



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of Southern Alberta

William Epstein – One Calgarian’s Role in the Establishment of the State of Israel



By Jack Switzer

On the night of November 29, 1947, William Epstein, a former Calgarian, was among the thousands of Jews in New York celebrating the United Nation’s acceptance of a partition plan for Palestine, in effect approving the formation of a Jewish state when the British Mandate, set to terminate, was over.

Bill Epstein was not merely a celebrant. He was in the General Assembly chamber for the debate on Resolution 131 (the partition plan) and heard the speeches of Zionist luminaries like David Ben Gurion and Abba Eban.

He was also an important participant. Bill Epstein was a United Nations official, part of its Middle East secretariat, and it was his reports and proposals that formed much of Resolution 131’s content.

(Zionists considered the UN vote a major victory, but Palestinians rejected the partition plan. Fighting between Arabs and Jews began almost immediately. But within six months, on May 14, 1948, with the final British pull-out, Zionist leaders declared their UN-endorsed territories as the State of Israel, and again won approval of the world body.)

Bill Epstein grew up in a Zionist milieu. He was born in Calgary in 1912, the second of four children of Harry Louis and Marcia Belle Epstein. H.L. Epstein came from Russia to Canada in 1907, reached Calgary in 1910, and ran the Grand Cigar Store for many years. He served as president of several Jewish organizations, including Congregation House of Jacob and the Zionist council.



Calgary’s Epstein family at University of Alberta graduation day, Edmonton, 1935. (L to R): William Epstein, LLB, his sister Betty, father Harry Louis Epstein, mother Marcia Belle Epstein, and brother Samuel Epstein, B.Sc. Photo courtesy of William Epstein.

Marcia Epstein also had Zionist credentials. She was a Geffen, one of Calgary’s very early Jewish families, whose members were active in every phase of the city’s Zionist spectrum.

Young Bill Epstein attended public schools and after-school classes at the Talmud Torah, where his father was a perennial executive member.

After high school, Epstein attended the University of Alberta, earning a BA in 1933 and a law degree in 1935.¹

He was an outstanding student, winning the law faculty’s gold medal. He won a Jewish-student oratory contest in 1934, with a speech titled “Dreams and Ideals of Israel,” about both Israel as the Jewish people and Israel as the future Jewish homeland.

Back in Calgary, Bill Epstein articulated with prominent lawyer A.H Smith, KC,

who later became a Conservative MP.

He went into private practice and then joined the Calgary office of the provincial Attorney General. In 1937 he appeared before the Privy Council in London; at 25, he was the youngest lawyer ever to appear before the Commonwealth’s highest court.

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This issue of *Discovery* is sponsored by Jewish War Veterans of Canada, Post #2, Calgary. Their support is greatly appreciated.

William Epstein

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For several months in 1936-37 Epstein studied international law at the London School of Economics, as the recipient of an IODE Overseas Scholarship.

His participation in the Calgary Jewish community revolved around Zionism. He frequently spoke to non-Jewish groups about anti-Semitism, the Nazi threat, and the solutions offered by Zionism. In 1941-42 he was president of the Sharon Zionist Club, and a member of the United Palestine Appeal management committee. As the city's most desirable Jewish bachelor, Bill Epstein was also very active socially.²

Epstein joined the Canadian army as a private in an artillery regiment, and soon became an officer. In England, Captain Epstein began defending fellow soldiers in court-martial proceedings, so effectively that army brass had him transferred to London as a senior military lawyer.

Late in 1945, Epstein got a telephone call from the Canadian High Commissioner, offering to recommend him for a high-level job with the group that was working to establish the United Nations.

He immediately accepted, and began work in London for the Security Council Department of the new international organization. About the same time he married an English girl, Edna Frances Hyman. The newlyweds soon moved to New York with the UN.

A special session of the UN in early 1947 saw the creation of a special committee to deal with the troublesome Palestine issue. Bill Epstein was one of three advisors attached to the group – UNSCOP, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. He was the "Jewish" advisor, assigned to work with the Jewish Agency, the pre-state representative of Jews in Palestine.

