and analysis. The study will examine their origins, formation, and evolution up until the year 1949. The Montreal Jewish community had its own distinct character and flavour which developed from the particular economic,

Synagogue, A Sanctuary Transformed ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 206-230; Pamela S. Nadell and Rita Simon, "Ladies of the Sisterhood: Women in the American Reform Synagogue, 1900-1930," in *Active Voices: Women in Jewish Culture* ed. Maurice Sacks (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 63- 75.

¹² Several congregations formed by immigrants according to their countries of origin will be looked at as well to provide context or background.

political and cultural context of the city. The effect on the founding of Montreal sisterhood and the roles they played particularly in relation or contrast to their American counterparts will be described and examined. The goal of this research is to explore with the intent to initiate a portrait of synagogue sisterhoods in Montreal in the early years shedding light on their roles in women's lives and in the Jewish community.

Methodological Issues

The construction of a comprehensive historical story entails several methods of investigation each offering a different perspective and aspect. A women's history requires a particular approach, that of feminist scholarship. Feminist scholarship had made significant contributions to Jewish history in the past two decades. Traditional categories of male scholarship and interpretation have not been adequate. Gender as an analytical tool is critical to the exploration and understanding of the social and cultural life of women and to a reconceptualization of basic concepts and paradigm shifts. Gender segregation is endemic to traditional and even modern Judaism, making the study of women's religious and social experience all the more necessary. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum describe the development of feminist scholarship in three "not simply sequential but continuous and perhaps spiraling" stages. The first stage was a critique of how men scholars perpetuated women's invisibility. The second was an attempt to fill in the gaps of knowledge about women by using categories of traditional male scholarship and adding to or mixing in the information to the existing historical data. The third stage places women at the center and begins with women's experience. This allows scholars to see women's world from their perspective and vantage point. The methodology of

feminist scholarship reveals the ways in which women maneuver and find meaning within and around their cultural heritage.¹³ Its perspective and analyses requires the formulation of new or modified research methods, addresses tensions and conflicts, challenges fixed ideas, concepts and boundaries, and places women in the broader Jewish community and surroundings. Several historians of women's organizations have aptly demonstrated how the intersection of gender, ethnic-religious culture and class has produced a female vision of philanthropy and challenged the private-public dichotomy.¹⁴ Hence, the overall methodological path to construct an inclusive history of Montreal synagogue sisterhoods is that of feminist scholarship.

Published histories of Canadian Jewry, particularly of Quebec and Montreal, serve as a context for the lives of Montreal Jewish women. Montreal's bi-national and bi-cultural features had an affect on the evolving Jewish community and consequently influenced the realm of women. However, as mentioned very little exists in the way of published texts that refer to or elicit information explicit to Montreal Jewish women. Therefore, archival research is a vital resource to uncover their lives. Although synagogue archives are a fundamental source they are also problematic. Both in the United States and Canada they are notorious for their poor record keeping, especially of synagogue sisterhoods. They (synagogue and sisterhood archives) are extremely sparse, randomly preserved, and definitely incomplete. The history and activities of the sisterhoods have to be extracted from an assortment of notebooks, annual reports, memos, synagogue and sisterhood minute books, bulletins, and commemoration or anniversary booklets and manuscripts. Jewish Canadian institutional archives, such as the

¹³ Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum, "Introduction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies* ed. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), 1-15.

¹⁴ I am referring to those historians that I have previously mentioned.

Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives and the Jewish Public Library are important informational sources as well. They also contain synagogue records and related material, plus newspapers containing announcements of ongoing sisterhood and synagogue social, cultural and religious events.

It is a feminist methodological principle that oral histories can provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women's experiences of themselves in their worlds.¹⁵ Due to the lacunae in published and first hand documentation, oral histories can not only help fill gaps but also help recreate the experience and world of the synagogue sisterhood. To my knowledge this has not been done extensively in sisterhood research in the United States. Listening, engaging and recording women's experiences honour their perceptions and place in history.

Oral history interviews should be carefully prepared, conducted, interpreted and correlated, and lastly integrated with the textual material. A proposition central to much feminist thinking is that language reflects males' experiences and is often incongruent with the realities of women's lives. Marjorie L. Devault, a sociologist, notes how linguistic forms exclude women and that the names of experiences frequently do not fit or describe their experiences. Women have trouble articulating their experiences as they often mute their own thoughts and feelings when trying to describe their lives in prevailing acceptable and familiar concepts and conventions.¹⁶ The ways and terms with which women define their work differs. For example, they describe their work in terms of

¹⁵ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, "Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. S.B. Gluck and D. Patai (New York: Routledge, 1991), 11.

¹⁶ Marjorie L. Devault, "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis," *Social Problems* 37 no.1 (1990): 98.

activity and social housekeeping. This is an important consideration in the development of the set of questions, during the interview process and in the course of interpretation.

The interview questions were constructed to promote a loosely structured interview that would both allow the women to tell their stories and reveal certain patterns of organizational life (Appendix A). Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack contend that oral histories require a shift of methodology from information (data) gathering where the focus is on the right questions to an interactive process where the focus is on the “dynamic unfolding of the subject’s viewpoint”.¹⁷ Not only are actual activities and events important, but so are the subjective emotional experiences relayed in feelings, attitudes, values and judgments which give meaning to the activities and events. The women should have the opportunity to reveal themselves and the significance they attach to their narrative. Using open ended questions, not being overly agenda focused, and encouraging and allowing time for the interviewee to discuss, express, and reflect helps produce valuable knowledge. Due to the era of my research an additional concern is the age of the women. They are quite elderly and hence need time to recollect and not feel hurried or incompetent.

Potential interviewees were recommended by the synagogue rabbis and present sisterhood presidents. The selected women were the oldest women possible in each sisterhood who would remember sisterhood history and be able to reiterate their own experiences and possibly that of their mothers. They were contacted by telephone to explain the research, to request their participation and permission to record the interview. The pre-interview is important for the outset of the interview for it sets the tone to the

¹⁷Anderson and Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses”, 23.

moral obligation that I, as the possible final spokesperson for them in the public arena, have to their privacy and integrity.

The interviews took place at the home of the women with the exception of one at the synagogue office. At the commencement of the actual interview a consent form requiring their signature was extended to them as a follow-up to the information given in the pre-interview (Appendix B). Researchers of women's oral history Karen Olson and Linda Shopes note that the social role of the interviewer is consequential in addition to the techniques of the interview to elicit the desired information. Dale Spender, a feminist linguistic researcher, argues that women speak differently when in a mixed group. She asserts that "women-to-women" talk" affords opportunities for women to speak more fully about their feelings and experiences and that they listen more seriously to one another.¹⁸ The fact that I am of the same gender as the interviewees may have encouraged them to speak more freely and articulate their experiences using linguistic terms that they felt I may have understood or been able to relate to. I also have a similar background to the women I interviewed although I am younger. This may have been an asset as it may have prompted a more personal, less distanced and trusting relationship in the interview. On the other hand my age, education and purpose may have induced the narration of familiar stories, telling things that they think I may have wanted to hear or fit into the prevailing ideologies.

Listening carefully during the interview and when transcribing and interpreting the interviews is a critical tool. Sensitivity and looking beyond or below the surface to the 'words', moral language, gestures, silences, conflicts, vocal quality, body language,

¹⁸ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*, 2d. ed. with revised introduction, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) quoted in Majorie L. Devault, "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis", 98.

meta-statements, logic of the narrative reveals additional insight. The women's accounts, however, should not be taken at face value; that is, as totally factual, for memories may fade or alter the past and so certain historical or even religious facts or dates had to be verified. In essence, the oral history interview helps determine where women place themselves in their world and their perception of their place in that world. They can provide valuable knowledge in terms of historical sisterhood data and the emotional personal facet and experience of the sisterhood women and their realm.

The subsequent chapters will explore the sphere of sisterhood women. Chapter Two will present the historical story of North American synagogue sisterhoods up to 1949. The theories of women's movements will be discussed followed by the histories of women's organizations both in the United States and Canada. The historical backdrop of the sisterhood organizations will be illustrated creating an understanding of the environment and circumstance from which they evolved. The historical data of sisterhoods and their national organizations based on the American research will also be discussed. Through these means a background context for the sisterhoods of Montreal will be provided. Chapter Three will focus on my primary area of research, that of Montreal sisterhoods. The historical, social and cultural context of the Montreal Jewish community will preface the histories of specific Montreal synagogues, their sisterhoods and their relationship to the sisterhood national organizations. Chapter Four will examine the presented material of the Montreal sisterhoods. A critical component of this interpretative process is the perceptions of the women themselves as revealed through the interviews. The last chapter will be a concluding analysis of the sisterhoods of Montreal

examining their role and impact in the life of Montreal Jewish women. Questions arising from the study will be addressed and those for future research will be posed.

Chapter 2: Historical Background: Women's Voluntary Organizations

Theories

Many of the secular ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries meshed with the traditional values and roles of Jewish women. From the early to mid-nineteenth century, the Victorian Era, a complex of virtues constituted the cult of True Womanhood or Domesticity by which a middle class woman judged herself and was also judged by her husband, neighbours and society. This was a powerful concept. Cultural historian Barbara Welter, in discussing the term True Womanhood espoused by authors of the period, determined the specific characteristics it implied. The four cardinal attributes were piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Women were thought to be naturally religious, possessing a pious mind. Piety was exchangeable with the virtue of religiosity, considered the core and strength of women's virtue. Whereas participation in other societies and movements might make a woman less domestic or submissive, church work would not. Literary and intellectual pursuits were not to interfere or lead women astray from God. Women were to be the feminine, submissive passive responders while men were the proactive participants. Domesticity was a highly valued virtue. The true place of women was at home as wife and mother dispensing comfort and cheer and promoting happiness to the family.¹⁹ Queen Victoria put forth the cultural model which emphasized that single women's goal was to be married and the focus of a married woman's life was

¹⁹ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-173.

“home, hearth and heart.”²⁰ It was a difficult ideal for women to live up to. Thus, women were told that they were separate but equal and that by maintaining their traditional role they were stabilizing the order of society, possessing both power and virtue.²¹

Sheila Rothman identifies successive ideologies characterizing public expectations about the “virtuous women” in America. The first from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1890’s is reminiscent of the True Woman ideal but with novel interpretations. It was believed that women’s unique biological cycles regulated their mental condition and thus embodied an “instinctive motherhood”²² Women were to raise children “as only a mother could, with love and affection”; as wives, civilize their husbands; and transform or “feminize” an entire culture.²³ The 1890’s to 1910 brought the definition of a new ideal of “educated motherhood”. Women were to apply their intellectual powers to their instincts using scientific findings to the efficient and healthful running of their homes and childrearing, setting the direction for social reform. Maternal instincts evolved into maternal insights and educated mothers began to bring their special sensitivity toward children more into the public arena. Mothers were to be responsible for more than just the physical requirements of the children. They were to study, read and learn for the benefit of child development. The campaign to restructure motherhood included kindergarten programs, clubs for mothers, college education for women, the settlement house institution, and the fight for suffrage. The third stage of Rothman’s ideology was

²⁰ Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995), 33.

²¹ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860”.

²² William Toll, *Women, Men and Ethnicity* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 45.

²³ Sheila Rothman, *Women’s Proper Place* (New York: Basic Books Inc. Publishers, 1978), 22-23.

that of “wife companion” from the 1920’s through the 1950’s.²⁴ In this era childrearing become secondary to that of romantic love and sex in marriage. Woman’s primary relationship was now to be with her husband rather than her children. Women turned their nurture over to the experts and became their husbands’ intellectual and sexual partners.

Seth Koven and Sonya Michel’s ideology of “maternalism” supports Sheila Rothman’s second stage principle “educated motherhood”. Maternalism also grew out of out of a variety of nationally specific constructions of domesticity such as the ‘the cult of true womanhood’ and “instinctive motherhood”. While women required special protection they, at the same time, possessed special insights into issues of social justice and welfare. Women transformed their emphasis on motherhood into public policy influencing state definitions of the needs of mothers and children and the creations of institutions and programs. Hence, maternalism functioned simultaneously on the dual levels of praising the virtues of domesticity and legitimizing women’s public relationships to politics, the state, the community, workplace and marketplace.²⁵

The ideal of the Jewish woman largely coincided with that of the “true woman” and the perceived new role of wife and mother.²⁶ Judaism always made a recognized distinction between the roles of the sexes. The “women of valor” ideal extolled in Proverbs demonstrates the ideal woman as self-sacrificing, devoting all her energies to the physical and spiritual well-being of her family. Beth Wenger assigns the term

²⁴ During WW11 women went to work creating a rupture in the ideology of this period.

²⁵ Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, “ Womenly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880-1920,” in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalistic Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²⁶ Many of these ideas were recalibrated to fit a Jewish model in the works of people such as Samson Raphael Hirsh.

“enablers” to Jewish women who in her traditional prescriptive role had the sole function to sustain and inspire others. She describes them as “behind-the scenes agents whose selfless activities empowered those around them”.²⁷ One of Judaism’s cardinal precepts is the concept of *tzedekah*, or charity, obligating every Jew to give to the less fortunate. It can be translated from Hebrew as ‘righteousness’ and ‘justice’. Women’s proclivity towards religion and her nurturing nature would make her exceptionally qualified in the area of charity. The ‘ideal woman’ of the nineteenth century was championed in Jewish writings. She was the “Priestess of the Jewish ideal, Prophetess of Purity and Refinement”²⁸ possessing “keener” spiritual insight” than that of the American Jewish male.²⁹ Rabbi David Philipson’s version of the “ideal Jewess” encompassed the virtues of “true womanhood” and “instinctive motherhood”.³⁰ Jewish women were not to be “too practical”, “matter-of-fact” but to “indulge in sentiment” and be shielded from “the influences that shall make her merely like man and less than woman.”³¹ He felt that religiosity was of foremost importance and an inherited innate characteristic of a Jewish woman quoting Emerson, “that a woman without religion is like a flower without perfume.”³² Family and religion were like one entity to women and a part of their daily lives. He professed that “Her home, she makes a temple” considering it her highest duty to fill it with religious and peaceful calm and that “she live the life of each of her children

²⁷ Wenger, “Jewish Women and Volunteerism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers” *American Jewish History* 79, no.1 (autumn 1989): 16.

²⁸ Emil Hirsch, “The Modern Jewess,” *AJ* no. 1 (April 1895): 11 quoted in Jenna Weissman Joselit “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman: the Synagogue Sisterhood, 1890-1940,” in *The American Synagogue, A Sanctuary Transformed* ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), 207.

²⁹ *Reform Advocate*, 20 February 1897 1, 7 quoted in Joselit, “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman”, 206.

³⁰ It is my opinion that Rabbi Philipson’s “ideal Jewess” embodied the philosophies of true womanhood and instinctive motherhood.

³¹ Rabbi David Philipson, “The Ideal Jewess,” *The American Jewess* IV, no.6 (March 1897): 259.

³² *Ibid.*, 257.

with them” guiding them.³³ Only a small amount of charity work with the needy outside the home was acceptable. Her ultimate role was that of mother and wife.

Kaufmann Kohler, a respected speaker for Reform Judaism, who believed that the emancipation of women in the synagogue was a fundamental part of Reform Judaism promoted the cult of domesticity in his struggle to redefine a modern Judaism and Jewess. Believing that it was in the home that Judaism would be renewed he equated the Sabbath, domestic devotion and the virtuous women. He looked to the past, for his modern concept of the ideal women which he claimed has not been sufficiently recognized earlier. Using the contemporary true women virtues he claimed that Jewish women from biblical times onward had always been pious, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. They were model wives, guardians of home, promoters of religious education, and angels of charity. He placed narrow bounds on female identity not wanting to blur the distinctions between the genders. His exemplified woman was to play a proper role to help create order asserting that “A woman without tenderness, without gentleness, without the power of self-suppression....cannot fail to do enormous harm, both to her sex and the other...”³⁴

The nineteenth century doctrine of “separate spheres” and the bourgeois ideal of family life both in Western Europe and America also merged with Jewish teachings about women. This value system defined women as domestic, weak, modest, dependent, protective, self-sacrificing, religious, and emotional.³⁵ They were expected to be the

³³ Ibid., 260.

³⁴ Kaufman Kohler, “Esther or the Other Jewish Women” Temple Beth Shalom Sunday Lectures 16 (2 February 1888): 3, quoted in Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 165.

³⁵ Beth Wenger discusses the term “separate spheres” in her article “Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers” claiming that its framework is an almost standard interpretive tool in

guardians of morality and religiosity. The home was to be a “retreat”, a place for spiritual, psychological and physical sustenance for the family.³⁶ General trends were toward secularization and for Jews, in particular, a time of acculturation and integration. Traditionally much of Jewish observance took place in the home and family, and continued to remain as the central focus for expression of Jewish feeling and commitment. However, concern for the abandonment of Jewish ritual, especially the Sabbath and kashrut in the Orthodox and Conservative sectors was expressed. Sermons and newspapers constantly advocated that it was the duty of Jewish women to maintain the sanctity of the home as the men and children became more involved in the ‘outside’ community. Jewish women became the domestic caretakers, nurturers, childrears, and moral instructors. In their special role as mothers they were now the informal transmitters of religion as opposed to the formal transmission taking place in the synagogue or religious lessons or school. Whereas Jewish women were relegated to a peripheral role in the synagogue they were placed on a pedestal in the home, a perch which kept them away from the centers of public and religious life.³⁷ The Jewish leaders’ prescribed behaviour for Jewish women advocated the dichotomy between the public/private and male/female spheres and the postemancipation model of the ideal family. Rabbi Leeser in 1835 stated that “the female sphere is not the highway, not the public streets, not the embattled field,

American women’s history. It is open to a variety of interpretations by those who use the term with the understanding that it is always an artificial construction.

³⁶ Marion A. Kaplan, “Priestess and Hausfrau: Women and Tradition in the German-Jewish Family,” in *The Jewish Family, Myths and Reality* ed. Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman (New York: Hoes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1986), 64.

³⁷ Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69, 70.

not the public hall. But her home....”³⁸ In response to the increasing acculturation of men and religious indifference in French society the *Archives Israelites* in 1852 wrote, “....they (men) abandon that care to maternal solicitude. The woman is the guardian of the house:....her religiosity, her virtues are a living example for her children....Man exists for public life, woman for domestic life.”³⁹ Women, through living example, the family and guidance and from within the home, were to safeguard the future of Judaism, upholding its standards and maintaining its rituals. As Solomon Schechter explained to United Synagogue members, “It is through them (Jewish women)...that we reach the children...that we can save a great part of the Sabbath.....and that the dietary laws will be observed in our homes.”⁴⁰ The *American Jewess* sermonized to women that, “We must begin at the beginning-at Home.”⁴¹ As both male and female American Jewish leaders utilized categorical phrases such as, women as “queens of the home” and the home their “religious domain” and place of “essential work” women may have actualized themselves in these roles.⁴²

Questions then arise whether Jewish women did actualize themselves in this role. Did they follow the Rothman model of successive stages or did their experience modify it? If they did, how did they manage the shift of domesticity to more public action? And did Jewish women follow or parallel women’s Christian organizations? Studies based on their organizations have produced the majority of the information on women’s clubs and

³⁸ Rabbi Issac Leeser, “How to Educate Jewish Girls,” in Jacob R. Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1988) quoted in Wenger, “Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers”, 19.

³⁹ *Archives Israelites* 13 (1852): 612, quoted in Paula Hyman, “The Modern Jewish Family; Myth and Reality” in *The Jewish Family; Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 188.

⁴⁰ Solomon Schechter, “Address Delivered at the 1913 Convention,” quoted in Jenna Joselit “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Woman”, 207.

⁴¹ “Save the Sabbath”, *AJ*, 7 no. 2 (May 1898), 97 quoted in Joselit, “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Woman”, 207.

⁴² Joselit, “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Woman”, 207.

the changing characteristics of women's special sphere. The subsequent chapters will explore these questions both in the United States and in Canada.

History of American Women's Organizations

After the civil war, American women struggled to embody the ideal of the true woman. In attempting to adapt to this ideal they began to alter it. Women employed the traits of the ideal lady to justify their move into the public sphere. Using the image of their supposed special qualities they took the ideology of domesticity with them preserving conventional appearances. Clubwomen made "Domestic Feminism" work for them by believing that were collaborating not at the expense of the home and family but because of their natural talents nurtured there.⁴³ In the post civil war period middle class American Protestant women began to form their public identities through church related work both abroad and at home. An extraordinary number of women joined and created organizations. Christian women's work for benevolence and social reform expanded in this era incorporating into ubiquitous local and national organizations. Although Jewish women continued to dominate regular worship attendance emulating the model of female religious identity of their American Protestant counterparts, their organizational activity did not grow in the same way in the 1860's, 70's or 80's. In fact, it contracted.

Synagogues narrowed their focus to the ritual and decorum in worship and decorum and burial. Consequently extrasynagogal affiliations such as the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society became marginalized. Whereas women's participation in worship had increased

⁴³ Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman As Feminist* (New York: Homes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980). Historian Daniel Scott Smith first coined the term "domestic feminism" in his theories about how nineteenth century women asserted power in their home. His research documented the declining birth rate in America and birth control. Blair uses the term Domestic Feminism in her study of Clubwomen from 1868-1970 claiming it resulted when women redefined the ideal lady.

in comparison to men's whose decreased, men still took the prominent governing roles in synagogues or found a place for themselves in Jewish fraternal orders which were expanding at this time.⁴⁴ Jewish public life was still male-oriented. Hence, women were left with few options for involvement beyond the synagogue school or sanctuary; their venues for public participation were limited. In addition, they could not partake in the work of the Protestant movements or create parallel groups because of the Christian orientation and goals; working for temperance and supporting missionary endeavours in the United States and abroad. The Jewish community did not consider temperance a problem partly due to the inclusion of wine in Jewish rituals or the concern about the preservation of the boundary of church and state.⁴⁵ In the case of missionary work, Jewish women would not want to be perceived as proselytizing to non-Jews and resented the reverse.⁴⁶ Women's activism was mainly quiescent; fundraising for specific projects in the form of mutual aid and charitable societies was most often initiated and directed by men. In the synagogue where they played a significant role particularly in congregational schools, their benevolent and educational work was frequently subsumed by male supervision. Dominant all male relief groups and institutionalized Jewish community work undermined women's organizations even though they did try to include women's groups and participation. Although women did work, they were not leaders nor on boards. There were no consistent movements, connection to their own larger purposes, or pursuit of autonomous power in the post Civil War period. They did not create any significant national organizations nor were they committed to any political movements

⁴⁴ This information is based on evidence in the Reform movement.

⁴⁵ Ministers advocated for prohibition and the Jewish community objected to the invasion of Church ideologies on the State.

⁴⁶ Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 138.

like their Protestant counterparts. Basically, local women responded to the frequent requests for help from the male synagogue leaders when the synagogues were in debt.⁴⁷

However, these early ladies' societies did provide American Jewish women their first group associations and extrafamilial outlets. They accepted "instinctive motherhood" as their personal ideology using their maternal and nurturing instincts. American Jewish women first starting meeting in groups often considered nothing more than glorified *kaffeeklatches*. Jenna Weissman Joselit describes these as a place where "women honed their verbal skills and cultivated their aesthetic senses amidst "the aroma of fragrant coffee and fresh cake" supporting the connecting idea of women, Judaism and food.⁴⁸ As their horizons broadened somewhat outward wanting to apply their skills and qualities of compassion and sensitivity toward society, Benevolent Societies, Passover Relief Societies, Lodges, Temple Aid Societies, ladies auxiliaries and sisterhoods were formed. These were most frequently associated with synagogues and not always created by women. The members' main responsibility was to raise funds, sew clothes for the needy and do flower decoration for synagogue affairs. The money raised was usually given to an all male board to allocate. A small number of women performed the work of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, the burial society or "holy society". Some of these groups were based on the female burial societies which played an essential role in German-Jewish communities⁴⁹ while others envisioned themselves as the counterparts to the men's

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman" 20.

⁴⁹ *Chevra Kaddishas* held a special position among social services in Europe. Jews were autonomous in their restricted neighbourhoods or ghettos maintaining their religion, controlling education, judicial action, social welfare. *Chevra Kaddishas* attended the dying, sewed shrouds performed ritual ablutions, stood watch over the corpse and accompanied it to the cemetery. They also extended themselves into the charitable and social service arena. See Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 193, 199-202.

Hebrew Benevolent societies.⁵⁰ They prepared a women's body for burial, visited the sick, took care of the children and distributed small sums to the 'worthy poor'. The women exhibited an ability to collect funds for focused purposes and perform charity works as needed in the diverse locations.⁵¹ Although they were systematic and well organized contributing vitally to creating and sustaining the community, their work was done in a quiet indiscriminate manner. The women accepted their role as behind-the-scenes workers.

A second more proactive specialized stage emerged. At the end of 19th century, despite limitations imposed by leaders and women's supposed allegiance to the ideologies and their "special sphere" and "proper place", women began to participate in social and cultural activities outside the 'sacred' boundaries. By the 1890's Christian women's activism had become a powerful force. The lack of Jewish women's activism in ethical and philanthropic endeavours was noted by both Christian and Jewish women. Josephine Shaw Lowell, founder of the Charity Organization society of New York City, commented to Rebecca Kohut that she had "never yet met any of the better class Jewesses in the lower quarter of the city."⁵² Rosa Sonneschein, editor of the *American Jewess* noted this frequent observation and drew it to the attention of her readers. The reason for the deficiency was pointed out as not lack of empathy but the small demand

⁵⁰Toll, "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870-1920".

Men's Hebrew Benevolent Societies sometimes looked after the health and burial needs of Jewish men.

