

## ABOUT JEWISH HISTORY

The Jewish Community in Saint John began with the arrival of Solomon and Alice Hart from England in 1858. The Harts, a wealthy family of tobacco manufacturers, established a tobacco factory in Saint John and were also influential in founding the first synagogue in 1898, the Ahavith Achim or Brotherly Love. Alice Hart founded the Daughters of Israel, a Jewish ladies' organization created to assist the poor and immigrants to the city. She also ran the Hebrew School and a nursery. The Harts' daughter, Elizabeth, was the first Jewish bride when, in 1882, she married her cousin, Louis Green, also from England.

The 1890s were a time of persecution for Jews in Eastern Europe; several were expelled from their homes in the Russian Empire and made up the "second wave" of Jewish immigrants to Saint John. Interestingly, most of the Jews in New Brunswick can trace their ancestors to the town of Dorbian, Lithuania which was wiped out by the Nazis during the Holocaust and never re-established. These settlers could speak only Yiddish and wore traditional Jewish clothing. Burial records indicate that many immigrants died on Partridge Island, a quarantine station in the Saint John Harbour.

A second synagogue was established in 1906 to accommodate the growing community and in 1918; the two congregations joined and purchased the present-day synagogue, the Shaarei Zedek or Gates of Righteousness. The building, constructed in the 1860s, was originally a Calvinist Church. At the time of purchase, the community was Orthodox in its practice. In the 1950s the community adopted the more modern Conservative movement.

The once thriving community of 300 families, whose "Golden Years" were the 1920s-1960s, has decreased to less than 45 families. Since the 1960s the children of these families have been moving to bigger cities like Toronto and Montreal.

In 1986 The Saint John Jewish Historical Museum was created in fulfillment of the dream of Marcia Koven to preserve the Jewish heritage of Saint John, and it is the only Jewish museum in Atlantic Canada. It started out modestly as a museum with two rooms on the bottom level of the Jewish Community Centre. In 1987, the museum was recognized with an award from the American Association for State and Local History and since then we have grown to encompass the three floors of the Jewish Community Centre with several additional galleries, a library and an extensive archival collection. The internationally renowned Museum has received several awards for its permanent and seasonal exhibits.

The museum has in many respects become the public face of the Jewish community in Saint John. Its primary role is to collect, preserve and display the history of the Jewish community of Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. Visitors are welcomed from around the world. In addition to exhibits, the museum also has a research library and archives. The Saint John Jewish Historical Museum has received awards from the American Association for State and Local History, (1987), The Church and Synagogue Library Association, (1996), and the Province of New Brunswick, (2000).