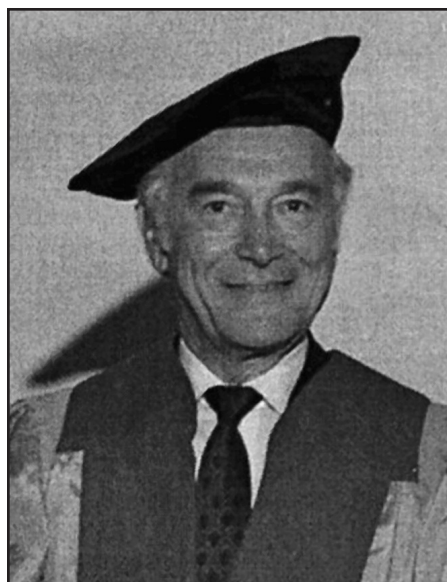
The other advisors were an Arab and an Englishman. All were familiar with the disputed area and its problems. Epstein was the only advisor to recommend partition of Palestine, a proposal favoured by UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie.

The 11 member UNSCOP delegation (including Ivor Strong of Canada) visited Palestine in June of 1947. At the last

minute Epstein and his Arab colleague, considered not to be objective, were barred from the trip. On August 30th UNSCOP tabled its recommendations; seven of the eleven members favored partition, and used Bill Epstein's report as its basis.

The November 29 General Assembly vote confirmed the partition plan, and as noted, Israeli Independence, a long-awaited victory for the Zionist movement, came a few months later, in May of 1948.

Bill Epstein remained at the UN's Israel desk, officially as a Political Officer



William Epstein, Doctor of Laws, University of Calgary, 1971. Source – University of Calgary website.

for the UN Mediator Staff for Palestine. His appointment in 1950 as permanent chief of the Middle East Section was opposed by Arab governments, and he was transferred – made chief of the UN's disarmament section.

He continued as the UN point man for nuclear disarmament and arms control until his official retirement in 1971. He wrote numerous articles and books on these topics. Epstein also served as chairman of the Canadian Pugwash Group. It is for his disarmament work that he has been most lauded.

Bill Epstein never really retired. He became a consultant to various United Nations projects and represented the Secretary General at many disarmament conferences. He was a Canadian dele-

gate to the United Nations for several years, and had the ear of several prime ministers, notably Pierre Trudeau.

Epstein never forgot his Calgary roots, according to his friend and legal colleague Robert Barron. He visited his native city occasionally when his family was still living here. In 1971 he received the first honorary Doctor of Laws degree to be granted by the University of Calgary. The University of Alberta gave him a similar honour in 1984.

In 1990 Bill Epstein was made an Officer of the Order of Canada.

William Harold Epstein died in 2001, aged 88. At his funeral his son Mark gave examples of his father's devotion to Judaism and to Israel. (His critics were right in one respect – Epstein was not impartial.)

"Dad was a Jew with a strong Old Testament sense of right and wrong ... these core beliefs underscored everything he did. He truly believed that we are commanded by God to understand right and wrong and to act accordingly. This belief crossed many political lines.

"As a Jew, Israel was the focus of his life and work. ... In 1948, when he was in Greece working on the first Arab-Israeli peace talks, he learned of secret settlement plans that would have been disastrous for Israel. Dad decided the Israelis had the right to know and to know fast. So he sent the plans out with Mom and me. She carried them, but I'm told that at the Athens airport I did my part, screaming and bellowing to distract the police and immigration agents.

"Decades later, (in 1981) Dad concluded that the Iraqi nuclear effort was serious, nearly successful, and a clear threat to Israel. So he travelled to Israel and presented his views to the Israeli leadership. They said to him, 'If this is as serious as you suggest, what should we do?' Dad said he could only present the facts, the decisions were up to them. We all know – and should be thankful for – what the Israelis decided." (In a preemptive attack, Israeli air force jets bombed and disabled Iraq's nuclear reactor.)

In 1949 Bill Epstein received a letter

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Girls Just Want to Have Fun: Mem Zadick Gimmel Sorority (1941-1960)

By Maxine Fischbein

For more than two decades, many Jewish girls in Calgary became sisters in organizations mirroring the popular sororities of the day. A few photographs and a handful of archival sources confirm the existence of Jewish sororities as early as 1937 with the establishment of Chi Omega Chi.

Other local Jewish sororities included Ki Lo Noeh, Aleph Gimmel Mem, Sheen Raysh Fae, Aleph Zadik Shayne, Beta Phi Gamma and Phi Lambda Chi.