⁵¹ The American Jewish communities of the south and west were not at the same stages of development as the north and east. Women put more energy in fundraising and institution building and had more communal impact in less established communities. See Goldman *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*; William Toll *Women, Men and Ethnicity*; and "From Domestic Judaism to Public Ritual: Women and Religious Identity in the American West" in *Women and American Judaism*; Karla Goldman, "The Public Lives of Cincinnati's Jewish Women" in *Women and American Judaism*; Beth S. Wenger "Jewish Women of the Club: The Changing Role of Atlanta's Jewish Women (1870-1930) *American Jewish History* LXXVI, no. 3 (1987).

⁵² Rebekah Kohut, in *Papers of the Jewish Women's Conference, Chicago 1893*, 191-192, quoted in Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*, 175.

for such services among Jews due to small population, relatively few poor and the regular relief channels being able to fulfill all demands.⁵³

However, the influx and accompanying crisis of immigrants was an impetus to new ideals and goals for Jewish women.⁵⁴ The migration changed the situation and population of Jews creating new demands on the Jewish community. In response, women's organizations became more conscious of community work, immigrant social service and Zionism. The new organizations were led by women themselves rather than male boards. They were more outward directed and focused more on 'active' charity rather than that of just 'raising' and 'giving' donations.⁵⁵ The most important part of their contributions was now their time, personally going out to interact and work with the community. Their primary focus was to care for the immigrant women and children especially those unescorted, widowed or deceased. They visited immigrant homes and made recommendations of their needs, worked in settlement houses, day nurseries, kindergartens and religious schools, founded social clubs and culture classes for women and children, and assisted probation officers. While carrying out this responsibility they saw two opportunities. One was to influence the immigrant women to resemble themselves. They wished to teach them appropriate middle class forms of behaviour and habits. Although they felt sympathetic and responsible for the unfortunate Eastern European streaming into America, the American German Jews did not want to be identified with lower class and uncultured immigrants and be socially discriminated

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ American Jewish women did not model themselves after the European Jewish women's groups. Rather they looked to the model of their Christian counterparts suggesting that they were more influenced by the American society wanting to acculturate. See Marion A. Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, 1904-1930* (New York, 1979).

⁵⁵ Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess".

against as in the past. On the other hand the 'downtown' Eastern European women had mixed feelings about their 'uptown' German Jewish sisters who were helping them.⁵⁶ They felt a certain amount of resentment toward the uptown ladies for their superior concept of charity and Judaism and for having to depend on their generosity. The noble motives of their coreligionists activity were also suspect and were most often considered as an intrusion in the lives of the immigrant women.⁵⁷

The second was to find rewarding and useful work for themselves and improve their religious and moral image.⁵⁸ In this second stage Jewish women were able to find novel ways to shape their nurturing interests and qualities and bring their ideas and skills into the public realm. Their new duties meshed with the ideology of maternalism. Hannah B. Einstein, long time president of the Federation of Sisterhoods, explained the changing time as one in which to the Jewish woman "have come larger duties: she is not only a mother to her children, she must of necessity become a mother and sister to the unfortunate and poverty-stricken"⁵⁹ The transition was made from "instinctive" to "educated" motherhood" where women were to be 'trained' to the tasks of motherhood. In order to have respectability in the public realm they had to learn the formalities of meetings and the scientific techniques of public health, education, legal proceedings and social settlement.

⁵⁶ The terms 'uptown' and 'downtown' represent both a geographical division as well as an ethnic/cultural one.

⁵⁷ Much of the resentment of the immigrants elicited through literary forms was directed towards the German Jewish women rather than the male leaders of the community due to the more personal 'face-to-face' daily contact with the volunteer women. See Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, "The Uptown Lady and Downtown Woman *Two Kinds of Jews*," in *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: The Dial Press, 1976).

⁵⁸ Charlotte Baum, Paula Hyman, and Sonya Michel, *The Jewish Woman in America*.

⁵⁹ Hannah Einstein, "The Federation of Sisterhoods," *Twenty-fifth annual Report of the United Hebrew Charities of the City of New York* (1899), 55 quoted in Herman, "From Priestess to Hostess", 159.

The organizations dubbed Sisterhoods of Personal Service were created between 1888 and 1896 as a means for women's religious expression through charitable undertakings. Each sisterhood was affiliated with a major synagogue, the majority in New York. They were to emulate the good works done by the Christian women's organizations and to *counter* the activities of those Christian groups and their missionizing. They formed a Federation of Sisterhoods not only for reasons of efficiency and organization but to bring about mutual support and helpfulness. As the vice-president of Temple Emmanuel explained "We, ourselves have found how blessed it is for sisters to dwell together in the unity of humane endeavors."⁶⁰ This organization differed from the previous women's benevolent societies in that it required *personal service* from its members, strived for egalitarianism between the rich and poor, and espoused the principles of "scientific charity".⁶¹ They rendered a wide variety of services to new immigrants which included limited cash relief and personal visits to the sick and needy, schools, classes and clubs for working girls, child daycare, kindergartens, an industrial and religious school for immigrant youth and an employment bureau.

The National Council of Jewish Women was founded in 1893 by middle-class American Jewish German women. The organization was a vehicle to supply a voice in the world of women's clubs and at the same time to Americanize Jewish woman without sacrificing Jewish identity. Modeled after secular clubs it was to bring social reform to the Jewish community. It focused on the concerns of women and children which it felt were being ignored by male-dominated institutions. Its areas of programming were

⁶⁰ Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*.

⁶¹ Felicia Herman assesses the tenets of "scientific" charity as advocating large, centralized charitable organization instead of numerous smaller independent ones to prevent fraud and duplications, preferring preventive methods, vocational training and moral advice over financial aid and to work to end the "pauperization" of material aid.

philanthropy, religion and education with emphasis on the pragmatic means of solving problems in these areas. The women of the National Council recognized the need of “scientific” techniques in its progress; that is predictable and efficient means of organization and the support of progressive social welfare legislation in addition to philanthropy. A network of activities and institutions were developed to facilitate adaptation. They initiated an immigrant aid network, attempted to deal with the issue of white slavery, organized Settlement houses or Neighbourhood houses, and set up Sabbath Schools for girls. A variety of social services were offered. Study Circles were provided where the National Council women could learn about history, politics, economics, and new techniques of social work. They were a crucial form of self-education for women. As they worked in the fields the women studied and learned becoming experts in areas such as judicial procedures, juvenile delinquency and financial needs.⁶²

Some women leaders and magazine editors, such as Rose Sonneschein and Mary Fels, advocated that the ideology of Zionism should be included in the agendas of Jewish women’s organizations. Hadassah was the first Jewish women’s Zionist organization, founded by Henrietta Szold in 1912. It combined the goals of the NCJW with the idealism of Zionism. The two primary goals were to spread the cause of Zionism in the United States and to improve the medical facilities in Palestine. The members consisted of upper middleclass women and recent immigrants. In the twentieth century East European women joined the ranks of the Jewish club movement which grew out of their particular

⁶² The information for NCJW was amassed from Charlotte Baum, *The Jewish Woman in America*; Faith Rogrow, “Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women, 1893-1993” in *American Jewish Women’s History* ed. Pamela S. Nadell (New York & London: New York University Press, 2003): 64-74; Sochen, *Consecrate Every Day, The Public Lives of Jewish American Women, 1880-1980*.

values and experiences. Prior to this time they did not have the affluence or leisure time as did the German Jewish women.

Challenges faced the organizations after WWI due to the shifting needs of the Jewish community and the growth of professionalism of social work. Immigration had slowed down and the acculturation of the immigrants advanced relatively unhindered thus rendering most of the social work aspects of the organizations obsolete. The community wanted to attend to problems of keeping Jews from becoming too American and losing their Jewish identity and vestiges. In addition, the drive for trained professionals in the social work sector eliminated many volunteer women from much social work activity as well as dislodging women from many responsible positions.⁶³ Academically trained male social workers fortified with “scientific” methods criticized and devalued Jewish women’s volunteer methods. “The destinies of the poor are too precious to be placed in the hands of persons whose only qualifications are their willingness to act as social workers” was the way they expressed their claim that women were not properly prepared for the task.⁶⁴ They thought that as long as social work was perceived as women’s work the profession would not have status or significance. Although Jewish women fought they could not combat the devaluation. Once social work demanded professional education and training it became out of the bounds of women’s sphere. The concept of ‘professional’ and ‘volunteer’ distinguished the spheres of male and female.

Simultaneously, rabbis began to worry about the moral decay of Jewish families and the nurturing role of women. They were anxious about the pull of secular society and the need for transmission of Jewish values and tradition through the family. Judgment was

⁶³ Paula Hyman, “The Volunteer Organizations: Vanguard of Rear Guard?” *Lilith* (1976).

⁶⁴ H. Joseph Hyman, “The Problem of Jewish Charities in the South,” *American Jewish Review* (April, 1914) quoted in Wenger, “Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers”, 29.

passed on women for deserting the household. A similar dilemma was being voiced in the greater society described by sociologists as the collapse of the American family and the loss of its traditional functions and sources of legitimacy. Women were told that they could reconcile this family crisis through a new kind of marital relationship “wife as companion”.⁶⁵

As a result, organizational women turned inward focusing their energies on less direct and personalized work such as fundraising and programming. Second generation women joined the established organizations such as NCJW, Hadassah, ORT⁶⁶ and still continued their work in women’s auxiliaries of hospitals, orphanages, and community centers. The sisterhoods rallied around their individual congregations devoting themselves to an array of synagogue affairs. June Sochen describes the surfacing of a new social type of women in the 1920’s; that of the professional board member. They were middle and upper class women who “joined one or more groups early in married life, worked as a volunteer, participated in committees, and eventually assumed leadership positions in the organization.”⁶⁷

History of Canadian Women’s Organizations

Middle class Canadian women in the nineteenth century accepted the dominant ideology of the day that women’s proper place was in the home. Nonetheless, they were always involved in charitable endeavours. At the beginning of the century these were either in the form of voluntary contributions on a personal level or through the church.

⁶⁵ Rothman, *Women’s Proper Place*.

⁶⁶ Ort which is the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (1880) always concentrated on fundraising for vocational schools for Jewish youth in various parts of the world. Sochen, *Consecrate Every Day*.

⁶⁷ Sochen, *Consecrate Every Day*, 68.

When the government did not meet needs of women and children, Christian women formed more structured and permanent societies which helped found or administer orphanages, asylums, and refuge homes. The women, however, were not the figureheads of these societies but ran the homes, raised the funds for daily operations and hired the personnel to help run them. At the end of the century women's organizational activity increased becoming national in scope and reformist in nature rather than charitable. Although this more public enterprise could have lead to confrontation it did not. The women were motivated by a Christian religious sense of concern which they extended to the state formulating it into a secular sense of responsibility. The fact that these organizations were based on religious beliefs or moralities justified the expansion of woman's private sphere into the public one.⁶⁸

In comparison to their Christian counterparts Canadian Jewish women differed in their interests and activities but shared some developmental traits.⁶⁹ They adhered to the notions of true womanhood and women's 'proper place' and unquestionably internalized Judaism's fundamental principle of *tzedekah* or charity within their own community. In his book *The Jew in Canada* Arthur Daniel Hart describes Canadian Jewish women as having "from the earliest days proved themselves to be "true mothers in Israel" keeping the spark of Judaism alive even as far back as when the Jewish population of Canada was "but a few souls". They did so by adhering to their religious beliefs and maintaining a Jewish atmosphere in the homes, instructing their children in religious obligations and

⁶⁸ Wendy Mitchinson, "Early Women's Organizations and Social Reform; Prelude to the Welfare State," in *The Benevolent State* (Toronto: Garamond Press 1987). In her study Wendy Mitchinson lists the early societies and focuses on four societies in the reform period; Church Missionary Societies, The Young Women's Christian Association, Woman's Temperance Union, the National Council of Women.

⁶⁹ The women's organizations I am looking at are in the more established urban areas of eastern Canada. Jewish women in the mostly rural settlements of Western Canada had different experiences.

setting themselves as examples.⁷⁰ The first settlers were considerably well off and the number of immigrants minimal. At this point there was little need of philanthropic work, an arena traditionally dominated by men. Women did however give generous monetary gifts or organized fundraising for the building of synagogues. For example, Mrs. Myer Michaels donated to the building of the Shearith Israel Synagogue and Cecilia Davies (Mrs. Frank Sylvester) raised funds for the first synagogue on the Pacific coast in 1863.⁷¹

In the 1870's there was an upswing of immigration to Canada which continued into the 1880's. Benevolent societies had previously been founded by men in the 1860's in the expectation that immigrants would begin arriving en route to the United States. The changing conditions of the population and recurrent economic crisis at this time prompted the 'maternal instincts' of the women to form their own benevolent groups usually affiliated with the synagogues.

The Toronto Hebrew Ladies Sick and Benevolent Society was organized in 1868 as a mutual aid and charitable society. Services were rendered to the members, such as free loans, "watchers for the sick, funeral expenses, and support to families during the week of mourning". In 1870 it was renamed the Ladies' Montefiore Hebrew Benevolent Society offering aid to Jewish orphans and widows and transients needing railway tickets or employment. Financial contributions also were given to non-Jewish charitable institutions.⁷² In Montreal, the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society was established in 1877 in response to the needs of local poor Jewish women and children. This organization not only had its own set of by-laws but was also incorporated by a special

⁷⁰ Daniel Hart, ed., *The Jew in Canada: A Complete Record of Canadian Jewry from the Days of the French Regime to the Present Time* (Toronto: Jewish Publications, 1926), 240.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁷² Stephen A. Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1979).

Act of the Legislature of the Province of Quebec receiving an annual grant from the Provincial Government and a yearly donation from the Montreal City and District Savings Bank. These contributions together with annual member dues and sums derived from concerts and bazaars made it possible for the Society to carry out its work. There seems to have been a recognition of special needs of women or a gender awareness. Documents of the Baron de Hirsch in Montreal convey that in 1905 while women were responsible for relief assistance to women, men attended to the general needs of men such as coal or matzo.⁷³ The Deborah Ladies Society was formed in Hamilton in 1878 by the wives of the members of the Anshe Shalom Congregation at a time when there was no immediate need for philanthropy. It acted as an auxiliary to the congregation supplying necessities and decorations and financial contributions. An organization founded with a very specific agenda and somewhat different from those stated above was The Ladies Chevra Kadisha (Holy) Society at the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue in Montreal. This society's objective as declared in their constitution was to "attend to the dead (the dying if required), to appoint proper persons to prepare them for interment according to the Orthodox Jewish rites and the making of shrouds."⁷⁴ At this point in time there were no Jewish undertakers in Montreal and these Jewish women, well versed in the requirements of Jewish law, provided an essential and important service to the community. They met on a regularly basis to sew shrouds. Although their task can be viewed as sacred and their work as a labour of love they did charge or at least requested a

⁷³ Joseph, "Jewish Women in Canada: an Evolving Role". In 1903 the Society had trouble with the demand for funds due to the influx of immigrants. In 1905 they met with the Board of the Baron de Hirsch Institute to make new arrangements. Daniel Hart ed. *The Jew in Canada: A Complete Record of Canadian Jewry*.

⁷⁴ Rabbi William Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven: The Story of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim of Montreal 1846-1996* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 59.

contribution for the shrouds. The income they accrued was sometimes used for donations to various institutions, particularly to the synagogue.

When the Jewish population increased dramatically due to the influx of immigrants at the end of the century women's organizations flourished in communities across Canada. Jewish women had a legitimated opportunity to expand their nurturing instincts and charitable skills into the public arena of the Jewish community. The Hebrew Ladies Sewing Society formed in 1896; the Ottawa Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society in 1898, the Toronto Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society in 1899, the Council of Jewish Women in Toronto in 1897, the Ottawa's Ladies Aid Society in 1899, the Daughters of Israel in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1900, the Jewish Endeavour Society in Montreal in 1902⁷⁵, the Hebrew Ladies' Maternity Aid Society in Toronto in 1908, Jewish Working Girls Club in Toronto in 1909⁷⁶, and the Ezras Nashim in Toronto in 1913. The concerns and tasks of the new organizations were reflective of the concept of "educated motherhood" focusing on the welfare of children and women. A myriad of relief services were offered. To thwart the missionary threat from the non-Jewish sector a more comprehensive approach was required. Activities and facilities for the exclusive care for children were instituted. The Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Circle in Toronto changed its name to the Hebrew Ladies' Maternity Aid and Child Welfare Society and provided aid to new mothers and their infants and taught sewing and Jewish religion, history and Zionism to young girls. The Jewish Day Nursery, an outgrowth of the Hebrew Ladies' Aid daycare

⁷⁵ Irene Wolff, "Present Days Activities of Montreal Jewish Women" in *The Jews of Canada*. This Society was formed when several women became alarmed that Jewish girls were being tempted to attend mission schools that taught sewing and would possibly form relationships with non-Jewish girls.

⁷⁶ This was established as a recreational centre for Jewish working girls where they could spend evenings. Most of the members were new arrivals and unable to speak English. As a result English classes and sewing were organized and Saturday nights were devoted to social gatherings.

centre to prevent Jewish children of working mothers being placed in homes of Christian women, opened a day nursery. A Mother's Club was established as a place where parents and teachers could meet to discuss the welfare of children and provide instruction. The goal was to acculturate immigrant parents while combating missionary endeavors.

A more structured and "scientific" approach was undertaken in this period.

Constitutions were approved, officers were elected, policies adopted and committees created. The Ladies' Montefiore demanded thorough investigation to establish need before providing assistance. Still, some of the organizations had men as the figureheads.⁷⁷ The Toronto Ladies' Aid Society which was made up mostly of East European women were not comfortable electing a female president feeling it was improper for a woman to hold the position.⁷⁸

During the years of the First World War women created philanthropic and patriotic groups geared toward the war's and soldiers' specific needs. A group of women known as the Hebrew Ladies Patriotic Group in Montreal banded together to sew and knit for the Red Cross and the Patriotic Fund. Believing that their work could be more effective under a central organization, they formed the Grace Aguilar Chapter of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire in 1916⁷⁹. The Lord Reading Chapter I.O.D.E. was founded in Quebec City in 1914, and Disraeli Chapter I.O.D.E. in Ottawa in 1918.

⁷⁷ Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto*, 146.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 146. This organization formed partially in reaction against the patronizing and more acculturated Ladies' Montefiore organization. Their policy was to offer relief according to talmudic principles practiced in the *shtetl* (Jewish villages in Europe). This was when one asked for help they were entitled to it with no questions asked.

⁷⁹ Daniel Hart, *The Jew in Canada*. The Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire was founded in 1900, the time of the South African Boer War to supply and foster a bond of union amongst women and children of the Empire. Chapters were founded over the Dominion and Jewish names were among the earliest members and some being several attaining prominence in various offices of the Order.

The majority of these organizations either ceased to exist or evolved as the needs of the community changed. They were incorporated into larger philanthropic or community organizations or their activities became included under federated systems of each major city starting in 1915. These were male dominated and enforced “scientific philanthropy”, a strict system of economy and efficiency. The women of the ladies societies were used as volunteers to investigate the needs and root out the ‘undeservings’ and to distribute relief with restraint. However, they were criticized for their old-fashioned methods of openhandedness and lack of written reports. Disillusioned they began to withdraw and due to lack of funds dissolved or operated on a much reduced scale.⁸⁰

In this period some prominent national organizations which had their beginnings in the United States but with Canadian characteristics were founded and have continued to exist into contemporary times. The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) was founded in 1897 in Toronto four years after its establishment in the United States. Chapters across Canada quickly proliferated. They were established by British and German upper class women devoted to religious philanthropic and educational activities, traditional female pursuits. The NCJW’s basis was charity and not feminist oriented. Their primary concern was to aid the poor, immigrant women, young girls and children thus creating educational programs and facilities and family services. It was one of the very few remaining women’s organizations able to render its services during the next influx of immigrants in 1919-1920 and of Rumanian refugees in 1923-1924. An additional aim of its agenda was to present a positive image of the Jewish community and to have its contributions valued in Canadian society.⁸¹ During and after the Second

⁸⁰Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto*.

⁸¹Joseph, “Jewish Women in Canada: an Evolving Role”.

World War its activities included social welfare and immigrant absorption which branched into contemporary Jewish affairs, social legislation and international affairs.

The eastern European women organized their own groups. Hadassah was established in Toronto in 1917 and Montreal in 1918 by women who had settled in the 1880's and 90's. Although they were upper middle-class, they viewed themselves as dissimilar from the acculturated North American educated and leisured women of the National Council. Although they also saw their work as an extension of their role as caregiver into the public sphere, their concentration was on the provision of social services, particularly health care, to the Jews in Palestine. It was not feminist oriented in that it gave no consideration to the political and social role of Jewish women in the nation building of Palestine.⁸² Hadassah in Canada distinguished itself from its equivalent in the United States. It joined the Women's International Zionist Organization and funded Nahalal, the first women's agricultural college in Palestine. This changed its charity-oriented philanthropy to one of productivity.⁸³

Pioneer Women's Organization, now known as Na'amat, was organized by immigrant working-class women in Montreal in 1925. They were Yiddish speaking, politically-minded and religiously unaffiliated. This organization was Zionist but left wing affiliated with the Labour Zionist movement. They formed their own women's organization when they became angered by their exclusion from the political process of the male dominated Labour Zionist movement. Maintaining the same political ideology they focused on two areas: the education of children and promotion of women's participation in building a Jewish state and the raising of the cultural level of women in Canada in order to make a

⁸² Draper and Karlinsky, "Abraham's Daughters: Women, Charity, and Power in the Canadian Jewish Community".

⁸³ Joseph, "Jewish Women in Canada", 187.

more valuable contribution to Jewish life. Their goals were executed through fund raising events and meetings and special programs which kept women informed about important issues and expanded their knowledge about Palestine and the world.⁸⁴

The women's organizations in Canada encountered the same resistance to women's volunteer social services as those in the United States. In his study of philanthropy in Toronto, Stephen Speisman attributes the change in women's organizations at the end of the second decade of the twentieth century on the insistence on "scientific philosophy" which discouraged volunteerism and the older methods in favour of more formalized structures and professional social workers.⁸⁵ As the areas of social welfare involvement diminished the Jewish women's volunteer efforts narrowed to self-education and fundraising. Canadian women, like their American peers, joined their established national organizations of NCJW, Hadassah and Pioneer Women and continued work in various auxiliaries. They also expressed a renewed interest in synagogue affairs at the end of the second decade which was to develop into the proliferation of sisterhoods and the growth of their regional and national organizations.

American Sisterhoods and their National Organizations

Jewish women were most commonly idealized and esteemed as a mother and homemaker, "queen of her home". Their work was described metaphorically using religious language associated with the sanctuary as "service at the altar" and making a

⁸⁴ Draper and Karlinsky, "Abraham's Daughters: Women, Charity and Power in the Canadian Jewish Community".

⁸⁵ Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto*, 265.

“home a miniature Temple”.⁸⁶ However, women in the early twentieth century had acquired middle class incomes and a heightened sensitivity to their secular surroundings and began to require a ‘broader sphere’. While they were honoured as the priestess of the family and guardian of religious life they needed a new venue for their talents beyond this. Mathilde Schechter expressed concern that many women were turning from Jewish tradition to secular activities for cultural fulfillment.⁸⁷ Many women had done charitable and social work as portrayed previously and there was no reason that their organizational abilities and religious inclinations could not now be used for religious institutional purposes. William Chafe, a historian in American women’s history, demonstrated in his work that through the ubiquitous women’s voluntary societies of the late nineteenth century women had helped develop the social and educational infrastructures of American life. Numerous organizations continued but by the 1920’s and 1930’s new ones surfaced with particular agendas they wished to project.⁸⁸

In the nineteenth century the women’s gallery was moved down from the balcony and men’s synagogue attendance decreased. Jewish women became dominant in terms of attendance.⁸⁹ However, in the twentieth century synagogues began to proliferate and a pattern of increasing engagement in congregational life emerged. A new concept of the synagogue as a ‘family enterprise’ and an institution in which “all members of the family would feel at home” was being introduced in concurrence with a emerging new

⁸⁶ Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York’s Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 97.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ William H. Chafe, “The Paradox of Change: American Women in the Twentieth Century” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5, 9-10, 35-36, quoted in Pamela S. Nadell and Rita J. Simon, “Ladies of the Sisterhood: Women in the American Reform Synagogue, 1900-1930”.

⁸⁹ These facts are documented in the Reform movement. See Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*. This did not occur in the Orthodox movement to the same degree and the proportion of women never exceeded the men.

allegiance to the synagogue. The paradigm of a synagogue-centre, a complex institution built by the Jewish congregations to serve the need of all its members was quickly becoming the trend.⁹⁰ Youth activities and afternoon Hebrew schools were the first concerns of the modernized synagogues. Rabbis and sometimes their wives prompted the organization of sisterhoods as the successors to the Hebrew ladies benevolent societies. Jenna Weissman Joselit professed that sisterhoods (and men's clubs) were the most popular manifestation of the newly Americanized synagogues and that no modern synagogue -Orthodox, Conservative or Reform -was to be without one. Rabbi Lookstein of the Orthodox Kehilath Jeshurun Congregation in New York explained that "A congregation without a sisterhood is like a home without a mother. It is the Sisterhood that brings in a spirit of hospitality, friendship, sociability and warmth into a congregation."⁹¹ This notion reinforced the belief of the 'synagogue family' and the synagogue as a second home. It also legitimized the broadening of the women's home sphere into the synagogue venue. Women took the newly acquired tasks upon themselves with fervor and diligence, applying their domestic sensibilities and skills.

The synagogue sisterhood was a religious organization unlike the charitable or social service institutions in which many Jewish women had previously voluntarily worked. The object of the newly innovative sisterhoods was to press for religious observance and help render the synagogue a warm friendly and accessible institution fostering sociability and religious engagement with their congregations. The appeal was to the dormant energies

⁹⁰ The synagogue-centre is basically understood as a multipurpose synagogue encompassing the functions of religious worship, social activity and education. It has no European precedent. It is entirely American movement in its origin beginning in the late nineteenth century and reaching its height in the 1920's. For a fuller history see, David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (American University Press, 1999).