While a large number of former sorority members still live in Calgary, detailed information about the sorority era, which seems to have ended in the early 1960s, seemed elusive until Ruth Ullman brought the original log of the Mem Zadick Gimmel Sorority to the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta in December 2007.

Mem Zadick Gimmel (MZG) was established by founding members including Doreen Cohen and Helen Davids in 1941.

The organization's burgundy log, its cover emblazoned with gold letters, has yielded precious remembrances of a bygone era. The album, with its photos, reports and mementos, provides insight into the lives of teenaged girls and rare glimpses into social events spanning two decades.

The first leaders of the sorority were Vivian Florence (President) and Martha Levitt (Secretary-Treasurer) who served in 1941 - 1942. Tragically, the next entry concerning Martha Levitt is an obituary. She passed away on March 14, 1942 due to complications following surgery.

Some of the words in the pledge recited by MZG initiates suggest that relationships between high school girls were probably every bit as turbulent in the 1940s as they are today: "I pledge to put aside all petty prejudices and grievances, minor hates, and dislikes and swear that I will not bear false witness against my sorority sister."

Handwritten and typed reports through the years refer to such pledges,



Mem Zadick Gimmel Sorority Members, 1943-1944. Top Row, Left to Right: Goldie Dworkin, Annette Ravvin, Helen Davids, Frances Belzberg, Sylvia Shapiro. Middle Row, L-R: Esta Gurevitch, Pauline Nager (Secretary), Vivian Florence (President), Anne Switzer (Treasurer), Sylvia Baren. Bottom Row, L-R: Betty Loshaek, Marion Davis, Doreen Cohen. Photo courtesy of Anne Brodsky. Photographer: Hess.

solemnly recited by newly initiated members at candlelit ceremonies. The seriousness of those moments soon gave way to fun and games.

An undated newspaper clipping (c. 1942) mentions that the "Mem Zadek [sic] Gimmel" Sorority [of or at] Central and Western Canada High Schools "went through the throes of an initiation on downtown streets Wednesday night and came up with five new members.

"The sorority sisters dressed their victims in weird costumes according to the unusual initiation ideas ..."

Photographs confirm that the girls were a wonder to behold. They wore diapers "... (over other clothes) and similar apparel" and "played ring-around-a-rosie on 8th Ave., ushered passengers on and off street cars, engaged in a water fight and played cards on the sidewalk."

Identified in the brief article and captured in some humorous photographs are Sylvia Baren, Helen Davids,

Esta Gurevitch, Goldie Dworkin and Frances Belzberg.

In the log book is an August 26, 1942 letter from Koimie Belzberg on behalf of Aleph Zadik Aleph. Belzberg extends an invitation to the young ladies of MZG to join their male peers at a summer tournament – the actual sport is never mentioned – "not only for the benefit of A.Z.A. members, but also for the enjoyment of all the local girls."

The proposed activities for the weekend include a Thursday evening dance at the Jewish community building, Friday house parties at the homes of Ethel Torchinsky and Diana Davidman, a Saturday afternoon swimming party, a Saturday night hay ride and wiener roast, and a Sunday night semi-formal dance "with Ronnie Senkow and his orchestra."

Belzberg urges the young ladies to "... come stag to these affairs", and bring their friends.

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Girls Just Want to Have Fun

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"There will be a dating committee on hand to help with the introductions. Pass the word around," writes Belzberg.

The cashmere sweaters and pearls of the 1940s may have given way to the denim and pin curls of the 1950s, but the underlying theme always remained the same. The girls wanted to have fun. The evidence is clear in photographs of young sweethearts, invitations to dances and parties, and fading construction paper cut-outs that once hung among the decorations at annual Halloween and Valentine parties.

Letters of thanks and charitable receipts tell us that MZG members also supported community organizations and causes including Youth Aliyah, Jewish National Fund, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) and the Zionist Organization of Canada.

In a 1945 receipt from the Department of Veteran Affairs, sorority members are thanked for a "gift of \$40.00 in cash to be used for the purchase of furniture for the benefit of the patients of the new Colonel Belcher Hospital."

A decade later, a March 1955 letter

from the Canadian Red Cross Society thanks MZG for the "kind and generous donation to the children in the Red Cross Hospital."

Another letter, written in May 1956, expresses the gratitude of NCJW members to MZG for their donation to the "ship-a-box program." In it, Calgary Section corresponding secretary Eunice Bloom writes, "In closing may I say on behalf of our organization how thrilled we are to see young women so interested in helping to better conditions for those more unfortunate than ourselves."