⁹¹ Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews*, 46.

of the women to work on matters that were both spiritual and practical. The duties of the women were wide ranging from the buying of *tfellin* and *tallisim* to the firing of the janitor to supporting the school and equipping the kitchen encompassing their multi household roles. In their role as Jewish educators they supported the congregation's educational activities particularly the children's Hebrew afternoon schools. They arranged classes for themselves on Jewish subjects and attempted to educate members on how to be good Jewish women. Manuals and guidebooks were published, resources provided and programs, such as kosher cooking, initiated to instruct how to conduct rituals and maintain traditional Jewish homes. As homemakers they decorated the sukkah and the altar with flowers, designed Torah covers and cared for the Ark, equipped the synagogue kitchen, provided furnishings for the buildings and pioneered synagogue gift shops selling Jewish ritual articles. To foster hospitality, socialbility, and instill 'warm good feelings' they provided entertainments for the religious school children, held teas, luncheons, dances and regular meetings (always opened with a prayer) and supplied congregational food.⁹²

Through the continual round of activities and programs the sisterhood women became to a large degree the "cultural and social arm of the congregation".⁹³ Besides being regarded as the "backbone" of the congregation's social spirit the sisterhood developed a fiduciary relationship. Initially it was not the primary focus of the sisterhood to be a fundraising organization. Nonetheless, the congregations came to rely on them as a source of revenue for their institution supplementing its incomes and absorbing the costs of many extras. Jenna Joselit suggests that the concern of the fiscal well-being of the

⁹² Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman".

⁹³ Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews*, 106.

congregation may have endowed the social orientation of the sisterhood with a 'higher purpose' validating the social activities as 'dignified charity' or pursuit of 'sacred hobbies'.⁹⁴

The sisterhood women felt not only welcome but an integral part of the synagogue community. However, the tasks that they undertook in the synagogue were viewed as an extension of those performed as the 'Jewish mother' with no implication that the synagogue would supersede the home. In fact, it was hoped by the sisterhood members that participation in synagogue affairs would heighten a sense of Jewish purpose and revitalize home observance which was waning due to assimilation. As the Women's League manual "The Three Pillars" which presents Jewish ideals and understandings of Jewish practices and observances explains, "when the modern Jewish woman attains this new insight she will again invest these time honored outward expressions of the Jewish soul....in molding and preserving Jewish existence" and "take pride in creating for herself and for her family...an observant and richly rewarding Jewish life."⁹⁵ In this mindset the sisterhood could be looked upon as bridging "the complementary spheres of home and synagogue" and "serving as a "medium" between the two."⁹⁶

Sisterhoods mushroomed rapidly in the interwar years. In communities where women's groups and auxiliaries were already in existence the formation of national movements offered added incentive and stature to their local work. Many reformulated into sisterhoods in association with a national organization. Where no group existed in a

⁹⁴ Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman".

⁹⁵ Deborah M. Melamed, *The Three Pillars* (New York: The Women's League of the United Synagogue of America, 1927).

⁹⁶ Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman", 212.

synagogue the suggestion of a sisterhood was implanted and almost always created.

Umbrella organizations for each denomination developed to nationalize and mobilize the energy of the women to support their religious institutions. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), a coalition of Reform sisterhoods, was established in 1913, followed by the formation of The Women's League of the United Synagogue of America by Conservative women five years later, and the Orthodox women followed suit with the Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America in 1923. The synagogue sisterhoods were to work in cooperation with their national organization attempting to achieve locally, what the national organization strove to do nationally.⁹⁷

The idea of the NFTS may have originally come from the men. However, the founding women who were educated, middle-class second and third generation German Jews quickly seized upon the idea and set their own agenda. Carrie Simon, wife of a prominent rabbi and founding first president, called for "giving the synagogue back to the people....and putting Jewish womanhood on the road of highest usefulness to the cause of American Israel."⁹⁸ The historian Jacob Marcus suggests that the NFTS may have been formulated to counter and rival the National Council of Jewish Women whose original concerns were the religious lives of its members and social work. But by the early twentieth century philanthropy became its main priority rather than synagogue and religious affairs which may have troubled Carrie Simon.⁹⁹ At her instigation, along with Rabbi George Zepin, director of Synagogue and School Extension of the UAHC, NFTS was federated in Cincinnati in 1913 at a meeting with 156 delegates and 49 sisterhoods.

⁹⁷ Excerpt from the Women's League Handbook in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality*, eds. Ellen M. Umansky and Dianne Ashton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 161.

⁹⁸ Karen Davis, "The Ascent of Sisterhood, The First Eight Decades" *Reform Judaism* Fall 1992, 37.

⁹⁹ Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman: A Documentary History*.

She wanted to have women become active participants in leadership roles in congregational life moving from the “threshold...to the sanctum” of the temple.¹⁰⁰ Through biennial conferences, annual executive board meetings and correspondence with the individual sisterhoods combined with printed accounts of many of these, the national organization presented the possibilities for expanding Reform women’s role in the synagogue. The organization exceeded the vision of even Rabbi David Philipson who in his opening address “Women and the Congregation” at the first NFTS convention made a revolutionary proposal that although women are accounted on par with men in Reform “the last word would not be spoken..... until she is received into full membership if she so desire, on the same footing as man”.¹⁰¹

The NFTS emphasized its religious role as auxiliary and support to synagogue and encouraged the well-established roles of maintaining and beautifying the synagogues and involvement with youth and the religious education of children. National committees were formed to strengthen and further this work. The NFTS enabled the women to broaden their participation in religious life and extend their philanthropic activities. Collectively as a national organization, it could undertake much larger projects. NFTS women reclaimed traditions such as; recalling the custom of *shalach mones*, the ritual of gift giving on Purim, hosting communal seders and prompting the return of seder ritual at home. They expressed ideas about public worship and services, calling for the reintroduction of congregational singing, espousing the “free pew” movement,¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Karen Davis. Although there may have been competition between NCJW and NFTS at the national level, sisterhoods and NCJW groups did meet and cooperated at the local level as in the example of women in Atlanta. See Wenger, “Jewish Women of the Club: The Changing Role of Atlanta’s Jewish Women (1870-1930)”.

¹⁰¹ Marcus, *The American Jewish Woman*, 668.

¹⁰² The “free pew” movement was to change the congregational seating policy so that wealth would no longer determine where one sat.

reviving the synagogue celebration of Simcha Torah, conducting and leading services in the summer when rabbis vacationed, demanding public recognition of women's contributions in the form of an annual Sisterhood Sabbath, and electing women to synagogue boards. The NFTS also supported the various institutions of Reform Jewry raising funds for scholarships and a dormitory for the Hebrew Union College (HUC). Uniongrams, a message mailer for all occasions became a major means of fundraising as well.

Embracing humanitarian and social concerns the NFTS women took stands on issues of national and international importance. The issues were not always confined to the Jewish world in congruence with the belief that they were expressing a Reform Jewish viewpoint and reflecting Jewish values. From aid for immigrants and refugees, helping form National Temple Youth groups and a Jewish Braille Institute to matters of world peace, birth control dissemination and anti-lynching and child labour laws, the NFTS took a social activist role. The NFTS was sensitive to and influenced by world events and their intersections with American culture and life. Members participated in the ongoing debates of women's issues and roles in all spheres- rights, education, professions, labour force- linking and adapting them to their religious life.¹⁰³

The National Women's League of the United Synagogue (today called the Women's League for Conservative Judaism) was established in 1918 by Mathilde Schechter, wife of Solomon Schechter, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York who had called for women to assume a role in the newly organized United Synagogue of America. He recognized the potential contribution of layman in the fledgling new

¹⁰³ Women of Reform Judaism Records "Institutional Sketch" <http://www.huc.edu/aja/wrj.htm>.

movement and envisioned the essential work that could be done by the women.¹⁰⁴ At first the League was to be a constituent body of the United Synagogue, but Mathilde Schechter strongly advocated that it be autonomous and not swallowed into the parent organization. Her vision was that the League would be a coordinating body of 'Conservative' synagogue sisterhoods whose mission was the perpetuation of traditional Judaism in America through the home, synagogue, and community.¹⁰⁵ The fact that many women were turning toward the secular culture in search of new venues concerned her. She felt women should be involved in the daily functioning of their respective synagogues and community activities while simultaneously raising a family and creating a warm and beautiful home life. Notwithstanding, they should also become knowledgeable in Jewish rituals in order to be able to participate in Jewish life in a meaningful way. Her philosophy is clearly apparent in her declaration,

We wish to serve the cause of Judaism by strengthening the bond of unity among Jewish women and by learning to appreciate everything in Jewish life...the self education of conservative Jewish women is only the first step toward the better education of our children.¹⁰⁶

She encouraged the formation of new sisterhoods to affiliate with the National Women's League in order to obtain guidance and innovative ideas and to network with like-minded women. She created a blueprint of services to be undertaken by the women. The first step the new organization took was to help young women through the process of acculturation and Americanization through published educational materials and a Student House as a cultural center and offering kosher room and board.

¹⁰⁴ Women's League of Conservative Judaism, "Mathilde Schechter," *About Women's League*; available from <http://phil.jtsa.edu/wlcj/html/flounder.htm>; Internet; accessed 6 November 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Shuly Rubin Schwartz, "Women's League for Conservative Judaism" in *Jewish Women in America: A Historical Encyclopedia*, eds. Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore Vol. 11. 'Conservative' was not the name of the denomination at its founding. The term was being used ambivalently in these decades.

¹⁰⁶ Women's League for Conservative Judaism, "Mathilde Schechter".

Education was considered the “lifeline of sisterhood” by the league and hence came to encompass many areas including that of adult education, books, libraries, creative handicrafts, Judaica shops, music and programming. Numerous publications produced in the early years were to provide guidance and instruction for religious holidays and observance such as: *The Three Pillars: Thought, Worship and Practice* (1927) which became the cornerstone of the League’s educational programs; the Outlook magazine (1930) designed as a means to voice opinions, for members to keep in touch with each other and to focus on Jewish cultural subjects and contemporary issues; *The Jewish Home Beautiful* (1941), an illustrated guide and pageant program for creating the Jewish home filled with beauty and spirituality; and *The Women’s League Handbook and Guide* (1947) a guide to help local synagogue sisterhoods operate efficiently and achieve its objectives. Jewish study for its own sake was an important component. Hence, the League initiated the Women’s Institute of Jewish Studies of the Jewish Seminary of America in cooperation with other leading Jewish women’s organizations. Jewish education and synagogue participation for young girls was encouraged resulting in the formation of a Girl Scout project in 1946.¹⁰⁷

Fundraising on the national level was linked to the growing Conservative Movement but especially geared to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America with particular concern to the welfare of the students. A formal educational fund was established in 1934 and named Torah Fund in 1942. Social action to further traditional Judaism was a commitment of the Women’s League. Members were involved in issues of social justice, human rights with special attention to women, care for the hungry, homeless and poor, and helping the Jewish blind through the Jewish Braille Institute. During the Second

¹⁰⁷Schwartz, “Women’s League for Conservative Judaism”.

World War the league called for personal sacrifice on the part of all its members to help in the war effort. The organization was active in many drives and organizations and members trained to perform needed tasks in different areas. A high priority on the league's agenda was Israel, advocating unwavering support in its upbuilding, its needs and issues after the creation of the state and involvement in fundraising projects.¹⁰⁸

A women's division of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (UOJCA) known as Women's Branch was established in 1923 by a handful of dedicated Jewish women when it was noticed that Orthodox women were becoming more involved in the synagogues and "making sisterhood its 'fortunate cause' ".¹⁰⁹ It was apparent that this growing resourceful group of women had much to offer the Orthodox community and as a national organization could represent the Orthodox female community plus define the Orthodox Jewish experience from a woman's perspective.¹¹⁰ As a central unit with a formulated ideology the Women's Branch would be able to pursue the interests of orthodox women and at the same time enhance religious observance making it a "force for Jewishness".¹¹¹ As one objective of its mandate stipulates, "to arouse the individual Jewess to her outstanding role in the home and in the Jewish and civic communities."¹¹² A significant part of its agenda was to organize and affiliate new sisterhoods. Pamphlets, newsletters and manuals were published to instruct 'how to' establish and operate an "efficient sisterhood" and to provide detailed material for model constitutions, cultural and social programming and activities, fundraising and membership campaigning.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Mrs. Herbert S. Goldstein, "The Jewish Women-A Force for Jewishness-A Force for Jewishness," in *New York's Jewish Jews* 108.

¹¹² Mrs. Isidor Freeman and Mrs. Nathan H. Wadler, *Women's Branch OJCA: Its Background and History and A Glimpse into the Future* Women's Branch Publication (date unknown).

Education was an important and serious facet of the organization's ideology. The Jewish educational opportunities for women in the early century were meager. The 1930's saw slow changes but not until after WW II were educational advantages offered. In order to make women knowledgeable in the understanding and practice of traditional Judaism the sisterhood women were encouraged to attend classes or organize ones where they did not exist, on an array of subjects ranging from Hebrew, Bible, religious ceremonies, and Jewish literature to sociology, family problems and housewifery. To promote synagogue attendance and ritual and holiday observance booklets were published to advocate the benefits of observance and guidebooks for instruction. Deeply concerned about the education of the young adult Jewish woman who did not have the same learning opportunities as her male counterpart, the Branch instituted an initial remedy in the establishment of The Hebrew Teacher's Training School for Girls in 1928 to train teachers, educators and leaders. The Branch's educational agenda also included support for the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva. A fundraising campaign in 1925 raised a large sum of money to build a new dormitory.

The observance of kashruth was a particular ritual selected by the Women's Branch for promotion. Jenna Joselit suggests this choice was due to the primacy of kashruth in the sacred life of the traditional Jewish women and an organic evolvement from her role as homemaker and consumer. A Committee was appointed to make kosher products available to the public. The women visited manufacturers to request changes in conformance with the dietary laws. The initial investigation and analyses was underwritten by Women's Branch, the supervision of the products done by the rabbis and

the final function to bring it the attention to the public by the Branch.¹¹³ The Branch leaders pressed the local sisterhoods to urge for kashrut observance and under its tutelage classes explaining the origins of kashruth were held, instruction in kosher cooking sponsored and sisterhood kosher cookbooks encouraged. Kosher recipes circulated especially through cookbooks and the Women's Branch magazine. Reasons to follow kashruth which would be of interest to the modern American women were employed throughout the campaign.¹¹⁴ A committee to advocate the family purity laws was also formed, publishing "enlightening information to encourage and maintain interest in this mitzvah" and promoting "the construction of sanitary and inviting ritual baths (mikvahs)".¹¹⁵ As opposed to the publicity of the kashruth campaign the Branch's Committee to advocate the family purity laws operated with considerable diffidence and was a more difficult ritual to reinterpret and balance between modernity and religious traditionalism.¹¹⁶ One of the stated ideological mandates of the Women's Branch was to instill the 'spirit of Torah Judaism blending the traditional with the modern'.¹¹⁷

Women's Branch was involved in national and international endeavours; identifying with movements of its coreligionists, participating in Sisterhood Assembly Day, working to avert changes in the calendral reform affecting "wandering Sabbaths" and assisting in the myriad war effort projects and the aftermath of the plight of displaced persons. Projects on behalf of Israel were undertaken filling many religious needs such as help in

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 116.

¹¹⁷ Freedman and Wadler, *Women's Branch UOJCA*.

financing the building of the Jerusalem Mikvah and encouraging sisterhoods to send food and clothing.¹¹⁸

The question of what constitutes women's sphere has been asked continually in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century both in the United States and Canada. It has been questioned in the religious and secular realms. In their discussion of women's proper sphere, Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchenson astutely note "Why it was asked is debatable since those who insisted upon discussing the question agreed with monotonous regularity that woman's role was to be a wife, mother, and homemaker. Did so much attention and rhetoric suggest that women no longer accepted their 'proper sphere?'"¹¹⁹ This chapter examined the ideals of women's roles and their place. North American women accepted the role divisions founded on the concepts of their 'natural' instincts of nurturing and caring. The family was to be the centre of their attention which was an important element in the stability of society. However, technological innovations and industrial growth effected some changes in women's realm. As technological changes, such as labour saving devices and factory made food and clothing, entered the home domestic tasks took less time, particularly for middle class women who sometimes could afford domestic help. Fathers, sons, and sometimes daughters also worked more outside of the home. Women began to look to expand their horizons beyond the home. Working was not respectable for the image of middle class women.¹²⁰ It became apparent to women that there was a flaw in the image of women's roles that would allow an

¹¹⁸ Freeman and Wadler, *Women's Branch* and Joselit, *New York Jewish Jews*.

¹¹⁹ Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchenson, eds., *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Oxford University Press 1976), 5.

¹²⁰ This was not the reality for most working class women. But if and when they did enter middle class status they adopted the accepted images and roles. The Jewish immigrants changed their social status quite quickly in the United States and Canada. An example of how Jewish immigrant women followed the middle class accepted roles is in the next chapter in the study of other Montreal synagogue sisterhoods.

extension of their sphere. How were they to prepare and protect their families in the outer world if they themselves were isolated and uninformed in the homes?¹²¹ They recognized a way to extend their responsibilities into the public realm utilizing their 'natural' virtues so as to be acceptable. As illustrated these concepts had an effect on North American Jewish women shaping their roles within the religious realm. They advanced their natural mothering instincts and proclivity to charity into organizational activity within the community and synagogue. The next chapter will turn to the Jewish Canadian narrative of Canadian Jewish women's synagogue sisterhoods depicting an in-depth portrait of those in the Montreal Jewish community.

¹²¹ Cook and Mitchenson, eds., *The Proper Sphere*, 3-6.

Chapter 3: The Canadian/Montreal Chronicle

Historical and Cultural Context of Canada and Montreal

As previously noted, a common assumption embedded in Canadian Jewish historiography is that it is identical to or a pale reflection of that of American Jewry. It is frequently thought that Canadian Jewry was a sort of colony of the American Jewish communities.¹²² There is no doubt that there are significant similarities between the two cultures and their historical experiences. They both had a large influx of immigration from the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century bringing to both communities their cultural baggage consisting of a mixture of deeply religious orthodox views and a *mélange* of philosophies. Historical developments involving post-1900 settlement patterns, cultural life and economic struggle resembled each other very closely. Numerous exchanges and influences continually transpired due to the close proximity of the two countries. However, upon close examination it has become apparent that Canada did have its own unique configuration and characteristics.¹²³ There were different forces in the Canadian context such as constitutional structure, political life, national composition and ideology, urban and economic development, and linguistic patterns which affected Canadian Jewry to evolve in its own distinct fashion.

¹²² Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History" *The Jews in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993): 5-21. He is specifically referring to Michael Brown's essay "The American Connection of Canadian Jews: 1759-1914" in *AJS Review* 3 (1978) in which Brown discusses the 'indistinct image' European, and American Jews had of Canada and that Canadian Jewry, dependent and intimately connected with England and the United States, defined themselves through that relationship.

¹²³ The differences of the two countries Jewish history has been studied by various scholars. For example, Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Immigration to North America: The Canadian Experience (1870-1900) in *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 18 (1976): 31-41; Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root, Branching Out*, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History" in *The Jews in Canada*; Irving Abella "Canadian Jewry: Past, Present and Future".

The first Jews who came to Canada did so with the conquering armies of the British. Ties to England prevailed over time possibly because England was viewed as a country of religious toleration and a bulwark of Jewish traditionalism.¹²⁴ By the 1840's the small population of Jews in Canada (approximately 200) had full civic and political rights. They had found wealth and respectability in the Anglophone community holding modest levels in civic administration, militia (officer corps), Masonic lodges and various professions. They were mostly old families and culturally homogeneous in religious rites, the English language and associations. Officially they were Sephardic. The first congregation in Canada, the Shearith Israel was established in 1768 in Montreal. However, a slow influx of English, German, Alsatian, and Polish Jews brought Ashkenazi traditions to Canada. By the early 1840's these 'dissenters' formed their own congregation, the Shaar Hashomayim.

Upheaval in Germany in the 1840's induced a large emigration of German Jews to the United States. The Reform movement ideology was transported with them, establishing Reform synagogues with Cincinnati as the centre and virtually dominating American Jewish religious life. In addition they adapted the concept of being Germans of the Mosaic persuasion to that of America instilling a strong philosophy of Americaness. This is the first point of distinction. In Canada there was no comparable migration of German Jews and thus no strong influential Reform movement ideology nor accompanying philosophies. Canadian Jewry remained more religiously homogeneous. The number of Jews continued to be small, in concentrated areas such as Montreal and Toronto and nominally tied more to the old faith. They retained their more conservative and Orthodox religious practice. This may have been a reflection of the conservative ethos of

¹²⁴ Michael Brown, *Jew or Juif* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1986).

nineteenth century Canada which held monarchical values, established churches and certain quasi-aristocratic trappings in relation to the prevailing Canada British connection.¹²⁵ Canadian Jews had continuing links to England in the form of personal ties of sentiment, origin and experience and communal bonds as well. They sought religious guidance from the British and leaders and institutions with which they previously had association. Material and spiritual guidance was provided to the novice Canadian synagogues and affiliations with secular British-Jewish fraternal and communal organizations endured.¹²⁶ Canadian Jews to a certain extent viewed themselves as defenders of British tradition and Jewish Orthodoxy particularly in Montreal under the influence of the de Sola family of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation. This is not to say that there were no connections to the United States. Intellectual, cultural and religious exchanges existed. As clergy was not trained in Canada on a large scale at this time (and still are not today), rabbis and lesser synagogue officiants came from both England and the United States. There were exchanges of clergymen, rabbis as guest speakers and officiants at weddings and special occasions and New York was an important source of religious artifacts. The Canadian Reformers especially had to look southward for guidance for they were very few in number combined with the conservative opposing forces.

A further differentiating factor linked to Canadian Jewry's strong religious homogeneity was its concentration in only a few metropolitan areas with little countervailing influences. Hence, they were able to establish strong effective national

¹²⁵ Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Limited, 1992).

¹²⁶ Brown, *Jew or Juif*.

organizations.¹²⁷ This differed from American Jewry which had numerous synagogues across the country and after 1880 developed leading centres of Jewish religious life independent of New York which diffused power and influence. Rivalry of competing national organizations with diffuse regional and other interests resulted in weaker organizations. The Zionist Federation of Canada and The Canadian Jewish Congress were two organizations that were envied by the American Jewry for their unified well governed national structures.¹²⁸

Massive waves of immigration of Eastern European Jews commenced in the 1880's affecting Canadian Jewry. This large influx of newcomers was due to the complementary needs of the Canadian government which wished to increase the population in the Prairie provinces and the immigrants themselves who desired to flee difficult situations and seek a better life. These new immigrants came as families with the intentions of permanence, the majority settling in the larger cities of Montreal and Toronto in accordance with their urban and occupational backgrounds and the concentration of their kinship group.¹²⁹ Religious and secular beliefs were a part of their baggage together with their yearning to become a part of Western society. Although they were disposed towards or even eager to make concessions in order to acculturate and integrate, they were unwilling to give up their religious and ethnic characteristics totally.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Some of the organizations are Federation of Canadian Zionist Societies, Montreal Federation of Jewish Philanthropy, Toronto Jewish Federation of Philanthropies, Canadian Jewish Congress, JIAS. They were geared towards immigrant and communal needs and as a forum for political, religious and cultural expression.

¹²⁸ Tulchinsky, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History" 11.

¹²⁹ Joseph Kage, "Able and Willing to Work: Jewish Immigration and Occupational Patterns in Canada," 27-48 in *The Canadian Jewish Mosaic* ed. Morton Weinfeld, William Shaffir, Irwin Cotler (Toronto: New York: J. Wiley, 1981).

¹³⁰ Brown, *Jew or Juif*.

Similar to the United States' migration, these immigrants constituted a prominent communal presence. However, the two communities did not evolve identically demarcating a third point of distinction. Previous national differences influenced the evolution of certain organizations and institutions and national economic development affected the demographic distribution of Jews to an extent. Due to the fact that Canada had no issue of competing nationalism and little or no Reform ideology as in the United States, Zionism flourished. The American German Jews of the nineteenth century implanted the dominant philosophy of Jewish symbiosis they held in Germany now reinterpreting it as American-ness. They wished to assimilate into the mainstream of American society. Zionism was held back or even opposed by American Jewry for it raised the question of dual loyalty which conflicted with the prevailing ethos of American nationality and Jewish American identity. Moreover, the Reform synagogue which was strong in America was the model of the German-American symbiosis. In contrast Canadian Jews did not feel there was conflict or test of their nationality. British imperialism expressed a toleration and openness toward racial and cultural diversity. The Zionist movement in Canada was zealously undertaken by Canadian Jewish leaders in the late nineteenth century and continued to thrive with the addition of the East European immigrants, who having arrived from oppressive and semi-official anti-Semitic regimes had no predispositions toward symbiosis.¹³¹

Another formative factor in Canadian Jewish history is that the immigration period in Canada began and lasted later, a good decade later than that of the United States, well into the 1920's. The later immigrants had experienced first-hand traumatic occurrences in Europe, the turmoil of WWI, the upheaval and devastating Russian Revolution and civil

¹³¹ Tulchinsky, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History" 14-16.

war, and Ukranian pogroms. Among these immigrants was a small intellectual group which had a strong enriching effect on Jewish cultural life.

The dual French-English national personality of Canada especially in the province of Quebec created a particularly additional acute source of problems for Canadian Jews which did not occur south of the 49th parallel. The face of the communities in Quebec to which the immigrants came was a Christian one with strong Catholic foundations. This mixture of problematic factors of dual nationality and strong Christian character had no counterpart in the United States. Language had important influence. The early Jewish settlers who came were from England or British colonies spoke English. The institutions they established operated in English. They also lived among the English mostly in urban areas rather than in French rural communities. Occupational patterns and political affiliations linked them more with the Anglophone community. The little part Canadian Jews played in the intellectual, cultural and social affairs of Canada was also within the world of Anglo-Canada. The Protestant attitude of the English community towards Jews was more one of acceptance than that of French Canadians who were predominately Catholic and considered Jews unwelcome outsiders. French Canadian nationalism had its roots in the early 1800's and crystallized during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In combination with a renewed militant adherence to the Pope and Rome the Jew was viewed as a threat to the Catholic faith and an affront to the purity of the French-Canadian ideal and thus French Canada's survival.¹³² Although there was to a degree more acceptance on the part of the Anglophone community than the French, the Anglophones also felt threatened by non-Christians who posed a peril to their stability in the midst of the majority Catholic/French culture.