The young ladies, seemingly untroubled by misfortune, expressed gratitude through the years to the various mothers – always the moms – who offered their homes for various gatherings. The first of these expressions, a handwritten note, acknowledges Mrs. L. Loshak who gave her home for MZG's second anniversary celebration on Friday, November 12, 1943.

In another letter, dated December 11, 1954, Mrs. M. Katzin writes to MZG president Miriam Bleviss, "I was really overjoyed to receive such a beautiful gift

from your sorority, but you shouldn't have sent it. Thank you very much."

Many more gifts were exchanged as sorority members celebrated each other's marriages. The first of many thank you notes, on the personalized stationery of Helen and Gordon Signer, is pasted on a page devoted to the events of 1945 and 1946. Other wedding gifts and celebratory teas were acknowledged by Mrs. Leonard Slater, Pauline Nager and Lil Bleviss Zimmerman. The gifts – sometimes unidentified but nearly always described as "lovely" – included china and crystal.

Some alumna kept in touch with their MZG sisters even after they moved away as young brides or independent career women. Thus, the log contains correspondence like a 1947 Rosh Hashanah card from Pauline Nager, then living on Jervis Street in Vancouver.

Judy Serebrin wrote from her new home on Sherbrooke Street in Winnipeg. In the handwritten note, dated November 1, 1947, she thanks her sorority sisters for an unidentified but "lovely" gift and apologizes for having been too busy to write, citing "4 to 6 hours ward duty every day" in addition to "lectures and studying." It seems that Serebrin had morphed from sorority sister to nursing sister. In the same letter she brings her old MZG friends up to date on "Sorority sisters Goldie Dworkin and her sister Minnie", whom she sees often, and urges her sorority sisters back in Calgary to, "Keep up the standard of the M.Z.G. Sorority."

That standard mainly consisted of organizing social events. In 1946, the 4th Annual Kibitz Nite (sometimes spelled "night") was announced in an invitation that, in part, reads:

"Come Young, Come Old,
Come one, Come all!
Come Dancing at the Community
Hall".

New MZG members were in charge of the event, and the proceeds were used to plant trees in Palestine. A report on the party takes us back to a time when sandwiches were sold "two for a quarter." The 35 cent admission included a chance on



Mem Zadick Gimmel Sorority Members celebrate Valentine's Day at the Harris Skyrooms, February 14, 1949. Back Row, Left to Right: Cynthia Pearlman, Dina Davidman, Vivian Florence, Dora Lubinsky, Fran Bleviss, Eunice Bergman, Geta Gurevitch. Middle Row, L-R: Ida Gedeger, Rose Sheftel, Ida Goresht, Zelda Austin, Mildred Cahan, Helen Fishman. Front Row, L-R: Mona Shapiro, Rosalyn Katzin, Lil Belzberg, Betty Feldman, Betty Crystal. Photo courtesy of Ruth Ullman.

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the door prize, "a box of chocolates donated by Dora Lubinsky."

Raffle tickets, five cents apiece, brought the lucky (but unidentified) winner a pair of stockings donated by Frances Belzberg.

Seventy dollars was raised, \$50 of which was earmarked for the trees. Betty Baren arranged the purchase of 33 trees (those were the days!), and Lil Blevis represented the MZG Sorority at a Jewish National Fund banquet, held October 19, 1947, where Max Katzin presented a certificate acknowledging MZG's donation.

Annie Brodsky (nee Switzer), an early member of MZG, has vivid recollections of a dance organized and enjoyed by sorority members. The MZG Anniversary and Valentine Party was held at the Switzer family home in February of 1947.

A handwritten entry in the log book tells us that a dozen girls and their escorts attended the soiree, which featured prizes for novelty dances. "A delicious buffet supper was served."

Over six decades later, Brodsky remembers the event for more dramatic reasons. She must have really had her eye on the dance prize as she literally slid along the hardwood floors gracing her parents' home while dancing with her date, Leon Smehoff.

She doesn't recall actually winning a prize for her dance moves, but vividly remembers spending much of the evening in a somewhat less elegant pose. "Mom had to pick the slivers out of my *tuches*," recalls Brodsky, who can laugh about it 60 years later!

Brodsky and Helen Signer remember other MZG highlights, including pyjama parties with as many as five girls sleeping across pullout beds; wiener roasts at Sandy Beach; and selling war savings certificates at the request of MZG president Vivian Florence's father, Izzy.

Signer and Brodsky confirm what the clippings, photographs and handwritten or typed entries in the MZG log already strongly suggest: although the sorority was for Jewish girls, its events were almost entirely secular. Many of the girls were also members of Young Judaea and, later, B'nai Brith Girls.



Helen Davids (foreground) and sorority sister Esta Gurevitch frolic with an innocent passerby during a spirited MZG initiation, 1943. Photo courtesy of Ruth Ullman

Although there is a gap in the MZG records between 1950 and 1952, it seems that 1953-1954 was a busy year for the organization under the presidency of Leona Levitt. A typed report, presumably penned by Marsha Pearlman, keeper of the log, refers to three formal initiations held that year.

Highlights of the season included a Halloween party and a Valentine coffee party at the home of Lil Mendleman. Some details are captured in a typed entry that reads, in part: "Leona and Lil did a lovely job of decorating, and one of the highlights was a huge MZG made out of Valentine cards."

Another entry reminds time travelers how idiom has changed over the past half century when the author – most likely Marsha Pearlman – enthusiastically declares, "The party was gay from beginning to end, and all the girls made a special effort to see that everyone had a good time."

It seems that Cupid may have, in fact, visited that party. The very next item in the MZG log refers to a "Bride's Evening" honouring "all recent and soon-to-be sorority brides." That event was held at the home of Marsha Pearlman on Sunday, March 21, 1954 in honour of Lil Shackman Gurevitch, Miriam

Switzer Winston, Fran Bleviss and Rose Sheftel. Each received a crystal cream and sugar set which, one can safely assume, was "lovely."

We know that games were played. One, described as "especially successful", was a charade-style crowd-pleaser that saw guests acting out titles of songs.

Rose Sheftel "thanked the sorority on behalf of the girls and their husbands, or future husbands."

One of the most intriguing documents gracing the pages of the MZG log is a handwritten poem by Dave Zivot alluding to his bride-to-be, "Rosie" (Sheftel). In it, Zivot gives the young ladies of MZG some advice on how they, too, can get a man.

The poem, in part, reads:

*When your out on a date with a fellow,
Who you wish would propose that night,
Don't ration the love and the passion,
And read the menu\$ from the right
(price)*

*Some girls use lots of padding
To make things look like they ain't,
Others resort to the old stuff,
Like lipstick, powder and paint!*

*But here is my advice to you sisters,
If a man you would like to trap,
Don't paint and don't pad and don't
think your too sharp,
Just flatter the crazy sap!!*

A couple of years later the young women of MZG were hedging their bets by honing talents in addition to those specifically geared to snaring suitable mates.

On March 5, 1956, sorority members performed a community service, singing and dancing for the Friendship Club.

"We danced the Arabian Horah, and the plain horah, and sang *Tumbadiata Tumba*, *Shir Hapalmach*, and *Eliyahu*," reads the summary. "Even though we were not called back for an encore, Mrs. Florence assured us that we performed beautifully, and we felt the same way."

Their singing and dancing may not have brought audiences to their feet, but MZG's community service was recognized. Several years later, during what

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Would-be Calgarians, Lost in Shoah, Recalled in 1933 Photos

By Jack Switzer

Several poignant photos, sent in 1933 to Calgary from pre-Holocaust Poland, recently made their way to the JHSSA archives.

The photos were sent by the Birenbaum family in Radom, Poland, to members of Calgary's Bleviss family, most likely to Chana Davidman and Etta Switzer. Their sister, Lieba Birenbaum, her husband, Jacob, and their large family had stayed in Radom, while her parents, siblings and most of her cousins – the extended Switzer family – had emigrated to Calgary.

Mindel Switzer, the eldest daughter of family patriarch Wolf Baer Switzer, married Zacharias Bleviss (originally Bleiweis), about 1885. They had eight children – Liba (Birenbaum), Etta (Switzer), Jack, Sol, Max, Deena (Cooper), Yosel, and Chana (Anna Davidman).