¹³² Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*.

The dilemma of the confessional school system in Quebec illustrates this fact. No specific legal provision for Jewish children in either the Catholic or Protestant system of schooling existed. The Protestant school board was the preferred educational system for the Jewish community, however, the Anglophones made them unwelcome in their schools. A battle for fundamental civil rights ensued with the Protestant school commissioners of Montreal and the Quebec government over a twenty year period (1903-1920). After a court battle in 1903 between the Jewish community and the Protestant school commissioners the right of Jewish children to attend the schools was established. Jewish students became prominent constituents in the Protestant schools to the point of outnumbering Protestants in some inner-city areas. Subsequently, issues of Jewish representation on the school boards, employment of Jewish teachers and the compensation of the cost of educating Jewish children arose. It was suggested that if the Jews did not like the existing arrangements they should start their own school system. However, this was problematic for two reasons; the resistance to a separate Jewish school system in a 'Christian society' and the lack of consensus among the Jews themselves as to the form of a Jewish school system (the 'uptowners' conceptions versus that of the 'downtowners').¹³³ In addition, entry into McGill University was severely restricted. In the 1930's enrollment was limited and Jews were required to have higher high-school averages.¹³⁴ Alfred Bader a Milwaukee philanthropist who came to Montreal at age 17 having escaped the Nazis during the Second World War stated that:

¹³³ Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: the transformation of the Canadian Jewish community* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing co. Limited), 43-86. The events and problems are discussed in detail in Ch.3 "The 'Jewish Problem' in Montreal Schools in the 1920's".

¹³⁴ Ibid.. 190,191.

McGill wouldn't accept me, I am a Jew. They had a quota and the quota was full when I applied there on Monday, Nov.3, 1941. Even though I had passed McGill's senior matriculation exam, and passed it very well, I couldn't get in.¹³⁵

The Jewish community in Montreal in and of itself had its own unique characteristics and flavour which developed from the particular economic, political, and cultural context of the city itself. As previously discussed the Montreal Jewish community was small, traditionally Orthodox and predisposed to the Anglo community. The synagogue was initially the focal point of Jewish religious, social and charitable activities. Social services such as provision for the sick and poor and education were the responsibility of the ethnic communities in Montreal owing to the fact that social services were not provided by Canadian governments in the nineteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century Montreal Jews also began to form welfare organizations and benevolent societies. The large influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who came to Montreal constituted the first large non-Christian community to attempt to adapt and integrate into the majority society. They arrived impoverished, uncomfortable with Canada's political and social realities, barely if at all able to read or speak either official language and visibly different in the cultural sense. The newcomers became very noticeable in the city via the formation of specific immigrant enclaves which acquired a distinct Jewish nature through the establishment and expansion of their own religious, social, and cultural institutions. Bringing their entire "baggage" of traditions, ideals and experiences to a formidable dual national community, they created a cohesive Montreal Jewish community. An extensive network of organizations was established and blossomed, all conducted in their native language Yiddish.

¹³⁵ *Montreal The Gazette* October 3, 2003.

Socially and culturally Jews were not readily admitted into circles that proposed to disseminate Christian teachings. Jews were locked out of organizations and concerns that were formed for either the benefit English-language Protestants or French-language Catholics. Hence, caught between the Anglophone and Francophone milieus, deemed neither Protestant nor Catholic and determined to defend the erosion of their culture, the community functioned with a certain degree of cultural and religious independence.¹³⁶

The Montreal Jewish community constituted the third largest ethnic community in the city. It was dominant in the clothing manufacturing industry, the second most important industry in the city. The number and variety of Jewish institutions burgeoned due to an increase in numbers, more diverse European origins, and a continuation of traditional desire to provide for their own needs especially in an alien environment in combination with the necessity to turn inward due to the bi-national, bi-linguistic predicament.¹³⁷ By 1920 the “Jewish Quarter” consisted of factories, shops synagogues, and tightly packed housing stretching from the waterfront north in a belt along St. Lawrence Boulevard (“the Main”) to the lower reaches of Outremont. This central geographic location strategically divided the French and English sections of the city symbolically portraying the insecure marginality of the Jewish presence to both communities. Geographically and culturally the Montreal Jewish population comprised a “third solitude” in a city which had a history of tension between French and English.¹³⁸

In many respects the Canadian and American historical experiences are so similar that they are almost indistinguishable. Certainly, the American Jewish community being more

¹³⁶ Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil, and Mervin Butovksy, eds., *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal* (Quebec: Vehicle Press, 1990), 14-17.

¹³⁷ Brown, *Jew or Juif*. 215.

¹³⁸ Tulchinsky. *Branching Out*, 63,64.

numerous and highly developed has strongly influenced the Canadian one. However, the different coordinates of the Canadian context did have an affect on the development of Canadian Jewry. Nuances can be detected in the recording and reading of the Canadian synagogues and sisterhood histories as we shall see in the following sections.

Canadian Synagogue Sisterhoods

As noted in the introductory remarks minimal research has been done on Canadian sisterhoods. It is known that sisterhoods were founded across Canada in the early decades of the twentieth century. The information is uneven. We don't know whether this is due to a sisterhood's membership size, how active or dynamic it was or whether one person was a good historian and another was not. The following brief historical sketches are presented geographically from the East coast to the West.

The first synagogues in St. John's, New Brunswick, Ahavith Achim (1896) and Hazen Avenue (1903) had Ladies Auxiliaries. The two congregations amalgamated in 1919 to form the Shaarei Zedek. The women were involved in fundraising activities such as bake sales, teas and luncheons. Entertainments and treats were provided for the children on the specific holidays by the women. Some actually taught in the Sunday School. An exact date of the foundation of the Sisterhood is not available but it is known that the Daughter's of Israel organization amalgamated with the Sisterhood in the 1950's.¹³⁹ The Beth Israel sisterhood in Halifax, Nova Scotia was established in 1936 with its own constitution and executive. The scope of the work included fundraising, outfitting and looking after the operations of a kosher kitchen, beautifying the sanctuary and succah,

¹³⁹ Marcia Koven, *Weaving the Past into the Present*, (Saint John & Frediction, N.B.: Wilson Printing, 1989), 34. and Susan Landau Chark, "The Sisterhood across Canada", Research for Professor Richard Menkis, June 1994, University of British Columbia.

providing the kiddushim following Shabbat and Junior congregation services, catering to and supporting the needs of the Hebrew school.¹⁴⁰

In Ontario, the Beth Medrosh Ha-Gadol Chevra Tehillim Congregation of Toronto established in 1887 had a Ladies Auxiliary. There are references to monetary donations for the congregation for decorations and the provision of "Mentalech" for the Scrolls in the years 1917 and 1932-33 in their 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee booklet. They reorganized in 1937 "working in harmony with the leadership of the congregation". However, the Auxiliary seemed to still have experienced organizational difficulties. This is surmised from the brief description of the Ladies Auxiliary called "A Brief Sketch of the Growth of the Ladies Auxiliary" in the anniversary booklet and from the fact that the congregation had a singular religious purpose rather than that of a synagogue center.¹⁴¹

A group of six women formed the Ladies Aid Society of the Beth Jacob Congregation in Hamilton. Their mandate was to help immigrants and it is not clear if they did work directly beneficial to the synagogue. In 1917, they amalgamated with the Beth Jacob Sewing Circle to become the Ladies' Auxiliary of Beth Jacob with the intention to focus their energies on the welfare of the synagogue. They bought prayer books, contributed to the certain building projects, equipped the kitchen, and helped with extra costs the congregation may have incurred. During the war years they entertained servicemen, providing clothing, knitted for the Red Cross, and did fundraising for various war relief committees.¹⁴² A ladies auxiliary or sisterhood seems to have existed since the founding of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Windsor according to their Golden Jubilee Book.

¹⁴⁰ 100th Anniversary Commemorative Book 1890-1990, personal files of Professor Richard Menkis., University of British Columbia.

¹⁴¹ Chark, "The Sisterhood across Canada".

¹⁴² Ibid.

However, the only detail it reveals about the organization is that it equipped and maintained the synagogue kitchen.

The Shaarey Zedek Sisterhood in Winnipeg Manitoba was formed in 1920 as an adjunct of the Ladies' Aid Society and Sewing Circle. It undertook to assist immigrants, visit the sick and shut-ins, provide interpreter services to the hospitals, courts and schools, distribute holiday food and fruit to the needy and maintain a Hebrew/Yiddish library. The Sisterhood later combined outreach and education through the "development and exhibition of Jewish ritual objects".¹⁴³ In response to anti-semitism occurring in the larger community they produced an exhibit in 1935. Within the synagogue they helped with the Sunday School and ensuring attendance. The Shaarey Zedek was originally formed as an Orthodox synagogue. When it changed to Conservative in 1929, the Sisterhood affiliated itself with the National Women's League of the United Synagogues of America. In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan the only mention of sisterhood activity in its dedication book is under a heading "Women's Organizations" which lists the formation of a Ladies Auxiliary of the Agudas Israel Synagogue in 1919 and a Sisterhood at the Agudlas Israel Synagogue in 1946 with no further detail.¹⁴⁴

The date of the founding of the Sisterhood of the Schara Zedek Congregation in Vancouver, British Columbia is not certain but it is believed to have started as the Ladies Aid Society in 1907 when the synagogue was established. In the mid 1920's the name was changed to the Schara Tzedek Ladies Auxiliary, then was renamed ScharaTzedek Women's Branch and only in the 1970's did it call itself the Sisterhood. However, it

¹⁴³ Goldie Gelmon Weatherhead, *Congregation Shaarey Zedek-One Hundred Years, 1889-1989* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Legacy Committee of Congregation Shaarey Zedek, 1990) 34 quoted in Susan Landau Chark, "The Sisterhood across Canada".

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Jordan Field, "The Saskatoon Jewish Community-1905-1962," Dedication Book, 1963, Saskatoon.

performed the typical duties of a sisterhood. Its purpose at inception was to preserve “Judaism in the community at large and to assist in Synagogue functions”.¹⁴⁵ The funds raised through its yearly Donor Luncheons, Fall Teas, and Farmer Market were used for the benefit of the synagogue. It maintained the two kitchens keeping strict rules of kashrut, provided furnishings for the Sefer Torahs, Altar and Ark in the sanctuary and enhanced the beautification of the synagogue in various refurbishing projects. An additional function was the maintenance and support of the religious school until 1938. The Anniversary Booklet describes the Sisterhood analogously “As a wife is the foundation to her husband so has the Schara Tzedek Sisterhood been a pillar of our Synagogue”.¹⁴⁶

It is clear that we need to learn more which prompted me to do research to broaden our knowledge. In order to initiate and develop a more inclusive and comprehensive illustration of Canadian sisterhoods the next sections will focus on sisterhoods in Montreal with especial concentration on the three oldest and prominent congregations.

Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue

Fifteen to twenty Jews established Canada’s first congregation, the Shearith Israel, in Montreal on December 30, 1768. Although most of the founders were Ashkenazim the congregation was characterized as Sephardic. This was due to the first members identifying themselves as Sephardic¹⁴⁷, implementing the Sephardic order of prayer ritual

¹⁴⁵ “The Schara Tzedek Sisterhood”, Schara Tzedek 77th Anniversary Year Book, 1984, Vancouver British Columbia.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*. The first Jews who settled in the towns were Sephardim from Holland or England and the majority who followed were of Ashkenazi background. However, they conformed to the Sephardic order of prayer in the existing synagogues frequently intermarrying into the older families and

and desiring to obtain funds from wealthy Sephardic congregations in the world. The name was taken from the Shearith Israel Congregation in New York with which it maintained strong ties, but the congregation oriented itself to London for religious personnel and guidance.¹⁴⁸ The founding members of the 17th and 18th centuries were prominent men both in the Jewish community and in the economic and political development of the city. Names such as Hart, Joseph, David, Solomon, Frank, Levy, and Hays contributed to the laying of the foundation of a distinctive Jewish identity in a new land.¹⁴⁹ The first place of worship was a rented hall on St. James Street. Subsequently an edifice was built in 1775 on land lent to them by a member David David on the corner of Little St. James Street and Notre Dame Street. Cemetery land was acquired in 1775 and religious artifacts from London several years later. The first by-laws drawn up in 1778 were a strict code of governance enforcing discipline and the payment of fines for certain violations. Lay leaders led services in between terms of various spiritual leaders; positions which frequently were difficult to fill throughout the congregation's history. On the occasions which required a rabbi or ritual specialist such as circumcisions, weddings, etc., the spiritual leader of the New York Sephardic Congregation would make the necessary journey to Montreal.

In 1824 the synagogue building had to be closed down due to the death of the landowner and services were held in an establishment on the property of one of its presidents. Ten years later land was purchased on Chenneville Street on which a new

adopting the Sephardic identity. They identified themselves as Sephardim not to distinguish themselves but because the Sephardic order of prayer was an integral part of the Jewish culture they shared before moving to Quebec.

¹⁴⁸ Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*.

¹⁴⁹ Further information of the prominent figures in early Canadian Jewry can be sourced in histories of Canadian Jewry.

synagogue building was constructed in 1835. The building funds were raised through private subscription from amongst the Jewish population, the largest benefactor being a woman, Mrs. Francis Michaels and designed by a member Moses Hays. A new *hazan* Rev. David Pisa who also acted as *mohel*, *schochet* and teacher came from London in 1839. A ladies' choir was organized and sat in the balcony.¹⁵⁰ However, there were diverse groups in the synagogue and opinions on the *minhag* (customary practice). A small group of recent arrivals preferred to lead services in the Ashkenazic style. In 1846 they separated and formed their own congregation, Shaar Hashomayim. The succeeding spiritual leader of the Shearith Israel was Abraham de Sola in 1847 who came from London and became renown in both in the Hebrew and general community in Canada and the United States.¹⁵¹ He revitalized the congregation's faltering educational, fraternal, and benevolent societies and through all his work the congregation remained a significant part of the Jewish community. A congregational Sunday school, the first in Canada, was started to introduce children to the basic elements of Judaism including prayer, Hebrew Bible and Jewish history, lasting until 1947 under varying fortunes. The Hebrew Philanthropic Society was founded in 1847 for Jewish indigents. The first Canadian Jewish Day School was also established in 1875 under the auspices of the congregation. However due to lack of funds this pioneer venture had to close in 1895.¹⁵² His son Meldola de Sola, the first Canadian born *hazan* followed in Abraham's footsteps when he died in 1882. A new edifice was necessary. As the congregation grew they wanted one

¹⁵⁰ Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, *The Continuing History of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue Congregation of Montreal 1768-1993*, (Canada: Robert Davies Publishing, 1996), 14,15.

¹⁵¹ A great deal has been written about the Abraham de Sola and the de Sola era, for example; *Taking Root, The Continuing History of the Spanish and Portuguese*, and *Issac Leeser Papers*.

¹⁵² Esther I Blaustein, Rachel A. Esar, and Evelyn Miller, "Spanish and Portuguese synagogues, Montreal, 1769-1968," in *The Jewish Historical Society of England. Transactions Session 1969-1970 XXIII*, 135-136.

that should befit its distinguished history in architecture. In 1892 the new synagogue was built on Stanley Street in Judeo-Egyptian style with columns. In 1918 Rabbi Dr. Raphael Melamud was appointed upon the death of Meldola de Sola, staying only for a short term of three years. A Men's Club had been in existence since the beginning of the century. It was his inspiration that the ladies commence a Sisterhood. Around 1920 an association for young members, The Young People's Assembly, was formed primarily for social contacts.

The depression of 1929 caused the congregation to suffer economically. Membership was also drastically declining. Many congregants were moving uptown as the downtown core became more of a commercial area. It was thought that the synagogue should move to a more suitable location if it were to progress. Under the stalwart direction of both lay and spiritual leaders efforts were made to hold the congregation together and maintain its leadership role in the community.¹⁵³ The Sunday school was continued, two ladies were appointed to the Board of Trustees which was a unique step for an Orthodox congregation, a bulletin was initiated in 1931, and special services were held for such groups as the Armed Services, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and the Masons. The Second World War added to the financial burden and relocation plans were delayed until 1946 when the Stanley Street building was sold to Sir George Williams College. Services were held in the small chapel of the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue during the time a new structure was being built uptown on Lemieux Street and St. Kevin Road. A community hall and a school were to be erected first followed by the Synagogue edifice

¹⁵³ The spiritual leaders were Rabbi Bender 1928-1940, assistant Rev. Issac de la Penha 1904-1935, and Rabbi Solomon Frank in 1947. The Shearith Israel continually had prominent and recognized people in the community as lay leaders and members. Some well known lay leader were William Montefiore, Philip Hart, Martin Wolff, and Cecil Hart.

at a later date. The consideration at the time of construction was that the membership list was small and the need to appeal to the immediate neighbourhood and their potential needs.¹⁵⁴ The first service was held in the unfinished building in 1947. Members at this time were of Ashkenazi origin and the dominant force; some having been members for generations with new local residents joining. Certain Ashkenazi customs were introduced to complement the existing Sephardi ones. The hope was for the membership to increase and flourish in the new location which was in a recently developing and rapidly expanding area.

Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue

We should like to have found place for a description of the present synagogue activities especially of the very important part which the ladies of the congregation are taking in many of the branches of the congregational work, but both time and space at our disposal prevent our attempting to do so, and we regret that we must content ourselves with the statement that in all periods of its history the women of "Shearith Israel" have played a worthy and indeed in many cases, a most notable part. Today the ladies of the congregation are organizing new branches of activity, and are doing much to preserve those Jewish ideals which have dominated "Shearith Israel" for 150 years.¹⁵⁵

As this quote indicates there is not an abundance of information either written or retained about the activities of the women of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. At the time of the 150th Anniversary booklet an active Ladies Sewing Circle had been in existence for many decades meeting regularly to sew undergarments for the Jewish poor in Montreal or deprived people overseas. The women, under the leadership of Mrs. Meldola

¹⁵⁴ Rabbi Solomon Frank, *Two Centuries in the Life of A Synagogue* (Montreal: Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, 1970).

¹⁵⁵ CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, 1918, 150th Anniversary Booklet.

de Sola, felt that aiding those in need in the community was an important task.¹⁵⁶ When Rev. Dr. Raphael Melamed assumed his position as Hazan of the congregation in 1918 one of his interests was the formation of a Sisterhood. Having come from Philadelphia he was most likely influenced by the flourishing synagogue sisterhood movement in the United States. It seemed to be a natural outgrowth of the congregational women's past activities and ideals.¹⁵⁷

By-laws were drawn up with specific objectives and governances by the first president Mrs. Clarence de Sola, the secretary Mrs. I Kirschenberg and 28 members. It was decided that membership be extended to any Jewess interested in the goals of the organization. The objectives were "the cultivation of social intercourse, the advancements of the interests of the congregation, the furtherance of Jewish observance and study, and such other religious and philanthropic objects as the organization may desire to pursue."¹⁵⁸ Standing committees were structured accordingly: membership, sewing, relief, synagogue attendance, social programmes, the school, decorating the Succah and repairing the vestments, printing and publicity, and study.¹⁵⁹ The chairwomen of the committees constituted the Executive Council of the new organization. Monies would be raised through membership dues and by means of various types of sales and social functions. Financial donations were to be donated to both the synagogue and selected charities. The first dues were set at \$1.00. Organizational activity commenced immediately upon creation. Bi-monthly meetings were held where different members acted as hostesses providing food and even their own cups and saucers. Shortly after the

¹⁵⁶ *The Continuing History of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.*

¹⁵⁷ Blaustein, Esther, "History of the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue" unpublished booklet to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of Sisterhood.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ The committees were proposed but not started immediately until the individual committee was required.

first year they realized that their organization should supply their necessities covering their own expenses. By raising the dues to \$2.00 they were able to do so and able to donate \$100 to the synagogue. The first money raising function was a card party in the ballroom of the Ritz Carlton Hotel realizing \$140.00. A Purim masquerade was the first entertainment for the children.¹⁶⁰ By 1919 twenty-six new members had joined the sisterhood.

In the next three decades the objectives of the Sisterhood remained consistent, the activities and events changing or initiated according to the pertinent needs within the synagogue, the Montreal community or the wider world community. Sometimes collaboration with other sisterhoods or organizations was advantageous or necessary. The work of the women was not only hands on but mentally nourishing as well. Meetings usually had programs or speakers covering a variety of subjects related to Jewish studies or current affairs or of a musical nature involving concert singing, violin or piano playing often performed by talented members in the early years. Mrs. Robins, a member who joined in 1946 and eventually became president said that one of the reasons she joined the sisterhood was that, "It was very stimulating."¹⁶¹

Membership increased notably in the 1920's under the leadership of Mrs. de Sola's successors Mrs. Kirschberg, Mrs. Martin Wolff and Mrs. William Sebeg-Montefiore. The women worked diligently for the synagogue. They decorated the succah yearly, donated two new sepher cloaks for rededication ceremony in 1924¹⁶² and repaired and replaced Torah vestments when necessary. They entertained the children in the Sunday

¹⁶⁰ Blaustein, "History of the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue".

¹⁶¹ Mrs. Robins, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 7 April 2003.

¹⁶² CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue Montreal, Minute book VI 1911-1946, General Meetings, 23 November 1924.

school on festivals, serving ice cream and cake and giving each child a small box of candies on Chanukah.¹⁶³ Money was allotted for teacher expenses and the women themselves filled in as teachers when needed. In 1924 they took a stocking booth at the Hadassah Fair raising \$170. The women continued their weekly sewing making garments to be donated to the Hebrew Orphanage and the Maternity Hospital, and given to Hebrew Women's Sewing League to be distributed through the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies.¹⁶⁴ When 200 orphaned children were brought from Europe to Canada, the Spanish and Portuguese sisterhood worked together with other Montreal sisterhoods to provide clothing.¹⁶⁵ Five and ten dollar donations were raised for various outside organizations such as The Social Service Department of Children's Memorial Hospital, Montreal Council of Jewish Women for helping immigrants and the Hebrew and Montefiore Orphanages. To also help in the community the women served meals to orphans at the Baron de Hirsch Institute, assisted in the Jewish Hospital Campaign 1928-1929 , and formed two new committees; one to visit and to drive people living in the Old Folk's Home and a Relief Committee for the Women's Auxiliary of Jewish Immigrant Aid Society.¹⁶⁶ In 1925 they invited officers of other sisterhoods to a meeting to "foster community spirit and kindly feeling."¹⁶⁷ Although the Sisterhood was a part of an Orthodox Synagogue it became affiliated with the Women's League of United Synagogues of America in 1924.

¹⁶³ Blaustein, "History of the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood".

¹⁶⁴ CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese, Minute Book VI, General Meetings May 1924.

¹⁶⁵ Blaustein, Esar, and Miller, "Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Montreal, 1768-1968".

¹⁶⁶ CJCNA, Minute Book VI, General Meetings 1926, 1926, 1929.

¹⁶⁷ Blaustein, "History of the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood".

Despite the economic and membership problems of the 1930's the sisterhood "...was called upon to perform a greater task and to assume heavier burdens."¹⁶⁸ Normal activities and donations continued and new ones were added. To ensure the continuation of garments being made the women gave money towards buying a sewing machine. It was thought to be more appropriate to hold meetings in members' homes for a time and charge of \$0.10 for tea money was initiated. To generate more funds each individual member was requested to raise \$5.00 over the year. This proved to be a successful means of raising money as they presented \$700 to the synagogue at the end of the year.¹⁶⁹ A telephone committee was formed to save postage money and announcements of sisterhood meetings were also placed in the synagogue bulletin. The school was a center of attention for the sisterhood. In 1930 they bore the entire cost of the school¹⁷⁰ and the rummage sale of 1931-32 raised \$300 to help pay for the Sunday School teacher salaries.¹⁷¹ The women themselves helped in the Hebrew school which they considered a serious undertaking. In a letter to Capt. W. Sebag-Montefiore, president of the congregation, contained in the diary of Mrs. Martin Wolff, she stated:

Owing to my absence abroad, the School will be closed from Nov.15 till Dec. During my absence, lessons will be conducted by my assistant, Miss Sarah Wolff. Miss Wolff has studied under such noted teachers...and I feel sure the Hebrew education will be safe in her hands. Rest assured that while in Europe I shall take care to study the latest pedagogical methods in Hebrew instruction...¹⁷²

The first Donor Luncheon was held in 1936 in the synagogue. Due to the financial and social success it became an annual event. A successful fund-raising musical concert was

¹⁶⁸ Rabbi Frank, *Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue* 103.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Blaustein, "History of the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood".