As noted above, all but Liba moved to Calgary in the 1920s. Yosel died in Calgary in 1922. Sol, Max and Deena moved on to Los Angeles, and were followed by parents Mindel and Zacharias Bleviss, who left Calgary late in the 30s. Etta, Jack and Chana stayed in Calgary. Leeba, the oldest Bleviss daughter, had married Jacob Birenbaum, a baker in Radom; they had seven children and several grandchildren in the Polish city.

The photos – donated by Dinah Switzer Spindel (just before her death in late 2007) and her daughter Debra Sword – are dated 1933 and feature two of Liba Birenbaum's seven children. Chaim Birenbaum's photos, sent to "Auntie Etta," show a formally dressed, serious young man. His mother writes of the 18-year old: "Chaim wants to go to America since he can't stand 'schotzim" (gentile hooligans) calling him a dirty Jew."

Another two photos show Chanah Rubinstein, Liba's oldest daughter. Chanah is alone in one, and holds her daughter in the other which is captioned, "This is me, Chanele, with my daughter."

The Bleviss family attempted, during the 1930s, to bring at least one of the Birenbaums, single daughter Feiga, to Calgary. It was the "none is too many"



Chanah Rubinstein and infant daughter, Radom, Poland, c. 1933. Photo courtesy of Dinah Spindel.

period of Jewish immigration, with entry to Canada severely restricted. Getting a Polish-Jewish woman admitted required political influence. A federal Order-in-Council was required.

As part of the immigration process, the Switzer family assured Calgary officials in 1936 that Feiga Birenbaum would never be on relief. A city investigator's report testified that Feiga's sponsors, brothers Abraham and Louis Belzberg, Max (Myer) Switzer, Bella Singer and Anna Davidman, had considerable assets including debt-free homes, active businesses and substantial bank accounts. The senior Blevisses then lived with Harry and Anna Davidman.

Family friend Dr. G.D. Stanley, a former member of Parliament, was pressed to lobby R.B. Bennett, Calgary M.P., former Prime Minister, and then Leader of the Opposition, to secure permission for 16-year old Feiga Birenbaum to come to Canada. Bennett was known to have been friendly with his Jewish constituents; but the process

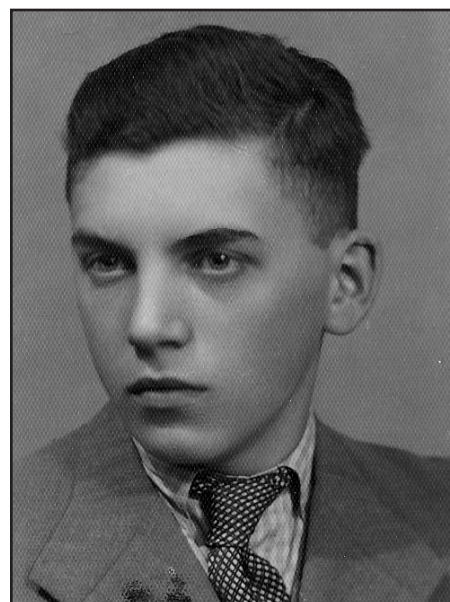
was delayed by suspicious bureaucrats, notably Immigration Branch director Frederick C. Blair, the man who is said to have uttered the notorious "none is too many" remark about prospective Jewish immigrants.

Anna Davidman sent hand-written letters to Bennett: "... I am sure you remember the case of Figa Birenbaum the girl we tried to get papers for from Poland. As you will see we didn't get very far with them. Im sure its because you werent there. ... Please Mr. Bennet Im sure you can get the papers if you try and please do try as you know whats going on in Poland now. ... Please Mr. Bennet don't be mad at me for bothering you... Ive been waiting for this for a long time. You don't know what it means to us, especially my old parents..."

Bennett, through his secretary, politely acknowledged Davidman's letters and said he could not be of assistance. Blair and his staff stood firmly by the exclusionary legalities. The correspondence with the Calgary family ended early in 1937.

Feiga Birenbaum remained in Radom, and she perished in the Holocaust, along with her family – her parents, her brothers and sisters, and their children. (Radom had about 30,000 Jewish citi-

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Chaim Birenbaum, son of Leeba Birenbaum, Radom, Poland, c. 1933. Photo courtesy of Dinah Spindel.

Girls Just Want to Have Fun

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seems to have been the sorority's final year (the log ends with entries for 1959 - 1960), two organizations thank the sorority sisters for their volunteer efforts.

In a letter to MZG President Rochelle Ullman dated October 26, 1959, Mrs. H.A. Bercov, president of the Shaarey Tzedec Sisterhood, thanks sorority members for their help "... in supervising the young children of our Congregation during the Simchat Torah services."

Another letter, from January 1960 and signed by Mrs. S. Saltman, thanks the sorority sisters for their help at the Calgary Hebrew School's Family Day.

Other sorority events during MZG's final season included a coffee party, held on Sunday, September 27, 1959 and a "dated" dinner and dance at the Beacon Hotel, held on Saturday, December 5, 1959. Photographs provide images from a formal initiation ceremony held at the home of Wendy Morris where Beverly Hector, Judy Moss, Marsha Corenblum, Ruthie Sklar and Reva Miller were initiated as the organization's last few members.

Memories of the sorority era seem to have faded, but the recent discovery of the Mem Zadick Gimmel log book, and its acquisition by the JHSSA, means that additional details pertaining to the lives of Jewish teens can now be further explored. This fascinating source, together with the minute book maintained by members of Chi Omega Chi and its successor organizations during the 1930s and 1940s (also permanently housed in the JHSSA archives) will surely inspire further research.

Maxine Fischbein is a freelance writer and editor and serves as a vice president of the JHSSA. She can be reached at mfischbein@shaw.ca.

The JHSSA thanks Ruth Ullman for helping to preserve the memory of MZG by bringing the sorority's original log book our way. We urge everyone to keep their eyes open for similar archival treasures. Don't let them gather dust in attics and basements; bring them to us, and we will continue to share the wonderful stories they tell.

William Epstein

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from Chaim Weizman, the President of Israel, that sincerely, but in understated terms, spelled out his nation's gratitude to the "Canadian" (as Bill was known at the UN).

"My dear Mr. Epstein: I have not had the pleasure of meeting you, but from a number of my associates I have heard of the remarkably effective work which you have done on behalf of Israel."

"I want to take the occasion of this, the first anniversary of the Jewish State, to send you my warmest thanks and greetings."

Sincerely yours, Chaim Weizman."

Now, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the State of Israel, we might also recognize the unique and vital contributions of Calgary's Bill Epstein.

- (1) Also graduating from the U of A in 1935 were Jewish Calgarians Samuel Epstein (Bill's younger brother), B.Sc.; Benny Sosinsky, B.Sc.; Leonard Bercuson, B.A.; Lucien Dvorkin, B.Sc.; Nathan Safran, B.A. (Honors Chemistry); Simon Pasternack, B.Sc. (Honors Mathematics); and Esther Rabkin, B.Sc. (Electrical Engineering).
- (2) According to a JHSSA director, much younger than Epstein, who recalls the handsome young lawyer and his many female admirers.

Would-be Calgarians

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zens when World War II broke out, 38 per cent of the city's population; of these, 90 per cent died in the Holocaust.)

Our photos of three of the victims – Chaim Birenbaum, his sister Chanah Rubinstein and her baby – are silent reminders of the Nazi horror and of the anti-Semitic Canadian policies that made it so difficult to save many who later became Holocaust victims. The Birenbaums, had they been able to live in Calgary, would have been our neighbours, our friends, our kin.

Their memory is a stark reminder that we must keep open the once-barred doors to hope and freedom.

Sources: JHSSA Archives, Switzer family genealogy; City of Calgary Archives; the Davidman-Bennett correspondence is in the Public Archives of Canada and was cited by Erna Paris in her 1980 book *Jews, An Account of their Experience in Canada*. Agi Romer Segal translated the Yiddish inscriptions on the backs of the photos into English.

More on our Jewish Hockey League Story ...

To the Editor:

The excellent article by Maxine Fischbein in the February 2008 issue of *The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta* titled "A League of Their Own" brought back some fond memories. While I thoroughly enjoyed this piece, I would like to address some historical inaccuracies.

The passage of time has, I suspect, softened memories. Certainly the welts and bruises resulting from that inaugural season in the Calgary Jewish Hockey League would have long since resolved. However, it must be stated that Robyn Joffe, the first and only woman hockey player to play in this league, emerged from Eastern Canada in the tradition of the Ottawa '67s and the Smith Falls Bears. She was not only sharp-tongued and adept at talking a little trash, but she was also quick with the stick. It didn't take long for the men in the league to fear the corners if Robyn Joffe was bearing down. A slash across the ankles or back of the legs rewarded those who tried to take her on, or take away the puck. Lingering bumps and contusions would remind opposition players to avoid Robyn Joffe the next time around. I certainly don't recall any need for a "goon squad" to protect Robyn; rather, I think she made it clear that she could protect herself.