¹⁷² CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, "A Quebecer Looks at Life", The Diary of Irene Joseph Wolff. Compiled and edited by Rosetta Wolff Elkin 65. Irene Wolff was a long time active member Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood and president 1923-25, 1934-35.

given by a famous musician Lauritz Melchior in 1938. The efforts of the sisterhood were appreciated as indicated in random minutes from the congregational records of the era: “We have been through a very difficult period this year-the members of the sisterhood have rallied to our support”, “....the Sisterhood has been the chief bulwark of the congregation.” and “I must first of all thank the sisterhood for the good work they are doing-upholding the position of our Congregation by more than doing their duty.”¹⁷³

The women were sensitive to the war in Europe in the second half of the decade. They raised money for the Children’s Emergency fund and in conjunction with National Council of Jewish Women in 1938 boxes were distributed to homes in order to raise money to bring German Jewish Refugee children to Canada. It also seemed an appropriate time to start writing notes to members on occasions of sorrow or joy.¹⁷⁴ In the September 1940 synagogue bulletin a Rosh Hashanah message from the President of the Union Sephardic Congregation, Rev. Dr. David de Sola Pool, advised that all Jews who live securely in this continent face a challenge due to the European war but to those who have inherited the Sephardic tradition there is a special call due to its past persecutions. Sisterhood members volunteered at the Red Cross¹⁷⁵ and money was collected for War Comforts Committee for comfort boxes for men on active service.¹⁷⁶

The goals of the sisterhood in the 1940’s remained consistent as is illustrated in a “Message to the Sisterhood” from their president; “‘Auxiliary’ implies fundamentally assistance and increase. Not only are we to offer our aid towards the upholding and

¹⁷³ Rabbi Frank, 104.

¹⁷⁴ Blaustein, “The History of the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood”.

¹⁷⁵ CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Congregational Bulletin of the Shearith Israel Synagogue, September 1940.

¹⁷⁶ CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Congregational Bulletin of the Shearith Israel Synagogue, September 1942.

support of our synagogue, but by our efforts we must increase and augment its services to our community.”¹⁷⁷ While the sisterhood continued its annual arrangements of holiday celebrations, rummage sales, teas, luncheons, and upkeep of the ark and Torah vestments and Succah it also expanded its tasks. It began to provide the wine and refreshments for the newly inaugurated kiddushim given every Saturday morning after service and floral decorations during the Holydays. Members acted as hostesses at many of the congregational affairs and added raffles, bridge and mahjong to their list of social and fundraising activities. However, the congregational problems of membership size, finances and the relocation from Stanley Street to the new site on Lemieux Street brought a particular objective to the sisterhood’s agenda in 1946. Wanting to maintain congregational ties and solidarity during the time the new structure was being built, the Sisterhood held home-meetings regularly.¹⁷⁸ They took upon themselves the responsibility of assisting in the fundraising campaign to help make the move possible. A luncheon was held at the Mount Royal Club and a commemoration booklet in honor of the Stanley Street Synagogue was produced resulting in a \$ 3200 contribution. A Book of Memories was started in which any occasion of joy or sorrow could be commemorated by a donation with a card of acknowledgement.¹⁷⁹ To attract badly needed new members they held friendly social gatherings and their annual luncheon at the Mount Royal Club was attended by over 250 women.¹⁸⁰ At around this time the ladies of the sisterhood decided to switch their affiliation from the National Women’s League of the

¹⁷⁷ CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Congregational Bulletin of the Shearith Israel Synagogue, October 1945.

¹⁷⁸ Rabbi Frank, *Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue*.

¹⁷⁹ *The Continuing History of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*.

¹⁸⁰ Blaustein, “History of the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue”.

Conservative Movement to the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, Women's Branch and attend its annual conventions.¹⁸¹

The sisterhood continued its endeavours to enhance the new synagogue into the next decade providing caps and gowns for the choir, an equipped kitchen for synagogue functions, a Baldwin organ and numerous other furnishings. According to the sisterhood's minutes of 1951, "A letter was read from the Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, thanking us for the Ark in the synagogue which was presented by the Sisterhood." In the following years varied ways were found to raise money and new ideas to develop the Sisterhood itself and increase its membership. However, they were not to venture from their original mandates as expressed in the 185th Anniversary Celebration Booklet, "Anxious and ready to carry on the traditions of their people, the programs of the sisterhood are so arranged as to give meaning to the holidays.....The Sisterhood is dedicated to the completion of a sacred edifice sanctified exclusively for the purposes of religious devotion.".¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ I could not find the reason for choosing this particular time for the change. They may have chosen to join the Women's League initially because it was a more organized national organization at that time.

¹⁸² CJCNA, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, 185th Anniversary Celebration Bulletin of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation 8 May 1953.

The Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue

EXECUTIVE 1946-47



MRS. JOSEPH SIMAND
President



MISS RACHEL WOLFF
Secretary



MRS. MARTIN GOLDSMITH
Vice-President



MRS. A. L. GOLDSMITH
Treasurer



MRS. SAMUEL GIBSON
Hospitality



MRS. SAMUEL ROSENBERG
Membership

Honorary President

MRS. MICHAEL A. MICHAELS

Board Members

MRS. I. KIRSCHBERG

MISS FANNY SAMUELS

MISS GLADYS HART

MRS. I. KIRSCHBERG

MRS. M. FINEBERG

MRS. I. ETTENBERG

MRS. A. H. FINEBERG

MISS FREDA LEWIS

Congregation Shaar Hashomayim

The inception of the congregation arose from the need for a place that would follow the Ashkenazi mode of ritual service. The only synagogue in Montreal in the nineteenth century was the Shearith Israel which was committed to services according to the Sephardic custom. Although Jews from England, Germany and Poland were welcome there was an underlying discomfort. The first mention of a new congregation corporation was in 1846, the “Congregation of English, German and Polish Jews” but was short lived. It was not until 1858 that a second congregation was formed and permanently established using the same corporation.¹⁸³ Financial help was sought from the Jews of England and the United States but the majority of the funds came from contributions from the founding initiators particularly the three Moss brothers. The cornerstone was laid in 1859 on a new synagogue building on St. Constant Street which was a “handsome brick building of spacious size capable of seating 150 gentlemen and a front gallery for 50 ladies.”¹⁸⁴ Spiritual services were volunteered free of charge by Rev. Samuel Hoffnung followed by a series of hired ministers. As a new congregation certain concerns had to be dealt with by the trustees who were prominent men of the community. The Shearith Israel was a significant role model. Cemetery land had to be acquired, religious education of the children considered,¹⁸⁵ maintaining a daily minyan, servicing the mikveh, and problems of shehita. English influence was also a determinant in the Congregation’s formation. The first by-laws were modeled after the Bayswater Synagogue in London

¹⁸³ Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven: The Story of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim of Montreal* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-University Press, 2000), 17,18.

¹⁸⁴ CJCNA, Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue, *Dedication of the New Synagogue of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim Booklet* 1922.

¹⁸⁵ A day school was established that also taught secular subjects but due to financial problems had to be abandoned in 1877 and revived in 1882.

giving assurance of a traditional service with the traditional Hebrew prayer book with English translation and sermons to be delivered in English.

As the congregation increased in membership and importance, it outgrew its quarters plus the location became less central as the Jewish population moved westward. A new more favorable location was necessary. A surprising proposal of a merger of the Shearith Israel and the Congregation for English, German and Polish Jews was put forward due to the fact that both congregations were experiencing similar problems. The amalgamation of the two could reduce expenses and allow a more lavish building with a modified ritual that would adhere to the requirements of a positive historical Judaism. However, a satisfactory agreement was not reached and a new location was sought. The synagogue building was sold and a second more spacious edifice was constructed on McGill College in 1858.¹⁸⁶ The new name of Shaar Hashomayim was applied to the McGill College Synagogue but not official until 1918. The search for a rabbi proved to be difficult. Several served for short terms leaving for financial or personal reasons until Rabbi Herman Abramowitz, a student of Dr. Solomon Schechter from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, came in 1902 and stayed for 47 years. During this time the Congregation further developed its religious rituals, services, and ideals of decorum. A choir and a Sunday School for children was organized, the Ladies Chevra Kadisha Society formed in 1888 continued to function and Young People's Society was formed.¹⁸⁷ All these developments were in keeping with the Shaar Hashomayim's theme of a 'family synagogue' meeting the spiritual needs of every member of every generation.

¹⁸⁶ CJCNA, Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue, B. Bernstein, "A Historical Sketch of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim of Montreal" Dedication Booklet 1922; Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven* 27.

¹⁸⁷ Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*, 59,60.

Deeming it necessary to keep pace with the changes in the community in terms of population growth and another shift westward, plans were set in motion for a new location and building that would be commensurate with the dignity of the congregation whose members were from an affluent and middle to upper class milieu. The first plans for a new site and building were abandoned due to the decision that the locality was not sufficiently desirable plus the onset of WWI. However, in 1920 a more ideal site was procured in the district of Westmount on Kensington and Cote St. Antoine. The synagogue edifice was considered magnificent but the sanctuary was particularly noteworthy. It introduced a new style of architecture into the interior of an Orthodox synagogue. The women's balcony was eliminated, replaced by a slight elevation on either side of the men's seating enclosed by a balustrade of wood with a drapery in the interior. This structural fashion maintained segregated seating and a mehitza yet the women could see and hear all and be seen by all. The building also had many features of a modern community centre having a large lecture hall, dozens of school rooms and salon for the Ladies Auxiliary.¹⁸⁸ The next years were ones of growth during which educational, cultural and social programs were organized and expanded. Sunday school enrollment increased, one high school evening class, adult education classes, twice weekly lecture programs including eminent speakers, and a junior congregation when a full time education professional was hired were all important additions. A weekly bulletin sent to homes as a newsletter replaced the in house Sabbath edition. To enhance the existing choir a professional choirmaster was engaged. The Women's Auxiliary was formed as well as a Men's Club (which did not fare well for another generation). Other Montreal

¹⁸⁸ CJCNA, Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue, Anniversary and Dedication Booklets; Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*.

organizations not necessarily affiliated with the Shaar Hashomayim were approved to meet at the synagogue.¹⁸⁹

During the Second World War congregation members aided in any way possible. Many served in the reserve army, a group of children sent by parents to safeguard them from the London blitz were cared for and the Women's Auxiliary's sent overseas parcels. In 1946, the Shaar's Centennial Year, celebrations were abundant in the form of special services, balls, and booklets. The centennial anniversary booklet of 1946 begins by succinctly summarizing the development and position of the synagogue and the pride of the congregation as,

The steady and progressive growth of the congregation under the impetus of a policy, nobly envisioned, and which, in the course of time, was enriched into a Tradition, saw it expand and develop into the preeminent position it occupies today as the largest and most influential Congregation in the Dominion of Canada, and, undoubtedly one of the most outstanding on the North American continent.¹⁹⁰

The congregational inspirational goal in the new era was to continue to be "ageless, to remain a potent and active force in the Religious and Spiritual life of the Community".¹⁹¹ A plan to erect a modern educational building for the Jewish education of its youth behind the present synagogue facility was the first of many to activate the congregation's mission for the future.

Sisterhood of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim

The women of the Shaar Hashomayim participated in the development and welfare of the congregation almost from its inception. The Ladies' Chevra Kadisha Society,

¹⁸⁹ Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*, 106.

¹⁹⁰ CJCNA, Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue, Issac Kert, "Review of One Hundred Years of Congregational Progress," Anniversary Booklet 1946, 25.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 27.

established in 1883, met regularly to sew shrouds for the respect for the dead which was considered a sacred trust. Funds raised for the use of the shrouds were used to enhance the décor of the synagogue, the first being carpeting. This unique group existed until the 1950's. However, this was only a small part of women's activity in the synagogue. Although not formally organized there were numerous activities taking place led by the wives of the synagogue executives. As reported in the Montreal Gazette in 1899 the women "made elaborate preparations" for a moonlight excursion down the river which included refreshments and dancing. This and an annual bazaar were annual events whose proceeds were donated to the synagogue.¹⁹² In 1921 a group met at the home of Mrs. Archie Jacobs to found the Women's Auxiliary. In attendance at that meeting were Dr. and Mrs. H. Abramowitz, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Levinson, Mr. and Mrs. Lyon Cohen, Sophia Hirsh, Annie Saxe, Gladys Glickman and Mrs. Samuel Weiner. The call was issued by Rabbi Abramowitz who believed that "what the soul is to the body, that our women are to the life our Congregation".¹⁹³ At a larger meeting of 150 women in the synagogue on McGill College the Women's Auxiliary was formally established, officers elected, and a motto of Reverence-Loyalty-Unity adopted. In keeping with the Congregation's spiritual ideal of a 'Family Synagogue' Rabbi Abramowitz said in his officiating address that the core of Jewish tradition was with the family, hence the formation of the Women's Auxiliary would enhance religious observance in the home and community.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*, 60.

¹⁹³ Rosetta Elkin, interviewed by author, tape recording, 6 January 2003.; Janice Steinberg and Alice Lehrer, "History-Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhood", June 1996, Montreal, Personal files of authors.

¹⁹⁴ The title Women's Auxiliary was used until the 1950's when it was changed to Sisterhood under the presidency of Rosetta Elkin who explained in an interview that the "'sisterhood' gives a feminine description" whereas auxiliary "can mean anything".

The women of the Auxiliary were bound together under the skilled and enthusiastic leadership of their first president Mrs. Annie Saxe who served until 1924. The formative years of the Women's Auxiliary coincided with that of the newly constructed synagogue building on Cote St. Antoine. The women had immediate goals and opportunities to use their feminine vision and skills for the new synagogue and community. An artistic bazaar where every booth was represented by a poem was their first effort, raising an outstanding amount of \$25,000 for furnishings. A flurry of vigorous activity followed for the next five years. The sisterhood undertook the design, building and furnishing of the library, equipped the kitchen with dishes and cutlery, did 'finishing touches' to the surroundings such as the 'outstanding' drapery hangings around the rails in the sanctuary, organized Purim masquerades for the children, distributed candy to the children of the Religious School and orphanages on Sukkot, Simcha Torah and Hanukah, hosted Purim dinner dances, and held annual luncheons. Their considerations also looked beyond the congregation giving donations to the Children's Memorial Hospital and adopting two war orphans in Russia. A decision to affiliate with the national sisterhood organization Women's League was adopted and a representative sent to the convention in New York.¹⁹⁵

Membership grew and the sisterhood strove to strengthen the ideals of the organization and to make Jewish values a priority into the next two decades. Successive presidents Hannah Levinson (1924-34) and her daughter Myrtle Solomon (1934-48) both continued to inspire and motivate the members. Monthly meetings and adult education courses took place in the synagogue's domed hall which was dedicated to the

¹⁹⁵ CJCNA, Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue, Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhood notes 10 February 1926; Alice Lehrer, "History-Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhood".

achievement of the Women's Auxiliary. A picture of Mrs. Jacob Hirsch, one of the pioneer women of the synagogue was hung in the hall. A portrait of Hannah Levinson was added during her presidency.¹⁹⁶ Existing activities expanded and new innovative projects were inaugurated. Donations to be made in the memory of departed ones, letters of sympathy written, and cards sent to new bride and grooms on their first anniversary were new 'synagogue family' oriented undertakings. The women continued to make the synagogue a 'home' extension by buying more china for the kitchen, giving money to be used in defraying costs of drapes and other embellishments, purchasing chairs and decorating the sukkah and the synagogue during Holy Days. The intent of the majority of activities was twofold-to provide a means of socialization and raising money. Rummage, food and craft sales became an addition to the bazaars and a Hostess Club started hosting monthly luncheons, dances, bridge and keno parties to aid the educational fund. Children and educational welfare were an important concern to the Women's Auxiliary, as the congregational bulletin explains, education "should have a special appeal for our Jewish womanhood".¹⁹⁷ The success of the innovative Hostess Group prompted newly married sisterhood women to organize a Junior Hostess Group. The Women's Auxiliary's gave out prizes at school graduations and closings and was congratulated for "their enterprise in taking over the complete financial responsibilities of the Sunday School."¹⁹⁸ In addition, in 1935 at the suggestion of the Women's Auxiliary the Board Room was to be used as a library and reading room for young children so they could "spend time delving

¹⁹⁶ Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*. Upon her retirement at a luncheon attended by three hundred people she was presented with this portrait as the domed hall was no longer the Women's Auxiliary Room.

¹⁹⁷ SHCA, Shaar Hashomayim Bulletin, 1933.

¹⁹⁸ SHCA, Shaar Hashomayim Bulletin, 1933.

into Jewish Literature”¹⁹⁹ They not only undertook the responsibility to furnish it but in 1937 initiated the idea of Bar Mitzvah Book program. In commemoration Bar-Mitzvah boys donated a book for a Bar-Mitzvah shelf and girls, upon their graduation of the Religious School, a book of Jewish interest. The formal presentation of the synagogue library and children’s reading room to the Congregation was not until 1951 under the presidency of Sadie Brown. At that time a dedication ceremony was held with a history of the development of the library under the chairperson, Miriam Vineberg. Even improvements in the Junior Congregation facilities were made possible with the funds of the Auxiliary. An intellectual facet in addition to the social and cultural ones appeared at this time as well. Monthly meetings which always opened with a prayer and were business oriented began to include speakers on current events, Jewish history and literature and a study group was in formation.

The Auxiliary’s generosity and concern continued to extend beyond the confines of the synagogue. A myriad of institutions and causes benefited from the Auxiliary’s philanthropic endeavors. Funds were donated to numerous local and international organizations, clothing and food baskets collected, and Purim baskets prepared and distributed to the needy. In response the Rabbi suggested that the Auxiliary place reports in the synagogue bulletin “so members will be well acquainted with the excellent work being done by Women’s Auxiliary... and that the Auxiliary takes an interest in all deserving causes of community.”²⁰⁰ During the time of the devastation of the Second World War the Auxiliary took time to be involved in the War Effort. In 1934 a Women’s Division of the Boycott Committee, a part of the overall movement to boycott German

¹⁹⁹ SHCA, Minutes of Women’s Auxiliary, 1935.

²⁰⁰ SHCA, Minutes of Women’s Auxiliary, 1935.

merchandise, was formed. To aid the Red Cross a station was set up and regular meetings were held. The women knitted, sewed bandages and made various articles, performed office work and ran errands. Proceeds from Fashion Shows and other activities were donated as well. On a personal scale parcels were sent overseas to soldiers containing a letter from the Rabbi, money donated towards soldiers' 'Comfort Boxes', and hospitality extended to them during Jewish holidays. Joint Peace Meetings were held with National Council of Jewish Women and the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue Sisterhood.

Under dynamic, creative, and strong leadership the membership grew and the Auxiliary was considered an "important arm of the synagogue".²⁰¹ Florence Levy who succeeded Myrtle Solomon in 1948 had the by-laws revised in accordance with the postwar era. A proposal for a sisterhood gift shop was presented at this time but only brought to fruition under the succeeding president Sadie Brown in the 1950's. Brides were now welcomed into the auxiliary with a one year membership. Although the congregation was Orthodox, the Auxiliary maintained close ties with the Women's League which was a part of the Conservative movement. Conventions were attended and several of their sisterhood presidents served as vice presidents of the National Board, representing Canada in the League. Many of the ideas and programmes of Women's League were utilized by the Auxiliary. "The Jewish Home Beautiful" was an elaborate musical program undertaken which proved to be so successful that it was reproduced for many years. Beautiful table settings for each Festival in the calendral year were presented along with narrative and song. The program aspired to educate Jewish women about the Jewish Holidays and how to celebrate them with their families in a meaningful and interesting way. Rabbi Abramowitz emphasized the thematic concept in his address to the

²⁰¹ Rosetta Elkin, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 6 January 2003.

audience saying, “As long as the Jewish home remained a sanctuary of beauty, the Jewish people would survive.”²⁰² Inspired, the Auxiliary proceeded to present an operetta, *The Wedding*, a story based on a Jewish wedding with an array of Jewish folk music.

The women of the auxiliary embraced Rabbi Abramowitz’s initial vision, interpreting and expanding it in their own creative way over the three decades. By the end of the 1940’s auxiliary membership had grown to include six hundred members. The Women’s Auxiliary had become a potent element in the Shaar Hashomayim synagogue life and a significant “vehicle for Jewish communication and women’s self-expression Judaism” going forth into the post war years.²⁰³

²⁰² Rabbi Shuchat, *The Gate of Heaven*, 128.

²⁰³ Ibid., 128.

The Sisterhood of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim



MRS. EDWARD SOLOMON,
President, Women's Auxiliary

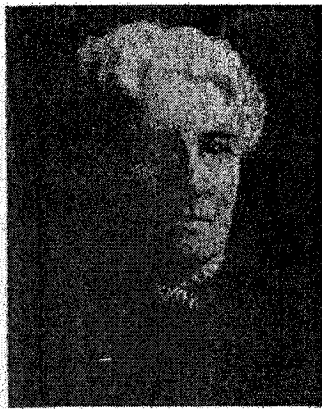


MRS. JOSEPH LEVINSON,
Past President, Women's Auxiliary

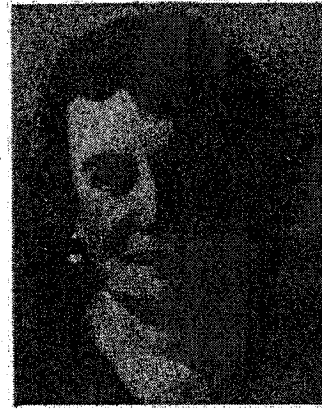
MRS. L. FRAID,
Vice-President, Ladies' Chevra Kadisha



MRS. JACOB HIRSCH,*
Past President,
Ladies' Chevra Kadisha



MRS. HARRIS KELLERT,*
Past Vice-President,
Ladies' Chevra Kadisha



MRS. SAMUEL SAXE,*
Past President
Women's Auxiliary

*Deceased.

Temple Emanu-El

The history of Temple Emanu-El differs from the former two synagogues. It was originally founded as a Reform congregation in the heart of a traditional Orthodox community that was not inclined to indulge novelty or pioneering. As a result the Temple had to struggle to ensure its permanency and place. It was conceived by a small group of courageous men who banded together to form a "Progressive Congregation". Many of them originated from the United States "upon whom the aims of American Reform Judaism had made an indelible impression".²⁰⁴ They felt the "necessity of preserving Judaism in all its pristine [sic] Glory, and...[of making] it understood to the rising generation."²⁰⁵ At a meeting in 1882 a document was signed to apply for a charter, lease a Hall for three years and eight months, adopt "minhag America" as the prayer book, engage a Rabbi, an organist and choir, assign the name of Temple Emanu-El as the congregation's name, draft by-laws and a constitution, and procure cemetery land. Funds were raised and the first services were held that year.²⁰⁶ After years of meeting in various halls a building was erected downtown on Stanley St. and dedicated in 1892.

The new congregation looked to the United States for leadership and assistance. The majority of early rabbis were from America. While in their posts they maintained their American ties socially and professionally. This was unlike the other two congregations which sought guidance from England. Due to financial difficulties, differences over rituals, and the unappealing position of a unique small struggling congregation in a conservative city, the American rabbis tended to stay only for brief terms. Many were

²⁰⁴ Michael Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada," *Jewish Social Studies* XXXIV no. 4 (October 1972): 322-343.

²⁰⁵ Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism", 323.

²⁰⁶ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, 50th Anniversary Jubilee Celebration Booklet 1932.

from small American towns and of questionable credentials and character. The Temple had seven rabbis in twenty-four years.²⁰⁷ In 1892 the Temple sent its minister to the Central Conference of American Rabbis meeting in Atlantic City and in 1897 Issac Wise, founder of American Reform Judaism, held the conference in Montreal. Temple Emanu-El was becoming a stronghold of Liberal Judaism. The Reform rituals were quickly instituted and followed rigidly vowing “to never turn back...to oriental Judaism”.²⁰⁸ The Union Prayer Book was adopted, family pews installed, an organ and a mixed choir installed, and headcoverings, tallisim, and the second day of Yom Tovs abandoned. In addition, the spiritual leaders were to be chosen from the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. The Temple became affiliated with the Union of American (Reform) Hebrew Congregation (UAHC).²⁰⁹ In the traditional city of Montreal, the Temple was considered somewhat of a renegade congregation although its members were affluent and respectable. It also bore the taint of American innovation at a time when Montrealers and many Canadians resented American immigrants and their ideas. The congregation felt it was condemned and under attack from the Jewish community. It often responded with animosity to the attacks and to overtures from fellow Jews. Hence, an inclination to segregate itself from the Jewish community and align itself with the gentile community developed. As Jewish criticism lessened and the self confidence of the Temple increased

²⁰⁷ Brown, “The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada”, 325. The seven rabbis were Rabbi Samuel Marks (1882-1889), Rabbi S. Eisenberg (1889-1890), Rabbi A.M. Bloch (1890-1891), Rabbi Hartog Veld (1891-1899), Rabbi E. Friedlander (1899-1901), Rabbi Issac Landman (1901-1904), Rabbi Joseph Kornfeld 1904-1906).

²⁰⁸ Rabbi Nathan Gordon, “Dedication of New Temple,” *Montreal Gazette*, 10 June 1911, p.6, quoted in Michael Brown, “The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada” 339.

²⁰⁹ CJCNA, Temple Emanu-El, “The Emanu-El Story 1882-1960” Dedication Volume 1960. Michael Brown, “The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada”. The other Reform congregations in Canada did not institute Reform rituals as quickly as they were not shaped by the American Reform Movement. The early members of Anshe Shalom in Hamilton were of German origin and the rabbis trained in Germany and Austria. The Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto looked to England for leadership.

with their acceptance by the gentiles the Temple slowly began to participate in Jewish communal activities.²¹⁰ However, the Temple's relationship with the gentile community became an integral part of its idealism evolving into a pattern of interfaith work interwoven throughout the Temple's activities.

Membership and activities grew to a point where the Stanley Street synagogue was no longer adequate to meet the requirements of the congregation. In 1911 a new building was erected further west on Sherbrooke Street in Westmount in Byzantine architectural style with seating accommodation for approximately seven hundred and equipped to meet the needs of a modern congregation. A range of groups were organized; the Sisterhood in 1908, the Brotherhood in 1920, the Youth Group in 1927, and a Junior Congregation. Education was important to the Temple for it was felt that people had to be properly educated to the Reform movement's idea of Judaism. The religious school for the young was started in the early years of the congregation with laymen as the teaching staff. It was similar in pattern to the Protestant Sunday schools comprised of one or two hours of Bible instruction weekly on Saturdays to help insure service attendance.²¹¹ The curriculum was further developed and expanded and enrollment increased requiring and frequently procuring larger and better facilities. The College of Jewish Studies was established by Rabbi Stern in 1928.

The congregation continued to flourish in the next two decades. In 1940 a Community House with classrooms and hall was added to the synagogue building. More groups were founded; the Home and School Association, Book Lover's Forum, and the

²¹⁰ At first the gentile community was also suspicious of the new heterodox congregation and only with time and effort did Temple Emanu-el gain their respect and approval. The Jewish community most probably started to change their attitude towards the Temple due to fear that the Reformers might endanger the position of other Jews in the city. See Michael Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada".

²¹¹ Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada". This was in the 1880's.

Young Married Group. New services and rituals were instituted some having the tendency toward a greater element of traditionalism such as Bar Mitzvah and the use of a cantor in services. The Temple's belief in interfaith relations and understanding strengthened. It held an annual conference "Institute on Judaism for Christian Clergy and Religious Educators" where well known Jewish scholars were guest speakers. The Book Lover's Forum sponsored by the sisterhood was an interfaith forum based on book reviews involving women of different faiths. The Brotherhood hosted 'social gatherings' with other denominations.²¹² By the postwar era the Temple had established itself as a permanent and respected Reform synagogue. Liberalism in Montreal was now accepted rather than condemned. Representative of the pride of the congregation the author of "The Temple Emanu-El Story" wrote in a 1960 dedication booklet, "In the march of Liberal Judaism, Emanu-El has made great strides. It has influenced and directed important changes in the whole community, and its influence has reached far beyond Montreal."²¹³

Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El

Women seemed to have been involved in Temple Emanu-El almost from its inception prompting one Temple's president's belief that their congregation was one of the earliest to "acknowledge the importance and advisability of the female sex participating in both its secular and religious affairs."²¹⁴ As early as 1882 a group of congregational ladies met

²¹² JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Maxwell Goldstein, "Reminiscences" Fiftieth Anniversary Temple Emanu-El Jubilee Celebration 1932.

²¹³ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Mark Edmund Gordon, "1882-1960-The Emanu-El Story" Dedication Volume April 1960.

²¹⁴ Ibid. This perception would be in keeping with the Reform ideal of egalitarianism. However, this was not in actual practice in Canada or the United States. See Karla Goldman, *Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*.

to form the Ladies' Social Society, "the object being as an auxiliary to the congregation for the purpose of giving entertainments to defray current expenses."²¹⁵ In 1905 the Ladies Aid Society and all temple women were invited by the Board to meet them.²¹⁶ The official founding of the Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood was in 1908. Without delay these founding ladies began their efforts to bring "the members of the Temple and of their families in closer social union and to assist in the raising of funds for charity"²¹⁷. By means of entertainments they gave a donation to the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Fund, put on a Purim Play for the benefit of the Sisterhood Fund, took an interest in the School donating prizes and an oil-cloth to cover the whole schoolroom and in the beautification of the synagogue in terms of decorations and cleanliness.²¹⁸ The membership was open to both Temple and non-Temple women.

The mandate of the Sisterhood enlarged as the Temple grew and gradually gained acceptance for the women felt that they must accept their "share of the responsibility in furthering the ideals and purposes of Judaism....so that both Temple and home-life, in its finest forms may be assured ..." and that "no task was too great, too menial or demanding" for the development of their "spiritual home".²¹⁹ The diversity of sisterhood activities and committees reflected the breadth of their goals. The activities and tasks that the women engaged in were those that were familiar to the role of a women or what they considered as "women's work".²²⁰ Aiding in the Religious School maintenance was a priority for the women who believed that children are the "tiny tributaries which

²¹⁵ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Jewish Messenger 27 October 1882.

²¹⁶ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Minutes of Temple Emanu-El 1905.

²¹⁷ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Minutes of Temple Emanu-El 1908.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Mrs. D.H. Lissner, "A Message from the President Sisterhood" The Emanu-El Story 1882-1960".

²²⁰ Myra Cohen, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Quebec, 19 June 2003.

eventually add strength to the congregation”.²²¹ Their efforts were in the form of financial help assuming payment of the teachers and contributing towards school entertainments, awarding incentives and prizes, attempting to keep the students interested from a social standpoint and sponsoring the Youth Group. The Home and School Association began as a committee of sisterhood and became its own full fledged entity. To uphold religious traditions the Sisterhood helped in the celebration of the annual festivals decorating the sukka and making booths on Sukkot, staging Chanukah programs, distributing *sholoch manot* on Purim, and sponsoring teas with meaningful holiday programs. Oneg Shabbats were sponsored after Sabbath services to “foster more warmth and greater fellowship in the congregation”.²²² The sisterhood continually sought ways to further this concept creating a familial atmosphere in the Temple. A Flower Fund was initiated in 1932 for occasions of joy and memorializing departed ones and Uniongrams in 1943 to be sent for anniversaries, birthdays and times of sorrow. Their responsibility for the enhancement of beautification of their ‘Temple Home’ broadened with the attention of house and flower committees furnishing floral decorations for the pulpit, the appurtenances for the Torahs and Ark and the establishment of a Furnishing Fund when the new Community House required endowment.²²³ They acted as hostesses preparing and serving at the congregation Seder Services and the monthly suppers at the Temple Brotherhood meetings. Like their counterparts the Sisterhood was very successful in their goal oriented enterprises of money-raising, sponsoring bazaars, rummage sales, food sales, teas, “give and get” and ‘donor’ luncheons, fashion shows and

²²¹ CJCNA, Temple Emanu-El, Community Building Pre-Dedication Volume 1939.

²²² JPL, Temple Emanu-El, “The Emanu-El Story 1882-1960”.

²²³ CJCNA, Temple Emanu-El, Community Building Pre-Dedication Volume 1939; JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Temple Emanu-El Bulletins.

bridge, keno and mahjong groups. Occasionally they would cosponsor fundraising special events with the Brotherhood. One such successful project which contributed 'considerably to the sisterhood treasury' in 1925 was an operetta.²²⁴

In 1919 Rabbi Samuel Schwartz stated that one of the sisterhood's special aims should be to encourage and foster interest in the divine services.²²⁵ It was most probable that both formal and informal methods were employed by the sisterhood members to appeal to both congregants and family members. However, a specific focus on the female segment was actualized. In continuity with the practices of Reform Judaism an annual Mother-Daughter Sabbath services and luncheons were held involving the reading of rituals, musical responses, skits and songs followed by varied thematic lunch programs.²²⁶

Embedded in all sisterhood activities was the social element which was important to the women of the Sisterhood and to attract new members. They also saw an opportunity to learn in their organization. Thus they incorporated a cultural and intellectual component in their monthly meetings by inviting prominent speakers to lecture on subjects of interest or having musical or artistic programs attached to them. Programmes were sometimes done in collaboration with other cultural groups and/or coinciding with events or celebrations occurring in the community or city. Rabbi Stern contributed to furthering the Sisterhood's interest in learning by organizing a weekly study group discussing subjects of Jewish customs, ceremonies, traditions, history and current affairs which had an influence on Judaism.

²²⁴ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Report of Temple Sisterhood 1925.

²²⁵ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Minutes of the Temple Emanu-El 1919.

²²⁶ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Temple Emanu-El Bulletins.

The women took an active interest in the administrative concerns of the Temple. At an annual meeting in 1918 it was suggested that women be qualified for appointment as trustees of the synagogue in keeping with the advances of Progressive Judaism. In the following year it was suggested that the sisterhood appoint two of its officers as Advisory Trustees. However, not until 1920 did the members of the Sisterhood Board ask to attend a meeting of the Board of Trustees. Sisterhood president Mrs. Joseph Kruger, Mrs. Maxwell Goldstein, Mrs. J. Levinson, Mrs. J. Katz, Mrs. G. Goldstein, Mrs. M. Simon, Mrs. G. Fischel were the first women to do so. At that meeting Mrs. Kruger requested that members of the sisterhood be invited to attend all meetings of the Board. Upon agreement Mrs. G. Goldstein and Mrs. Moe Silver were named as sisterhood representatives for that year. Sisterhood representatives conscientiously attended and participated in the meetings. As a result it became a stipulation in the Temple by-laws in 1925 that two members of the sisterhood be appointed as Advisory Trustees on the Board of Trustees.²²⁷

The Sisterhood adhered to their mandate “to promote Judaism and foster Jewish ideals outside of the community as well as the inside”.²²⁸ A social service group visited the sick at hospitals bringing gifts of fruit and candy and reading to patients. They also provided transportation to Social Services. Clothing and linen were collected and given to the needy, charity sewings were held, and funds donated for chosen worthy causes. Responding to current community and world emergencies was another facet of the sisterhood. A subcommittee to the social service group chaired by Mrs. J. D. Kuppenheimer and Mrs. D. L. Cohen donated sufficient funds to install a drinking

²²⁷ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Minutes of Temple Emanu-El 1915-1925.

²²⁸ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Consitution and By-Laws of the Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood (updated in 1956).

fountain at the Settlement plus contribute to the University Settlement's needs during the Immigrant Emergency in the 1920's.²²⁹ During the Second World War the Sisterhood, under the leadership of Mrs. Arthur Simon and Mrs. Michael Margolick, set up a Red Cross unit in cooperation with their umbrella organization NFTS and closely worked with the Women's War Effort due to the chairmanship of two sisterhood members. Like the other sisterhoods the women knitted, sewed, made bandages and articles were sent overseas at the request of agencies and campaigns. Monetary help was solicited in 'War Effort concerts' given at meetings, involvement in 'War Stamps' and in cooperation with other fundraising associations. 'Ditty bags' and 'V Bundles' were filled for merchant marines when they came to port and 'Comfort Boxes' sent to soldiers overseas.²³⁰

In accordance with the Temple's history of outreach to the non-Jewish community the Sisterhood took substantial steps in the undertaking of two dynamic well-attended interfaith projects. They sponsored annual Inter-Faith Meetings between Christian and Jewish women of Montreal with the avowed purpose of increasing mutual understanding. These sometimes had an international nature when representatives of various European countries brought greetings.²³¹ The Book Lover's Forum served not only as a literary platform for the intellectual benefit of Montreal women but also a medium of friendship between those of Jewish and Christian faith. Book reviews and discussion were lead by recognized scholars and clergy.²³²

The sisterhood's inspirations did not solely originate from within the organization. It chose "to coordinate its functions as far as possible with the National Federation of

²²⁹ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Report of the Temple Sisterhood 1925.

²³⁰ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Temple Emanu-El Bulletins.

²³¹ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Temple Emanu-El Bulletin February 1941.

²³² JPL, Temple Emanu-El, "The Emanu-EL Story 1882-1960"; Temple Emanu-El Bulletins.

Temple Sisterhoods”²³³ Being a part of the Reform movement in Montreal made the women feel isolated and apart from the other sisterhoods and hence they closely associated themselves with the Reform umbrella organization. They wished to discuss new thoughts and receive stimulating suggestions for strengthening their work and believed that through the Federation it acquired “a powerful medium for the expression of its goals and purposes and a voice in world affairs as a member of the women’s department of organized Reform Jewry.”²³⁴ Delegates were consistently sent to regional and national conventions. At the time of the post war era the Temple Emmanuel sisterhood felt that it had succeeded in implementing the goals of its mandate servicing the Temple wherever and whenever needed and dedicating and devoting itself to the highest of Jewish ideals and of Reform Judaism.

²³³ JPL, Temple Emanu-El, Constitution of Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood.

²³⁴ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, “The Emanu-EL Story 1882-1960”.

Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-el... Officers

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MRS. M. SILVERSTEIN
MRS. H. W. ROBINSON
MRS. S. MEDINE
MRS. E. REGAL
MRS. A. FRIEDMAN
MRS. GEORGE GOLDSTEIN
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MRS. L. B. GOODMAN
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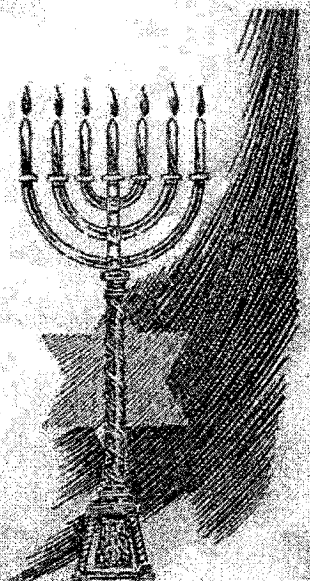
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Montreal Sisterhoods' Relationship to their National Organizations

The sisterhoods in Montreal kept close ties with their affiliated national organizations. By the 1920's The Temple Emanuel Sisterhood was associated with NFTS and the Shaar Hashomayim and Spanish and Portuguese with the Women's League. Although the Women's Branch was established in 1923, a conundrum exists in that both the Spanish and Portuguese and Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhoods which were of the Orthodox persuasion did not affiliate with it but rather with the traditional Conservative leaning Women's League. Perhaps, in the early decades the Women's Branch did not reach out or properly promote itself beyond the borders of the United States. However, the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood did switch its association to the Union of Orthodox Women in 1946. This change may have been due to Women's League and its parent organization the United Synagogue of America moving more towards Conservative Judaism which was growing at a fast pace after WW II. The Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhood calling itself a 'traditional' congregation maintained its original affiliation until the beginning of the twenty first century when it disassociated itself from any of the national organizations.

The three national organizations shared the common aim to revitalize and further a Jewish spirit and Jewish way of life for the North American Jewish women. It was believed that women's broadened participation in the synagogue would not only be beneficial to women but an asset to the synagogue itself for "no modern congregation can function adequately without the aid of a well-organized women's group attached to it".²³⁵ Subsequently, each organization's agenda contained the goal to aid the organization of

²³⁵ "Women's League Handbook and Guide" in *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality* ed. Ellen M. Umansky and Dianne Ashton (Boston: Beacon Press 1992), 161.

local sisterhoods and their social and cultural programming in order to reach sisterhood objectives on both levels. One national organization handbook explains the local sisterhood goal; "It is, or should be, to accomplish locally, what the Women's League aspires to do nationally. It cannot do this alone effectively, but only if it works closely with and through the congregation with which it is affiliated."²³⁶ The needs of their synagogue and congregation were always the sisterhoods' primary concern. The three Montreal sisterhoods did acknowledge and implement many of the ideas and suggestions imparted to them. Mrs. Robins, a member and past president of the Spanish and Portuguese sisterhood remarked, "we got our material from New York,...we worked from that. That's where our ideas came from initially. Were we going to copy church programs?"²³⁷ Most probably the women chose the programs which they thought would work well in Montreal as the city was unique or different from the United States in many ways.

They followed the suggestions from the various manuals, publications and newsletters the national organizations published as a means of disseminating their informative and frequently finely detailed ideas of achieving sisterhood objectives. Constitutional models and administrative order were instituted, committees were set up and regularly scheduled meetings were held by the sisterhoods as prescribed. The Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood went as far as opening meetings with prayers recommended by the Women's League. Constitutions and by-laws were updated when necessary as the By-Laws Committee of the Temple-Emanu-El sisterhood comments "in accordance with the needs of our

²³⁶ Ibid., 161.

²³⁷ Mrs. Robins, interview by author, 17 April 2003.

growing organization".²³⁸ Encouraged by the national organizations the three sisterhoods continued the enhancement and beautification of their synagogues. The monies raised from their fundraising activities were always utilized first for the benefit of the synagogue and then toward their national organization and its causes. Many of the umbrella organizations' fundraising ideas and campaigns for local and national advantage were put into operation. The Temple Emanu-El sisterhood instituted Uniongram occasion cards for birthdays and memorials and the Spanish and Portuguese and Shaar Hashomayim sisterhoods hosted luncheons and sold pins to support the Torah Fund. They pursued the national recommendations to stress the observance of rituals, holiday celebrations and home ceremonials. To help foster the spirit of Reform Judaism and broaden their participation in the religious life of the Temple as recommended by NFTS the women of the Temple Emanu-El facilitated the celebration of holidays for the congregation by building sukka booths on Sukkot, organizing Chanukahs programs, Passover seders, and Oneg Shabbats, and reinstituting the custom of *sholoch manot* and masquerades on Purim. They hosted Mother-Daughter Shabbats leading the services and had women appointed to the synagogue board. Both the Spanish and Portuguese and Shaar Hashomayim women worked to promote the congregational calendric holidays and festivals in a similar fashion inspired by the Women's League. The league's project to decorate a magnificent sukkah at the Jewish Theological Seminary could be viewed as a symbol of its concern with ritual observance.²³⁹ To further stimulate ritual and home

²³⁸ JPL, Temple Emanu-el, Letter by Mrs. Jack Carrick, Corresponding Secretary, in 1956 attached to the updated Constitution and By-laws of the Temple Emanu-El Sisterhood.

²³⁹ Schwartz, "Women's League for Conservative Judaism" in *Jewish Women in America: A Historical Encyclopedia*.

observance the Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood performed the Women's League "Jewish Home Beautiful Pageant" in an elaborate manner.

The sisterhoods closely adhered to their national organization's emphasis on education for both youth and women. Financial support and active involvement in their individual religious schools was clearly a priority.²⁴⁰ Annual contributions were given to "Student Aid" for Reform Judaism and "Educational Fund" for Women's League for student scholarships and the educational institutions associated with the national organization. A stipulation in the minutes of The Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood was for donations to be given first to the Educational Fund before any other organization. In their fervent pursuit for women's education the ideas and programming were generally in conjunction with those of the national organizations. Speakers were a constant on both Jewish subjects and current topics at sisterhood meetings and study groups and classes were formed. Subjects ranged from Jewish historical figures to Women and War and from Problems Facing World Jewry to a presentation 'Travelogue through Jewish Literature'. The sisterhoods shared their umbrella organizations' concern for youth, being actively involved with their synagogue youth groups. The Temple Emanu-El sisterhood supported the NFTS' National Federation of Temple Youth and both the Shaar Hashomayim and Spanish and Portuguese began girl guide groups, a project initiated by the Women's League to stress the importance of Jewish education and encourage the girl guides to participate in synagogue activities. The sisterhoods supported the stands the national organizations took on national and international issues. The Temple Emanu-El sisterhood's interfaith teas and Book Lovers' Forum upheld the NFTS Peace and World Relations work and the Spanish and Portuguese and Shaar Hashomayim held joint peace

²⁴⁰ See the histories of the individual Montreal sisterhoods.

meetings during distressful times. All supported the national calls for aid to the needy, the Jewish Braille Institute in terms of funds and personal involvement, the war effort and concern for Israel.

Delegates from the sisterhoods were regularly sent to national conventions so that “new and advanced work could be discussed with other women prominent in synagogue activities”.²⁴¹ Temple Emanu-El immediately developed a close association with the NFTS due to its isolated locality in Montreal. Mrs. Kruger, sisterhood president, attended the NFTS conference in Boston in 1919. The Shaar Hashomayim sent a representative as early as 1926 to the Eighth Annual Women’s League convention. In their capacity as delegates the women had the opportunity to be motivated and learn leadership skills. The delegates would return and relate the ideas and philosophies of the national organizations at their local synagogue sisterhood. This was done through the programs and speeches at home meetings. Presidents Myrtle Solomon and Sadie Brown of the Shaar Hashomayim practiced this latter method.²⁴² In addition, women from Women’s League would sometimes come to Montreal to speak. Mrs. Speigal, national president in 1933, addressed the Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood at a luncheon. Elinor Cohen, the daughter of Sadie Brown, commented how her mother was inspired, absorbed everything they told and taught at the conventions, and learned to make speeches.²⁴³ Information was sometimes shared between the local sisterhoods as in the case of Irene Wolff president of the Spanish and Portuguese meeting with the Shaar Hashomayim Auxiliary to discuss the Women’s League. Montreal women were involved in an executive capacity at the national level. At the Women’s League convention in Detroit in

²⁴¹ CJCNA, Temple Emanu-El, Temple Emanu-El Pre-Dedication Volume 1939.

²⁴² SHA, Minutes of Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood

²⁴³ Elinor Brown Cohen, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 9 January 2003.

1941 Myrtle Solomon was honoured and elected as one of six vice-presidents of the National Board and chosen to represent Canada. Delegates of Temple Emanu-El sisterhood sat on the board of NFTS and representatives attended regional meetings in Plattsburgh, New York.

The Women's League did not have a Canadian regional branch until 1948. Mrs. Barnet Appelbaum, president of Women's League in New York, called for a conference regarding the lack of a Canadian regional contingent. At the May 1948 conference Myrtle Solomon of Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhood was given the charter for the Eastern Canadian Branch by Mrs. Rachael Fixman, National Chairperson of Organizations. At a convention at the Breakers Hotel in Atlantic City in November of that year the charter was officially received. There were twelve affiliates in 1949 from Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick.²⁴⁴ The first campaign as a branch was to raise money for the Jewish Theological Seminary's Eternal Life program.²⁴⁵

The national organizations gave the Montreal sisterhoods a feeling of unity, significance and a collective voice. They not only offered guidance but inspiration and incentive to the work the women were doing on a local basis and simultaneously encouraging them to expand their scope of activities. The regional facet of the national organizations allowed the sisterhoods to confer on a smaller scale and develop relations closer to home. It allowed the exchange of ideas that were pertinent to more geographical local traits and needs.

²⁴⁴ The affiliates were Shaare Zedek (St John's N.B.), Adath Israel (Montreal), Shaar Hashomayim (Montreal), Agudath Israel (Ottawa), B'nai Israel (St. Catherines), Goel Tzedek (Toronto), Shaar Shamoyim (Toronto), Beth Midrash (Toronto), B'nai Israel (Galt), Daughters of Israel (London), Shaar Hashomayim (Windsor).

²⁴⁵ The information for the formation of the Eastern Canadian Branch was never properly recorded at that time. Carol Sher attempted to gather the information in the 1990's from the early presidents of the Eastern Canadian Branch. The facts and dates are not absolutely accurate.

Other Montreal Synagogue Sisterhoods

As the three oldest synagogues moved from their early locations south of Sherbrooke Street and reestablished themselves in the what is now known as the downtown area of Montreal, the Eastern European immigrants arriving in Montreal in the 1880's took over two of the vacated synagogues and established nascent congregations in homes or rented premises. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, seven to nine congregations existed in the initial area of Jewish settlement. The community then began to move north and by 1945 thirty congregations were concentrated in an area of two square miles. These congregations, often described as shuls or shulech, differed from the three older and established congregations in location, social, economic and political terms.²⁴⁶

Nevertheless, ladies auxiliaries and sisterhoods were organized in a number of these congregations following in the footsteps of the older established synagogues. Their mandates and activities closely resembled the first three sisterhoods. The main purpose of the Beth David sisterhood formed in 1929 was to create "good will amongst our members and also to assist financially in the maintenance of our beautiful Synagogue."²⁴⁷ They, like their "uptown' counterparts, financed the Sunday school, bought equipment for the dining hall and kitchen, had meetings accompanied with an educational element, donated prayer books to every Bar-Mitzvah, raised funds, continually introduced new activities and assisted charities in Montreal. The Beth Yehuda Synagogue's 50th Anniversary Booklet reports that their sisterhood was ready to help the synagogue in all

²⁴⁶ Sara Tauben, "Our Orthodox Synagogues: Monuments of our Jewish Community that are now disappearing," 4, March 2002. Unpublished paper.

²⁴⁷ JPL, Beth David Synagogue, "The Beth David Sisterhood: A summary of Its Activities," 7, 50th Anniversary Booklet 1888-1938.

ways such as providing coal, helping with repairs or providing monetary funds when needed.²⁴⁸ The sisterhood of the Beth Yitzhok was not formed until 1940 although the congregation was established in 1904. Its members were very involved in the decoration of the synagogue and with Jewish cultural affairs.²⁴⁹ The Tifereth Jerusalem sisterhood funded the school operated by the congregation while it was situated on Marquette St.²⁵⁰ The sisterhood of the Congregation Anshei Ozeroff, still called the Ladies Auxiliary, was structurally well organized with officers and executive and very involved in synagogue activities. They are thanked for helping to reach congregational goals in the 1943 25th Anniversary dedication booklet. Akin to the three older sisterhoods the ongoing meetings and events of the proliferating congregational sisterhoods were listed, frequently with detail, in the Jewish newspapers. These were to inform both members and the community either to attend or recount about the occasion and their accomplishments. The sisterhood of the New Adath Jeshrum congregation announced a raffle to raise money for its synagogue building fund and past and upcoming festivities.²⁵¹ A B'nai Jacob sisterhood meeting and the first meeting of the Shaarei Zion sisterhood with the names of the women who were present were reported in The Canadian Jewish Review in 1925.²⁵² The Canadian Jewish Chronicle contains an account of the Chevra Kadisha Sisterhood's recent meeting and a bridge and supper entertainment.²⁵³ Whether they donated to other organizations or helped in the community was not mentioned in reference to these

²⁴⁸ Eiran Harris Archives, 50th Anniversary Booklet of the New Beth Yehuda Synagogue paraphrased translation from Yiddish to English by Sara Tauben.

²⁴⁹ JPL, Cantor S. Hamerman, "Highlights from our Living Past---1886-1965" Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem Bulletin July-August 1980, 7.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. The Tifereth Jerusalem, Beth David, Beth Yizchok, and Kehal Yeshurim congregations were all amalgamated under the name Tifereth Beth David Jerusalem by 1965.

²⁵¹ Canadian Jewish Review 25 December 1925.

²⁵² Ibid., 25 November 1925, 30 October 1925.

²⁵³ The Canadian Jewish Chronicle 13 December 1935.

congregations as they were in the three 'uptown' congregations. Further research would possibly reveal this information. Perhaps these smaller sisterhoods did not have the excess funds as did the more prestigious synagogue sisterhoods.

Synagogue sisterhoods were still being organized in Montreal at the end of the fourth decade. In 1949, The Park Extension Jewish Community hoped to establish a synagogue, the Beth Aaron. In anticipation a Women's Division was formed with the objective of working and raising funds for the future prospect. Chairs were purchased which would be used presently but with the expectation that they would be for the new synagogue.²⁵⁴ The Spanish and Portuguese, Shaar Hashomayim and Temple Emanu-El sisterhoods had paved a path and provided a role model for sisterhoods in Montreal which were burgeoning and flourishing at the end of the first half of the century.