I would like to thank Larry Katz for his efforts (together with Lloyd Ashkin) in establishing the league. Larry and his brother Michael were the key members of a formidable defence on that original Scrap City Scappers Team. On behalf of my brother, Hal, I would also like to take this opportunity to apologize for his beard as evident in the team picture of the Scappers. It was a bad idea then and remains a bad idea to this day.

Mark Joffe, Scrap City Scappers 1978-79

Editor's Note: We have learned that other women, including Jamie Miles, followed Robyn Joffe's debut in the Jewish Hockey League. Thanks to Gerry Miles for bringing this to our attention.

JHSSA News

Get Clothes to the JHSSA

This is your invitation to come out of the closet ... and share the clothing and the memories you've been hiding there.

The Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta is in the midst of organizing a very special program for our Annual General Meeting.

This event will highlight some of the remarkable clothes worn by Jewish Calgarians and describe some of the fascinating historical events connected with them.

If you have any historically significant clothing or accessories you would like to share with us, please let us know. Of particular interest are Jewish team, organization or school sweaters, jerseys or uniforms; articles of clothing used for Jewish ritual purposes; and formal wear worn to celebrate Jewish holidays or simchas.

For more information, please call the JHSSA office at 444 - 3171 or e-mail us at jhssa@shaw.ca.

Yiddish Movie Delights

An audience of 75, including many who do not speak or understand Yiddish, enjoyed the lyrical Yiddish film *Green Fields* jointly sponsored by JHSSA, Beth Tzedec and Hazak on March 9, 2008. Most remained after the screening to enjoy refreshments and chat about the film and the period of Jewish history it evoked. The feedback was so enthusiastic that we hope to be able to partner again with Beth Tzedec to bring other enjoyable Yiddish films to an appreciative Calgary audience.

Kudos

Many thanks to Rabbi Simon Smolensky's granddaughter, Minnie Segal, who has donated his black topcoat and his circumcision kit to the Jay & Barbara Joffe Archives of the JHSSA. And thank you to Fishman Cleaners for donating their services to restore this historic garment.

Israel @ 60 Photo Contest

Calgarians contributed 83 photos for our Israel @ 60 photo contest, and many more sent in snapshots of themselves in Israel for the display unveiled

at the May 7, 2008 community celebration. The contest was co-sponsored by the JHSSA and the Calgary Jewish Community Council. Thanks to Ron Switzer for the many volunteer hours he spent mounting the photos and organizing the judging, and to the State of Israel Bonds of Canada for donating the prizes to the three first-prize winners.

A display at the Israel at 60 event also featured photos taken by Calgarian Yale Joffe during his service as a *mahalnik* in Israel's War of Independence. Thanks to Lily Joffe for making these photos available to us.

2008 Membership Additions & Corrections

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Jewish Heritage Part of Historic Calgary Week

JHSSA director Jack Switzer will present an illustrated talk on Calgary Jewish history at the Southern Alberta Pioneer Association building on the morning of Friday, July 25, 2008. The program is part of the 18th annual Historic Calgary Week, sponsored by the Chinook County Historical Society.

JHSSA at Canadian Jewish Studies Conference

JHSSA archivist Agi Romer Segal participated in a panel discussion at the Archives session at The Association of Canadian Jewish Studies annual meeting in Vancouver in early June.

JOIN THE JHSSA

- Family membership - \$36
- Single membership - \$18
- Institution/Corporation - \$36
- Patron - \$50
- Benefactor - \$100

Please make cheques payable to:
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1607 - 90 Avenue SW
Calgary, AB T2V 4V7

Membership payable by credit card through our office.

Please do not send cash through the mail.

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The Editors welcome submissions for publication relating to areas of Calgary and Southern Alberta Jewish History. All articles should be typed, documented and sent for consideration.

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Please address all communications on editorial and circulation matters to:

Discovery
c/o The Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta
1607 - 90th Avenue S.W.,
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2V 4V7

Phone 444-3171
Email: jhssa@shaw.ca
Website: www.jhssa.org

ISSN: 1916 - 3886