²⁵⁴ CJCNA/1949 Synagogues File

Chapter 4: The World of Montreal Sisterhood Women

Perspectives of the Women

As indicated in the last chapter the Montreal Jewish community was religiously traditional and self-contained having numerous institutions and facilities. By the end of the second decade women had been dislodged from their volunteer roles and were no longer as actively involved in organizations. The federated system of philanthropy in Montreal was now responsible for the care of community. Yet, women still felt that it was a part of their sacred religious duty to assist. Sisterhoods responded to the specific requests from rabbis and national sisterhood organizations to help in Jewish life by promoting religious ritual observance and transmitting the ideals of Judaism. Service to the synagogue was their main purpose. Their approaches to fulfill this obligation were very creative. Generating a comfortable inviting atmosphere and the initiation of congregational annual holiday celebrations and programs brought people into the synagogue and encouraged participation. Their strong bond and assistance to the religious schools never wavered. However, the sisterhoods realized that women specifically had to be inspired and educated in order for them to affect their families and community in furthering religious observance and participation and disseminating Jewish tradition. Speakers, classes study groups focusing on Jewish subjects and exciting new programs were provided. Aid was given mostly in the form of financial donations to chosen charities or institutions and garments sewn for the needy. Occasionally the women worked cooperatively with other organizations on special projects. This was particularly evident during the times of the two world wars

The work of the sisterhoods was often recognized by their institutions. Laudatory messages were bestowed upon sisterhood women in synagogue bulletins and commemoration books. But a very important question arises; what were the perceptions of the women? How did they perceive their work, the sisterhoods' overall role in the synagogue and the attitude of the men, especially those on the board, towards them? During the course of my research I interviewed six women from the three representative synagogue sisterhoods and one from the Beth El Synagogue in order to hear the voice of sisterhood women themselves.²⁵⁵ They are some of the oldest members who could offer some information and memories of that era. The women I interviewed were very active and involved, most of them past sisterhood presidents. The following small biographies will help give a sense of the women and their experiences.

Esther Blaustein was born in Ottawa but resided in Quebec for most of her life. Her parents, Irene and Martin Wolff, were prominent members of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation. In fact, Esther's ancestors were founders of the congregation. She received her nursing degree from McGill University and worked up until the time she had her children. She married her husband Henry in 1954 and they have three children and seven grandchildren. Soon after she was married she joined the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue sisterhood and was very active. Starting in 1979 she became sisterhood president for a number of years and is still an active synagogue board member.

Rosetta Elkin was born in Ottawa in 1914, the daughter of Irene and Martin Wolff and sister to Esther Blaustein. She earned a teaching degree from MacDonald College in 1932 and a BA in English and French in 1945 from Queen's University. She married Victor

²⁵⁵ They women whom I interviewed are some of the oldest sisterhood women. One of the difficulties of oral histories in my research period is the paucity of women still living and who are well enough and lucid to interview.

Elkin in 1939 and they have four children plus grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Although she was married at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue she and her husband became affiliated with the Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue. This was due to her husband being Ashkenazi. She joined the sisterhood immediately, and served as sisterhood president from 1956-59, president of the Canadian Eastern Branch of Women's League from 1962-1966, and vice-president of the National Women's League from 1966-1968.

Elinor Brown Cohen was born in 1929 in Montreal. She married in 1951 and had two children. Seven years later she was widowed and married for a second time in 1960. She returned to school to earn a Masters of Social Work at McGill University. Consequently she was active sporadically, often in special undertakings. In our interview Elinor recounted her mother's sisterhood history and some of her perceptions as well. Sadie Brown was born in 1900 and became a member of the sisterhood in the 1930's. She was sisterhood president in 1951-54 and was very active at the both the regional and national level attending the National Women's League conferences in the United States and the Canadian Eastern Branch ones in Canada.

Jewel Posh was born in 1926 in Montreal. After high school she attended Sir George William's College but went to work before graduating. She married in 1946 and had four children shortly after she stopped working. Having married at the Temple Emanu-El she was immediately invited to join the sisterhood. As her children grew up she became more actively involved becoming a sisterhood board member, holding the office of sisterhood president for two years and president of the regional Reform Movement in Canada.

Myra Cohen was born in northern Ontario. She attended Queen's University in Ontario and later McGill University in Montreal earning degrees in social work. She married her husband whom she met at Queen's at Temple Emanu-El in 1949 and they had two children. Her membership in the sisterhood commenced at the time of her marriage. Myra became president of the sisterhood for several years and attended the regional and national conferences of the NFTS as a delegate.

Mrs. Robins was born in Montreal.²⁵⁶ After high school she attended business school and worked as a stenographer. She married in 1930 and she and her husband moved to the Maritimes where they had three children. They returned to Montreal in the 1940's and joined the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue when it relocated on Lemieux Street. At the same time she joined the sisterhood and became an active member. She served as recording secretary for a number of years and held the office of president for three years.

Carol Sher was born in the United States. She and her husband joined the Beth El Synagogue in 1956 two years after they moved to Montreal and became more settled. However, Carol did not choose to become a member of the sisterhood until 1962 at which time her son started school and she could pursue her own interests. She served as president of the Beth El sisterhood and of the regional Canadian Eastern Branch and was a delegate to the Women's League of Conservative Judaism.

The Jewish women I interviewed initially joined synagogue sisterhoods for a variety of reasons which can be viewed as representative of sisterhood members in general. Firstly, many women at that time were not working or at least not full time or as Jewel Posh pointed out "not involved in careers....Most of them had reasonably good health

²⁵⁶ Mrs. Robins is a pseudonym name per her request for anonymity.

and they had good help in the house...and didn't have jobs outside.”²⁵⁷ Confirming this statement, Esther Blaustein said that when she first joined the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood, “...most of the women were not working and were free to do things...the children were at school”.²⁵⁸ Some were invited or persuaded to join by existing members. Although Rosetta Elkin felt “it was the natural thing to do,” Myrtie Solomon, the president of the Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood at the time, further encouraged her saying, “Come on you have to join!”.²⁵⁹ Jewel Posh claimed she was invited to join immediately upon her marriage at the Temple. Following in their mothers' path was also an incentive. Esther Blaustein and Rosetta Elkin regarded their mother, a committed sisterhood member, as a role model. In 1951 brides were being encouraged to join the Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood to help implement the new project of a gift shop. Elinor Cohen was one of the brides. However, Elinor's prime motivating factor to join was her mother Sadie Brown who was a very dedicated member. Occasionally mothers were influenced by their daughters. Jewel Posh's parents never had any synagogue affiliations. They joined the Temple on account of their daughter and her mother became an active sisterhood member for over 40 years. As newcomers to Montreal it was an opportune way to meet other Jewish women. This was the reason that Myra Cohen eagerly accepted her personal invitation from Sylvia Stern, the rabbi's wife to join the sisterhood. Upon her return to Montreal after numerous years away Mrs. Robins realized that the sisterhood was an excellent setting to meet the women in the newly developed community where she now lived. The social, cultural and educational activities and the desire to be involved with their children and the religious school were additional

²⁵⁷ Jewel Posh, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 3 January 2003.

²⁵⁸ Esther Blaustein, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 18 December 2002.

²⁵⁹ Rosetta Elkin, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 6 January 2003.

motivating factors common to the women. However, once they were involved what were their feelings and their sense of their sisterhood experience?

The sisterhood offered a social milieu for women to meet female friends whether they were from out of town or not. As Jewel Posh explained, "Working in the kitchen with a bunch of women you do make friends... You do because you are standing there cooking all day. You've got to make friends."²⁶⁰ It also provided an opportune way for older women who had free time to be occupied and make new friends. Jewel Posh's mother "...liked the women that she met....became very close with a lot of the women andenjoyed it."²⁶¹ Many developed into lifelong friendships as in the case of Myra Cohen, "I still have friends that I made when I joined the sisterhood."²⁶² The women had a "good" time working together and participating in the activities and events.²⁶³ "We were the ones who did all the work," recollected one member who worked in the gift shop, ".....and it was really wonderful....and was a lot of fun...".²⁶⁴ One woman recalled with both fondness and amusement her public speaking class women in which they had to suggest suitable alternate names for one another.²⁶⁵ The sisterhood also afforded the opportunity to meet and socialize with women from other cities during the regional and national conferences. Elinor Cohen related that her mother "made some very, very good

²⁶⁰ Interview, Jewel Posh.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Myra Cohen, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 19 June 2003.

²⁶³ I placed quotations around the word good because it was repeatedly used along with the word fun by the women interviewed in their descriptions of their actual work experience and when working with the other women.

²⁶⁴ Elinor Brown Cohen, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 9 January 2003.

²⁶⁵ Interview, Mrs. Robins

friends from New York and various other places.” and she herself made a lot of friends through Branch meetings.²⁶⁶

The sisterhood provided many women with a “stimulating” intellectual and educational opportunity. Some women did not receive religious education either due to neglect or non-availability where they lived. In the sisterhood they were able to learn in the classes and from guest speakers on Jewish subjects and through the various Jewish cultural activities. One member claimed that all the Jewish songs she knows today she learned through the sisterhood. There were numerous mixed marriages in the Temple. Some of the women had converted and others who hadn’t but had promised to bring the children up Jewish. Many became active in the sisterhood. But even for those women who didn’t, the sisterhood was an excellent vehicle to learn holiday customs, rituals, and cooking. “It was important to teach them at least some of the customs, how to make (a) seder...what Hanukah was...what went on the seder plate, how to make kneidlach and..things like that.” explained Jewel Posh.²⁶⁷ For women who did have background they were able to further their knowledge through the sisterhood.

A non-religious educational aspect also existed. Sessions such as public speaking, current events, and book reviews were readily available at local sisterhoods. Myra Cohen was especially involved in the Sisterhood’s Book Lover’s Forum describing it as a “cultural event.... that really cuts across all levels of religion” and thus ‘rewarding’ and ‘intellectually appealing’ to her.²⁶⁸ Women felt they benefited from their national associations as well. “It was fantastic...” Rosetta Elkin professed, “...they gave us

²⁶⁶ Interview, Elinor Brown Cohen. The group of women that I interviewed comprised of those that were successful at making friends and therefore stayed in the sisterhoods.

²⁶⁷ Interview, Jewel Posh.

²⁶⁸ Interview, Myra Cohen.

leadership training, organized leadership training with our own women and we would sit on board meetings...". She described the Women's League women who trained them as "outstanding" and "wonderful".²⁶⁹ Sadie Brown's first speeches were terrible according to her daughter Elinor but she "grew and developed" as a speaker. The Women's League provided her mother with inspiration and an abundance of learning tools and material which "she absorbed" and "drank it in" becoming "speech educated".²⁷⁰ Women also learned administrative skills in the sisterhood. They were responsible to organize meetings, committees, and events, raise and allocate money and report to the synagogue Boards. Sitting on the Board of Trustees was an additional opportune way to gain knowledge of organizational methods. In fact, some of the interviewees believed that it was through the experience of sisterhood and sitting on the board of Trustees and the administrative/organizational education acquired through that experience, that women became Board members and Presidents in the synagogue institutions. For example, Jewel Posh recounted:

...the sisterhood president always sat on the Temple Board and that was when you got your first experience as a board member... when I stopped being president I became a board member of the temple...And there were more women that came in gradually ...and then we had a woman president and you know that it went on.²⁷¹

The educational venues that the sisterhood afforded were a crucial means of informal education.

The duties and tasks the sisterhoods assumed were viewed as "women's work" by the women themselves. As one member succinctly explained, "in those days women's work was women's work" and another, "women chose the activities...we were good at,

²⁶⁹ Rosetta Elkin, interview by author, tape recording, Montreal, Que., 6 January 2003.

²⁷⁰ Interview, Elinor Brown Cohen.

²⁷¹ Interview, Jewel Posh.

comfortable, allowed.”²⁷² Furnishing the synagogue, decorating the bimah and the synagogue for the different holidays, working in the kitchen preparing, cooking and serving and involvement with the children seemed a natural extension of their roles as wives and mothers. Doing what women ‘traditionally’ did was how they interpreted their work and the responsibilities they chose. They felt they were very capable and did a good job. They enjoyed their work and were proud of their efforts. They thought their work had a purpose and filled a particular niche in the synagogue. “There would be a vacuum if the women were not there doing anything,” one member explicated.²⁷³ Nor did they think that their endeavours were “narrow-minded things with strictly female object or motive.”²⁷⁴ The congregation as a whole benefited from the efforts of the sisterhood. The sisterhood was the ‘social’ component of the synagogue. The different activities and entertainments were designed by the women to interest and involve the range of synagogue members. In addition, the synagogue profited financially and physically from their fundraising events. The sisterhood women believed they had a special sensitivity and understanding that was reflected in their activities and which reached the entire congregation. Until the 1950’s the Shaar Hashomayim’s sisterhood was called the Women’s Auxiliary. At this time it was the only congregation to have retained the term auxiliary. Rosetta Elkin proudly explained why she initiated the change, “You see an auxiliary can be anything. But this (sisterhood) gives this a feminine description.”

In response to the question whether they thought their sisterhood played an important role in the life of the synagogue the interviewed women, in general, answered positively. “The sisterhood as a sisterhood would participate in the running of the congregation”

²⁷² Interview, Myra Cohen and Jewel Posh.

²⁷³ Interview, Rosetta Elkin.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

asserted one member and similarly another, “the sisterhood was part and parcel of (the synagogue)...the men were the right arm and the women were the left arm”. Women felt that the sisterhood had its particular function and the men, whether in their men’s club or on the synagogue boards, had theirs. The social, cultural and educational activities in combination with the fundraising events that the sisterhood provided were an aspect that the men would not undertake categorizing it as ‘women’s domain’. Yet they became vital assets to the life of the synagogue. A sense of balance was created and a complement to the male presence. The sisterhood was a vehicle through which the women could actively participate in the synagogue life. Although they could not participate equally to the men in the arena of prayer, the women felt the sisterhood could and did introduce and initiate new ideas, plan and make certain decisions that affected the synagogue. “...women didn’t have a very active role in the synagogue ...in the services,” commented Elinor Brown Cohen, “..and this sort of brought women;...it’s kind of saying it’s okay, let the men have the services and all this kind of thing, we have an important role to play too.”²⁷⁵ They thought the sisterhood contributed significantly to the synagogue in ways that were recognizable and acknowledged and in others that were subtle and understated. “I think the synagogue relied on the sisterhood a great deal for many things. They might not even be aware of how much they did rely,” professed sisterhood member Jewel Posh.²⁷⁶ Another member clarified her statement that the men may have had ‘the first and the last word’ adding “behind every good man is a good woman”.²⁷⁷ The women of the Temple Emanu-El were of the opinion that the sisterhood played an influential role as part of the synagogue reaching out to the community. Their interfaith teas and Book

²⁷⁵ Interview, Elinor Brown Cohen.

²⁷⁶ Interview, Jewel Posh.

²⁷⁷ Interview, Mrs. Robins.

Lover's Forum were a significant and successful means of transmitting the philosophies of Reform Judaism to the Montreal community.²⁷⁸ The overall perspective of the women was as one member expressed, "*certainly* we were special in the congregation. We had a role to play in the congregation."²⁷⁹

For the most part, women did not contemplate or worry about the men's opinion of their work. Overall, they felt that the men knew they were efficient and capable and thus, rarely interfered. The sisterhoods as organizations were formally thanked in person and publicly in the congregational bulletins and booklets along with messages of praise. However, they did feel that the men were "proud to a certain degree".²⁸⁰ As one member recalled, "And they were always admiring of the work we did with the sukkah and the decorations for different holidays and things like that. BUT that was women's work."²⁸¹ Perhaps they felt that the men valued their capabilities only within women's limited domain. In general they were not aware of any overt negative or positive feelings from the men. When the men were given the actual monetary checks, the final product of the sisterhood fundraising efforts, the women said that they were always glad to receive them. But they expressed an underlying sense that the men "patted the ladies on the head" and "never took us very seriously" or "didn't expect a great deal from us".²⁸² The women seemed to think that perhaps the men perceived their work accomplishments merely in terms of 'women's work'. The Book Lover's Forum may have been regarded with more respect because it had more community involvement, according to Myra

²⁷⁸ Although Reform Judaism was egalitarian and women sat with men in prayer, women still wanted or felt the need for sisterhood.

²⁷⁹ Interview, Myra Cohen. The italics are my emphasis.

²⁸⁰ Interview, Rosetta Elkin.

²⁸¹ Interview, Jewel Posh. I have capitalized the word 'but' to show the emphasis on the word.

²⁸² Interviews, Myra Cohen and Jewel Posh.

Cohen. "But when it came to women's jobs then, you know, do the kitchen, do this, do that, you can do the cooking; they were definitely women's roles."²⁸³ Perhaps their efforts were taken for granted but they nevertheless diligently carried out their self-appointed responsibilities and were proud of it.

The women's perceptions of themselves and their sisterhood experience were positive. They viewed themselves as hardworking, competent, and creative. "You have to know how to approach, what letters to write, how to write..." one member explained.²⁸⁴ Another noted, "I ran the meetings. I would make up the agenda, get all the committee reports...It was a job that had to be done, so it was very satisfying."²⁸⁵ It was a place where they felt they were a "unity of women" and "belonged" and that the experience yielded "a lot of recognition and a lot of support" and admiration.²⁸⁶ Elinor Brown Cohen described it as a "place for women to be, to do their thing and certainly they did a lot of good things."²⁸⁷ A moral satisfaction was derived from their labours in that they were contributing to the synagogue, Judaism and to women. They did not question the kind of work that they did nor did they feel exploited. They were simply doing what men could not do or would not do. They believed that their work had special meaning and impact. They felt that they were unique as women bestowing the feminine touch with their "sensitivity and understanding". Their involvement gave them a sense of self-worth and consequence. The educational and intellectual elements of the local sisterhoods augmented their religious and secular knowledge and hence, their self-esteem. The leadership and organizational skills that they acquired via their national organizations'

²⁸³ Interview, Myra Cohen.

²⁸⁴ Interview, Mrs. Robins.

²⁸⁵ Interview, Jewel Posh.

²⁸⁶ Interview, Myra Cohen.

²⁸⁷ Interview, Elinor Brown Cohen.

instruction and practical experience were factors that also contributed to their self-confidence. The association with the National Organizations added prestige and status.

Various women's organizations existed along side the synagogue sisterhoods, such as Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, Pioneer Women's Organization, and B'nai Brith. Each organization had a different ideology. Hadassah's main concern was social services, and in particular medical, in Israel; Pioneer Women's Organization's was on the children and women in Israel; NCJW's was social service aid to immigrants, especially young girls and women's issues in Quebec and Canada; B'nai Birth Women's was to youth and adult education, human rights activism, community service, and assistance to Israel.²⁸⁸ Were women members of only one organization and or were they members of several? What reasons were there that a woman chose to be solely a member of a sisterhood or centre her energy there rather than the other organizations? What did the sisterhood offer that was enticing or unique?

Women thoughtfully chose their affiliations or preferred allegiances. They were aware of the differences of the various organizations. "Each had its own purpose, its own philosophy and you fitted in where you could," explained Esther Blaustein. Of the women I interviewed some belonged to several organizations and others to only one. Irene Wolff was involved in many organizations, yet each of her daughters Rosetta Elkin and Esther Blaustein chose different paths. Rosetta belonged to numerous organizations while Esther only to sisterhood. "My heart was in sisterhood" was one woman's explanation who belonged only to sisterhood.²⁸⁹ Another woman stated that although she

²⁸⁸ B'nai Brith Women was established only in 1939 when it dissolved its partnership with its parent organization. Today it is called JWI.

²⁸⁹ Interview, Carol Sher.

had many associations “sisterhood was a priority”.²⁹⁰ Some women worked part-time and could not belong to several organizations. Due to time constraints they had to carefully choose their organization of interest. Esther Blaustein was one of these women as well as Myra Cohen who exclaimed, “I was working part-time. Then I certainly didn’t have time for anything else.....it (sisterhood) was part of the temple and that would be my interest.”²⁹¹ Albeit Hadassah sometimes held its meetings in synagogues, it had no affiliation with any particular synagogue except in the unique case of the Shaar Hashomayim. It had a local chapter composed of members of the women’s auxiliary.²⁹² Rosetta Elkin was a life member of Hadassah but was not very active. Although Sadie Brown was a member of both her daughter Elinor was not. She belonged only to the sisterhood. Not all women’s auxiliary members necessarily joined the Hadassah chapter.

One of the main reasons that the women seemed to prefer the sisterhood was its association to a religious institution. The secularism of the other organizations seemed to be a deterrent. Mrs. Robins belonged to B’nai Brith for merely a short time. Feeling that it was inappropriate for functions to be held on Saturday mornings she commented, “Saturday your husbands are not working, your children are home so you waltz off by yourself? I didn’t think that was so...so right”.²⁹³ According to her the sisterhood was a Jewish organization in which she could “observe everything”; that is, perform the charitable responsibilities of a Jewish woman and be religious. Jewel Posh succinctly posited her explanation as, “...you could be a secular Jew and belong to Hadassah but

²⁹⁰ Interview, Rosetta Elkin.

²⁹¹ Interview, Myra Cohen.

²⁹² Sarah Filotas, “Les Organisations féminines de la communauté juive montréalaise, 1918-1948 (Master’s Thesis, Université de Montréal, 1998) 35.

²⁹³ Interview, Mrs. Robins

you can't be a secular Jew and be active in a synagogue.....the sisterhood has another component".²⁹⁴

The religious component of the sisterhood was important to the women. According to one member,

I don't think people belong to a sisterhood unless they feel something for the religion. There are so many organizations you could join where you wouldn't have to feel that. You know, I think they choose that or they discover in themselves a need for that.²⁹⁵

However, they did not seem to view their involvement as a form of religious expression in the traditional observant sense of prayer or attending services, rather as religious participation. "Judaism isn't just sitting and praying," Rosetta Elkin commented, "You have to live as a Jew and this was an opportunity to be Jewish, a practicing Jewish woman and do things". She also asserted that "...Jewish women should get together and we should do things for Judaism,".²⁹⁶ For Myra Cohen the sisterhood "had some meaning because it was a part of a reform temple". She had always felt that if she joined any organizations it would have to connect with the ideals of Reform Judaism for which she had an affinity. In one of Sadie Brown's speeches to the sisterhood she stated that the ethical values of the Jewish home and synagogue are continued through ceremonial observances which have given strength to the Jewish people through thousands of years. Her daughter's conjecture is that she believed that the upkeep and transmission of the religion was an essential part of the sisterhood's work.²⁹⁷ Perhaps this was one of the reasons that Sadie Brown initiated the gift shop in the Shaar Hashomayim. Making

²⁹⁴ Interview, Jewel Posh

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Interview, Elinor Brown Cohen.

Judaica and religious artifacts more easily accessible would encourage religious ceremonial observance.

Although the sisterhoods were women's organizations with their own local and national ideals and goals, they were one element of a greater institution. They were sharing and relating with other factions of the synagogue towards a more overall vision. Many of the women worked on synagogue committees and projects in addition to the sisterhood, such as youth commissions, the school board, the synagogue board, and the PTA. These additional activities were, in a manner, complementary to the sisterhood. They were within the synagogue domain and in alignment with the sisterhood mandate of service to the synagogue. The fact that their husbands and children were involved in the same institution was a significant factor to becoming and remaining a sisterhood member rather than the other women's organizations. Mrs. Robins remarked that it was "something we (her and her husband) did because we had had an interest together. How many organizations do you have of men and women?"²⁹⁸ The synagogue setting was analogously described with the home. Terms such as "family", "home" and "belonging" were repeatedly used by the women. Elinor Brown Cohen described it as "a part of her family's life" and a part of herself:

My father was the parnass and also involved in the Men's Association. It was just part of my life growing up that this was what you did. We went to Sunday school first and then when you grew up this is how you participated.²⁹⁹

Elinor choice of participation was the sisterhood as was her mother's.

²⁹⁸ Interview, Mrs. Robins.

²⁹⁹ Interview, Elinor Brown Cohen.

One woman maintained that it was a “family affair” and “kept her family together” and another that it was a “like a family.”³⁰⁰ Family participation encouraged religious observance and maintenance of traditions both in the home and synagogue. Jewel Posh wanted her children to have feelings towards religion and the religious institution and felt she had succeeded by their total family involvement. Myra Cohen said that through the sisterhood she found a “spiritual home” in the Temple. For sure, a sense of belonging can be elicited in associating actively in any organization. A women’s organization certainly offers a sisterhood bond as well. Jewel Posh described the sisterhood as:

....somewhat like a family. We knew each other quite well. We spent a lot of time together. We didn’t love everybody and you don’t in a family but we knew each other and we knew the strength(s) of all our members and...also the inadequacies and we managed to get along.....it was a good feeling.³⁰¹

However, the feeling of belonging through membership in the sisterhood frequently extended into its affiliated synagogue institution. The sisterhood provided a ‘female family’ in and of itself and through the synagogue a more rounded fuller family with the inclusion of men and children. “I felt very much a part of it,” Esther Blaustein articulated, expressing many of the women’s outlooks, “Very much a part of the synagogue family and everything involved in the synagogue”. The religious affiliation and environment of the synagogue offered a more enriching experience for the women of the sisterhood.

³⁰⁰ Interviews, Jewel Posh and Mrs. Robins.

³⁰¹ Interview, Jewel Posh.

Cultural Context

The “modern woman” emerged in the 1920’s. The transformation from educated motherhood to wife-companion encompassed new ideas of femininity, as discussed previously by Sheila Rothman. The remedy for societies concern of the modern family’s survival at this time was love and affection and the burden of the responsibility was placed on wives. A new code of behaviour encouraged women to focus on their appearance and to be good hostesses. Marriage was to be central to their lives.³⁰² Middle and upper class American Jewish women’s lives adapted to the changing ideology. Like their non-Jewish counterparts they bobbed their hair and shortened their skirts. No longer involved in volunteer community social work and with available leisure time they sought new outlooks. Many in the community wondered if they would abandon religion.

In 1924 A. Irma Cohen, a faculty wife at Hebrew Union College, wrote an article titled “Judaism and the Modern Women” for the magazine of the National Council of Jewish Women *The Jewish Woman*. In it she described NCJW women’s experiences to arrive at the decision to not entirely discard religion. It narrates the life and problems of the “new woman” and her search for fulfillment and meaning. Her journey leads to drawing “understanding strength from the Synagogue” and to the task of “beautifying and consecrating (of) a Jewish home; for in the end she is the guardian of the future--at the same time providing the men of the morrow and saving for them their noblest treasures.”³⁰³ The quest for meaning of the NCJW women can be representative of Montreal women who joined Jewish organizations, especially the sisterhoods in terms of the synagogue and religion.

³⁰² Sheila Rothman, *Women’s Proper Place* 179-182.

³⁰³ Ann D. Braude “Jewish Women in the Twentieth Century: Building a Life in America” in *Women and Religion in America* Vol 2: 1900-1968 (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers 1986) 161.

Due to the bi-national, bi-linguistic quandary, the growing Montreal Jewish community was experiencing its “third solitude” position between the English and French cultures and was turning inward. The establishment of the Montreal Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in 1915 and subsequent withdrawal of the Jewish women volunteer organizations left women without an organized charitable venue. New attitudes about social services and the growth of the city wide organizations altered the nature of Jewish women’s sphere in Montreal. They turned inward toward their synagogues.

A change in ideology for Jewish women was imminent. A woman’s home was now to include her actual domicile and her synagogue. “...your priority is your children, your family and your home.” explained Rosetta Elkin, a sisterhood member of the Shaar Hashomayim Congregation, “And from that its spreads to the congregation.”³⁰⁴ At this time the Montreal synagogues were encouraging religious observance and increased participation. The rabbis endorsed women’s participation in the synagogue in the form of sisterhoods for several reasons. First, it was the hope of the rabbis that women would enhance observance both at home and in the community; and secondly that women’s involvement and allegiance to the synagogue would further men’s and children’s participation in the institution and synagogue growth. Due to their ongoing association with the United States Montreal rabbis were in all probability influenced by the “synagogue center” movement taking place. In fact, Rabbi Abramowitz used the term “family synagogue”, a premise of the movement, in his address at the Shaar Hashomayim sisterhood inauguration in 1921.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Rosetta Elkin, January 6, 2003.

In the next decades Montreal Jewish women became “hostesses” “supporting their congregational family”.³⁰⁵ The women who joined the sisterhoods were middle class housewives with families who had the leisure time to engage in volunteer activities. Their husbands were most often affiliated and active with the synagogue and supported their wives spending time on synagogue affairs. Women felt that it was a place where they could work with other women. It also served as a venue where they could work along side of or work together with their husbands, suggestive of the “wife-companion” image of the period. Concern for children’s religious education, always a priority for women, was a motive for women to join the sisterhood. The sisterhood helped the upkeep and growth of the synagogues’ religious schools and youth groups. Historian Felicia Herman described the congregation as a home with “mothers” (sisterhood members), “fathers” (synagogue or brotherhood members) and “children” (religious school students and youth groups).³⁰⁶ . This created a sense of family. Jewel Posh, a Temple Emanu-El sisterhood member, whose children and husband were also active, describes it as a sense of belonging, “I got a feeling that I belonged and belonging is very important to me. And I also felt that it was good for my family. It kept my family together.”³⁰⁷ Married women who were new to Montreal frequently joined the sisterhood of their newly affiliated synagogue as a means to meet people and in particular female friends. The sisterhood provided them with a new “family” and the synagogue as an extended family. Some women had family historical allegiance to institutions. Esther Blaustein’s family was involved from the time of the foundation of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation.

³⁰⁵ Felicia Herman, “From Priestess to Hostess” 166

³⁰⁶ Ibid 164

³⁰⁷ Interview with Jewel Posh, January 3, 2003.

Her mother was president of the sisterhood in the 1920's and 1930's.³⁰⁸ Following family tradition and in particular a mother's footsteps was frequently a factor for membership for the second and third generation sisterhood women.

The concept of "home" and "family" underlay the endeavours of the Montreal sisterhoods to a large extent adapting their domestic expertise to the synagogue setting. The three oldest Montreal synagogues had distinguished histories and wished to maintain their heritage and prestigious role in the community. The women took pride in their synagogue as they would in their home. The sisterhoods strove to assist in this goal by making their synagogues both functional and 'haimisheh' (homey). Through fundraising efforts they donated substantial amounts of money to help defray expenses, for relocation, and for the upkeep of the edifices. In 1922 The Shaar Hashomayim expressed its gratitude by giving the women the responsibility for the furnishings for their new synagogue. This was an honour for in general the decision as to how the donated money was to be spent was usually in the hands of the male executive lay committees.

This is not to say that women were not financially autonomous. The women did raise money for specific synagogue enhancements of their choice, such as equipping the kitchen, purchasing new chairs and new curtains, and furnishing the library. These embellishments were appropriately within women's domestic realm and were often done in combination with their beautification tasks of flower decorations, the maintenance of the Ark, decorating the Sukkah and designing Torah covers. The fruits of these activities imparted a warm inviting atmosphere in the synagogue. Additional ways to maintain social ties and foster 'familial' synagogue feelings consisted of sending birthday and anniversary notes and letters of sympathy or congratulations to members.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Esther Blaustein, December 18, 2002.

The westward demographic move of the Jewish population created the problem of decreased membership. In addition when the synagogues did relocate new members had to be persuaded to join. Encouraging synagogue membership was another duty the sisterhood women assumed. To attract young members nurseries were started so that the children could be left with a qualified person while they attended services. In both situations, the welcoming and familial environment created by the sisterhood was considered an attractive feature. Bazaars, teas, dances, and lectures are just a few examples of the array of the social and cultural activities which they sponsored and designed to pique the interest of the new community and generate membership.

Sisterhood women were those who transferred their concerns from charitable venues to the Jewish sphere of the synagogue and those who felt it was the realm where they could best contribute to the continuation of Jewish ideals other than or in addition to the home. The mutual need of the women and of the synagogues in this period lead women to reassess their role and status in synagogue life and affairs. The sisterhood served the purpose of both entities. In the sisterhood women could practice Judaism through their good works. They could gain moral satisfaction from knowing that their contribution and participation would help preserve Judaism in answer to Jewish society's call to women to do so. Furthermore the organization could function as a self-education agency for women to learn. The synagogues wanted women's participation in order to help maintain and increase involvement and membership and to create a family community centre. Hence, the sisterhood organization was an acceptable vehicle for women's synagogue participation both to the women and the institution. Comparable to American sisterhoods very little difference existed between the different denominations of Orthodox,

Conservative (traditional) and Reform Montreal sisterhoods.³⁰⁹ They were all structured basically along similar lines. Their objectives, ideology and rhetoric closely resembled each other. They engaged in the same activities, holding teas, luncheons and bazaars, equipping the kitchen, decorating the sanctuary and organizing classes. Where they diverged was to how best promote ritual observance.³¹⁰

Although the sisterhood provided an opportunity for Montreal Jewish women to participate and be more active in synagogue life, they did not challenge prevailing notions about women's special nature or her 'separate' and 'domestic' sphere of communal work. They, similar to their American counterparts, made these assumptions an inherent part of their ideology and vocabulary.³¹¹ This is not surprising as they kept close ties to their national organizations attending the conventions and utilizing their ideas and detailed handbooks and guidebooks. The national organizations emphasized service and support to the synagogue and the practice of Jewish rituals and observances in the home and synagogue. The writings of the NFTS promoted furthering the religious spirit of Reform Judaism through the extension of their domestic responsibilities from the home into the congregation and community. The Women's League handbooks "The Three Pillars" and "The Jewish Home Beautiful" outlined symbols and ceremonies with accompanied explanations in order to present Jewish practice imbued with Jewish ideals and understanding. The significance of the themes and ideology were also conveyed and reiterated to Montreal women through their own official sisterhood mandates, bulletin and dedication messages and programs. The recording secretary of the Shaar

³⁰⁹ Jenna Joselit notes very little difference between the three dominations in her study, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class Jewish American Woman".

³¹⁰ This is an area that would be interesting for further examination.

³¹¹ Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman" 223.

Hashomayim sisterhood considered it important to include in the sisterhood notes the vital point of Rabbi Abramowitz's address at the "Jewish Home Beautiful Pageant, "as long as the Jewish home remains a sanctuary of beauty, the Jewish people would survive"³¹² As Jenna Joselit notes from examination of national organization material that "nowhere....does one find even a hint of implied criticism or demurral."³¹³

³¹² SHCA, Notes of Shaar Hashomayim Sisterhood, 1941.

³¹³ Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Jewish Woman," 223.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the introduction a significant difference of opinion was noted between Pamela Nadell and Rita Simon and Jenna Joselit. They held opposing views as to the influence of sisterhoods on American women's roles and power. In conclusion, I will discuss the two divergent judgments and how my research of their Canadian counterparts supports each view. In doing so, I will summarize some of my findings, raising questions that have not been answered in this study.

Pamela Nadell and Rita Simon in their study of the Reform sisterhoods in the United States comment that the actions of the NFTS were influenced by intersections of American life and culture. They pointed to the debates about suffrage, the meaning of women's votes and the emergence of new opportunities for middle and upper class women in the spheres of education, the professions and the labor force. The rabbis and their wives even took part debating with one another about women's roles and women's ordination. They further claim that the Reform sisterhoods through the influence of the NFTS extended the sphere of women's roles in the synagogue. This was done through their ideological concerns and pioneering activities, such as women conducting and leading summer services and occasionally giving sermons. Not only did these help change the expectations of women's roles, they facilitated their leaders to envision new ones for the future generation of women. A vision that they believe was inspired in this period of activism was the call for the ordination of rabbis in 1961.³¹⁴

On the other hand, Jenna Joselit, as previously noted, expresses an opposing view concluding, "As forces for change within the American Jewish community, the

³¹⁴ Nadell and Simon, "Ladies of the Sisterhood" 69-71. Sally Priesand became the first woman in America to be ordained a rabbi in 1972.

sisterhoods were negligible factors.” She disagrees with the assertions of some sisterhood women that women gained power “via the sisterhood, of being propelled into the synagogue boardroom through the synagogue kitchen”.³¹⁵ Her standpoint is on evidence based on the unchanged social structure of the synagogue and the larger Jewish community and the fact that the sisterhood as an institution did not lobby for change or increased opportunities for Jewish women in either arena. Her evaluation is in terms of power and decision making and does not regard the sisterhood programs as power but rather as outreach. Still, she does believe that they were a worthwhile organization serving certain needs of women at that particular time in acceptable forms and boundaries to both men and women. Each argument has developed from a different perspective and has valid points in application to the Montreal sisterhoods.

The allegorical image of the ‘woman of valor’ as a symbol of proper Jewish womanhood was used interchangeably by both males and females in Montreal. Synagogue bulletins and dedication booklets frequently employed the metaphor in reference to the sisterhood. In the 1946 Commemoration Booklet the Men’s Club president wrote:

As King Solomon’s “Aischess Chay-yil” is the good and dutiful Jewess that is eternal, so in our own day and hour, it is right and becoming to compliment the work and efforts of the Officers and Members of the Spanish and Portuguese “Shearith Israel” Sisterhood of Montreal. Their history and co-operation stem back to the year 1768 for without them there could not have been founded the holy and sacred synagogue we all so much adore.....They have been valorous and helpful and resourceful and successful. By their noble and dignified example they have instilled, and opportunely so, both courage and loyalty and faith and hope. By their works and achievements the Cause of Israel is forever enriched and glorified”³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Joselit, “The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class American Woman,” 223.

³¹⁶ CJCNA, The Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Commemoration Book, 1890-1946.

Another refers to the sisterhood as 'mothers' commenting that "Perhaps the finest compliment to mothers is found the 31st Chapter of the Book of Proverbs, where she is referred to as (Esheth Chayil) "a woman of spiritual strength".³¹⁷ As the women's sphere of boundaries extended from the home into the synagogue the rhetoric of continuity enabled and at the same time obscured the changes in the gender norms. The powerful symbol of "woman of valor" was not only preserved as women's sphere was renegotiated and reinvented but reinforced and glorified. As the men supported the women's entrance into new arenas such as the synagogue they claimed that the women were being true to the ideals of the women in their past. The women themselves accepted the image and the accompanying definitional meaning posited by Beth Wenger of "enabler, behind the scenes agents" as part of the new functions of the sisterhood.³¹⁸ Service to the synagogue and motivating their husbands and children in the religious aspect of their lives were primary goals of their agenda. As one Montreal sisterhood member stated about the work of the sisterhood, "Behind every good man is a women". In general, the Montreal sisterhoods functioned within acceptable bounds. They incorporated both Jewish and Canadian views of proper behaviour; behaviour which did not endanger prevailing gender roles. The Temple Emanu-El sisterhood's initiation of a Women's Shabbat and Luncheon involving a sermon was a small step forward to egalitarianism but was essentially performed within non-threatening boundaries. Theoretically the Reform movement called for women's equality in the synagogue but in reality it was not in

³¹⁷ JPL, "The Beth David Sisterhood Story", 50th Anniversary Booklet 1888-1938, 19.

³¹⁸ Wenger, "Jewish Women and Voluntarism: Beyond the Myth of Enablers," 16.

operation.³¹⁹ The basic structure of the synagogue was not altered by the sisterhoods. They did not change women's roles within the synagogue or within the larger community in Montreal during this time. Their community work was minimal and largely in the form of donations or intermittent cooperative work with other organizations. Even the more dynamic community interfaith occasional discussions of women's roles of the Temple Emanu-El sisterhood effected no notable visible changes. Yet, undercurrents of change were being affected.

Although the Montreal sisterhoods may not have lobbied for change or increased opportunities within the synagogue or the greater community, they were an influential and positive factor in individual women's lives and in synagogue institutional life. The sisterhood organization brought women into the synagogue making them a visible entity. It offered them the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities and dedication (which was equal to the men's). Their involvement in various facets of the institution helped prepare the way for future opportunities and advancements. Historian Karen Blair has argued domestic feminism's moderate approach to effecting change in women's roles was more successful than more militant ones (such as the suffragists) because changes were brought about while appearing non-threatening.³²⁰ The sisterhoods in Montreal used such a moderate approach using 'proper' channels. Although it did not bring about radical changes to which Blair was referring, it affected some transformation and imparted vision. Their programs became an integral part of annual synagogue activity and critical

³¹⁹ Karla Goldman documents the ambivalence of women's equality in Reform Judaism in America and what would happen to gender roles in its full implementation in *Beyond The Synagogue Gallery* and "The Ambivalence of Reform Judaism: Kaufmann Kohler and the Ideal Jewish Woman," *American Jewish History* 79 (Summer 1990): 492.

³²⁰ Karen Blair "The Club Women as Feminists" in Faith Rogow, "Gone to Another Meeting" 71. Karen Blair was writing in reference to the General Federation of Women's Clubs which she asserts did effect significant change for women's autonomy by rendering the notion that women's place is in the home obsolete.

to the flourishing synagogue organizational life. They sustained the community in the congregations and helped create novel frameworks as the congregations moved westward to new areas and the suburbs. The Reform mother-daughter Shabbat programs in which women lead their own services and gave sermons gave insight to women's leadership ability from the pulpit. Fundraising and allocation of the monies changed both women's and men's perception of women's competence to handle money. Sisterhood members sitting on Boards of Trustees certainly gave women an image of respectability and served as a precedent to their future decision making power in the synagogue institution. The sisterhood representatives on the Temple Board of Trustees as advisors in this era were appointed not elected. Although the vote of two women could not yield power to make changes, their participation gave them a presence and voice. At the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Irene Wolff's seat on the Board of Trustees in 1928 and two women in 1938 may have afforded similar possibilities.³²¹

Jenna Joselit's refutation of claims of women in the first half of the century "being propelled into the boardroom via the sisterhood" and "the development of the power of the American Jewess in the life of the congregation has been experienced through Sisterhood experience", arguing that these were realities that were minimal is legitimate. Firstly, the statements were sweeping using vigorous language and secondly women did not attain significant measures of leadership or governing power within that time period either in the United States or Montreal. In fact, the sisterhoods did not really have an actual focused sense of themselves as an organization in this era. They did not preserve their records nor did they document their history. An attempt was made by the Shaar

³²¹ CJCNA, Minutes of the Spanish and Portuguese. The minutes stated that board members remained the same for the next year. I was not able to find documentation at this time whether she served for more years or whether any other woman did during this decade.

Hashomayim Auxiliary in 1953. A project to keep an Auxiliary Record Book was launched with the purpose of recording the achievements and history. However, there is no evidence that it was ever completed.³²² It was not until 1996 that the sisterhood once again took the initiative to write its story. Similarly, the history of the Spanish and Portuguese Sisterhood was not noted until Esther Blaustein chose to do so in 1993 to commemorate their 75th Anniversary. Recognition or recording of their own achievements was for the most part in occasional dedication booklets with sparse detail. However, their persistent involvement, visibility, and presence did lead to gradual acceptance and changes and allowed the creation of visions for the future. Hence, Pamela Nadell and Rita Simon's position that sisterhoods did create vision and influence change and movement toward equality for women in the synagogue and religious life does have validity in a broad more far-reaching sense for the Montreal sisterhoods.

The sisterhoods can be seen as an organization along feminist lines in a fashion. Firstly, it recognized and responded to the needs of its middle-class members. Women were seeking an outlet outside of the home which would bridge the conflicting demands of home and society. The sisterhood provided a fulfilling and viable outlet in multiple ways for women in Montreal.³²³ An opportunity for meaningful and responsible work was offered. It enhanced their personal sense of involvement and self-worth. Their status was raised as they took pride in their leadership and accomplishments in the synagogue

³²² Shaar Hashomayim Archives. It was to record its history since its inception and into the future, to be used as a guide for reference and as a guide to the workers, and to have it as a memento for interest and inspiration. Loose pages from an auxiliary report reveal that a bounded leather book with engraved title was presented to the current president, Sadie Brown at an annual meeting in 1954 but that material and data was still to be collected before starting on the book itself. The sisterhood does have a memento book of the years 1951- 1954 with clippings, photographs and data that was possibly compiled from the material which was supposed to be used for the larger project. Two books of the Auxiliary's minutes from the years in the 1930's and 1940's were also just recently discovered.

³²³ Joselit, "The Special Sphere of the Middle-Class the American Jewish Woman," 223.

and community work and were awarded recognition.³²⁴ It was also an agent for education at a time when women's education was just being accepted. Through the sisterhoods, the women became more knowledgeable and articulate in various areas. By means of classes, speeches, the national organizations' written material and synagogue preparations and events for the annual holidays and festivals, they became more Judaically educated. In order to function efficiently as an organization, the sisterhood required skills in management and financial matters. Meetings had to be planned and led, events organized, sisterhood administrative decisions made and financial records kept. Not only were the women able to improve the skills they already possessed they were also able to learn new ones. Another contribution to their education were programmes comprising of book reviews, current events, and public speaking which expanded their knowledge about secular issues related to the public sphere.

Feelings of female unity, comraderie, bonding and belonging emanated within the sisterhoods. This was a significant factor in the building of their new self-image and self-confidence. It was a place where they could socialize with other women comfortably. The women enjoyed working together as a women's organized group with a set agenda and towards common goals. In the sisterhood, mutual help was customary and they could develop a sense of effectiveness. However, the Montreal sisterhoods had limited interaction and regular sharing of ideas between their local synagogue institutions. Each seemed to operate independently for the most part. They had a stronger vertical connection with the national organizations rather than a local horizontal one with each other. When the eastern regional branch of the Women's League was founded in the late 1940's the Spanish and Portuguese sisterhood did not join. The Reform Temple Emanu-

³²⁴ Paula Hyman, "The Volunteer Organizations: Vanguard or Rear Guard" *Lilith* 5 1978, 17.

El had regional affiliation with sisterhoods in the United States in close proximity and very little with those in Ontario. Perhaps, one explanation for this occurrence could be the different denominations of the three studied. This conundrum could be explored in further research.

Secondly, they brought a distinctive voice into the realm of the synagogue. Working from a specific female perspective the sisterhoods implemented programs geared for women and different from those of males. This was apparent in their work, educational and social agendas. As advisors on the board they offered suggestions and opinions which presented alternate perceptions and helped balance points of view in the governing realm. They also added a feminine touch throughout the synagogue in the course of their ideas, work and programs. Although their role may have been limited and contained it allowed a presence of female energy and contribution. Most of their programs and implementations were successful and added something substantial to the synagogue in terms of its embellishments, growth, and general flourishing. Women's serious dedication to the establishment was demonstrated as well. Hence, they became a vital part of the institution.

Lastly, the sisterhoods carved a "niche" for themselves within the Montreal Jewish women's organizations and in the religious life of the community. Although the other women's organizations were based on the Jewish religious tenet of charity they were secular in nature. The particular unique characteristic with which the sisterhood was endowed was a religious one. The sisterhoods granted a form of religious participation and expression for women. It's attachment to a religious institution assured this feature. Whether it was in the form of doing good works, creating and participating in annual

holiday celebrations, becoming educated in Jewish studies, being involved in the synagogue religious school, or prompting family or community religious participation it contained religious sentiments and significance. Their flurry of activity and dedication demonstrates that they had been waiting to find a way to contribute to the synagogue and express their personal commitment in the religious public arena. Now they were able to transfer their sacred responsibilities of charity and maintaining and transmitting Judaism which were traditionally carried out in the private sphere of the family and home to a public religious venue and new institutional concept of 'family' and 'home'. Through the sisterhood the women found an additional religious or 'spiritual' home. The religious nature of the sisterhood is captured in a 1938 anniversary booklet:

The accomplishments of the Sisterhood are a tribute to all officers both past and present as well as to all members who by their zeal for *holy work*, enabled the Sisterhood to progress and flourish. May the almighty crown their work for religion and Judaism with success everywhere...³²⁵

It is indeed apparent that the Sisterhoods created a female culture, community and religious world for women in Montreal in the first half of the twentieth century. Although they evolved differently and later than those in the United States, particularly in New York where the unified Sisterhoods of Personal Service functioned, they were very similar in their ideals, form, and activities. Seeming to work within acceptable boundaries, the sisterhoods were accepted by the more conservative/traditional Montreal Jewish community.

This leads us to consider the story of the congregational sisterhoods in the next decades continuing the search for women's participation in the Canadian Jewish

³²⁵ JPL, Beth David, "The Sisterhood Story", 50th Anniversary Booklet 1888-1938, 23. The italics are my emphasis on the sacred/religious aspects embedded in the sisterhood.

experience. In this vein, future research would do well to access the fuller story of sisterhoods in Canada. There are several areas for potential investigation that would be ideal as a starting point for this study. We need to chronicle the changes that occurred in the sisterhood organizations. Through this recording the above debate of their impact on women's roles in the synagogue and community can be more clearly discerned. A significant factor to monitor is whether the sisterhoods changed according to the needs of women. It would be interesting to explore the effect feminism had on the sisterhoods. Did the fact that there are women in the pulpit and on the synagogue boards in decision-making capacities affect sisterhoods' position? As discussed previously they filled a niche and imparted a distinctive voice within the synagogues. With the movement towards women's equality in the religious institutions, a component to investigate is the possible obscurity or loss of the female niche and feminine distinctive voice that the sisterhood afforded. The issue of whether they are still needed or important requires addressing. Overall, the challenge for further research is how and why did sisterhoods continue, why are they still here, what purpose are they serving in contemporary times and how do they continue to affect women's lives and the Jewish community in Canada.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Biography

Full Name (birth and married)

Birth date and place

Marital status

Personal Education

When did you join the sisterhood?

What kind of activities is your sisterhood involved in?

Which activities were (are) you active or involved in?

Who were (are) your friends in the sisterhood?

Why did you join the sisterhood? (motivation, goals, etc.)

Do you belong to any other organizations?

If yes: Which organizations?

What activities were you involved in or jobs did you perform for them?

Do or did you put more time or effort into the sisterhood than the others? Why or why not?

If no: Why?

Was your mother a member of a sisterhood?

If yes: Which one?

What kind of activities was the sisterhood involved in and your mother specifically?

Why do you think your mother became a member?

What do you know about your sisterhood's history?

Do you think the sisterhood was different in the past: 1) from mother's time to own
or 2) from earlier to own time
or 3) from own time to present

What role do you think the sisterhood played/plays in your life and in the life of your synagogue and community?

Appendix B

MONTREAL SYNAGOGUE SISTERHOODS: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE MONTREAL JEWISH COMMUNITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Donna Goodman of the Department of Religion at Concordia University and Dr. Norma Baumel Joseph acting as project supervisor..

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to gather the history and memories of Montreal synagogue sisterhoods and the role they played in Jewish women's lives and in the Jewish community. This information would then be used to: a) record the formation and early development of sisterhoods b) show their differentiation from other women's organizations c) assist in the understanding of Montreal Jewish women's sphere and sense of community, identity, and religion.

That this research will take place in private home and will involve my participation in a series of taped and individual or group interviews is agreeable to me. I also accept that the data from this study may be published.

I would like my participation to be (please initial your choice):

CONFIDENTIAL (the researcher will know but not disclose my identity)

NON-CONFIDENTIAL (my identity will be revealed in study results)

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time. The purpose of this study is clear to me and I believe that there are no hidden motives of which I have not been informed.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE

WITNESS SIGNATURE

DATE

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Michelle Hoffman, compliance officer, Concordia University at (514) 848-7481 or at michelle.hoffman@concordia.ca.