

*Immigration and Charity in the Montreal Jewish Community before 1890**

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Organized in 1863 to provide temporary assistance to indigent Jewish immigrants, the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society of Montreal was the first and most important Jewish philanthropic organization in Canada. The records reveal, however, that while Jewish indigency was minor and while the Society included many members of the city's two established synagogues, the organization felt overwhelmed by its responsibilities. When Jewish immigration to Canada during the 1880s more than doubled the community's size, the Society did little to increase significantly the scope of its work. The financial crisis arising from the immigration of 1882-83 was met only with sizeable support from Montreal's Protestants and London Jewish agencies, and the purchase of a Montreal Jewish house of refuge in 1890 was made possible by a grant from the Paris-based Baron Maurice de Hirsch. Far from welcoming Jewish immigration, supporters of Montreal's leading Jewish philanthropy resented the burdens imposed on them and, on occasion, even attempted unsuccessfully to stem the flow.

Mise sur pied en 1863 pour apporter une aide temporaire aux immigrants juifs dans le besoin, le Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society of Montreal a été le tout premier et est demeuré le plus important organisme philanthropique juif au Canada. Les archives révèlent néanmoins que cet organisme s'est senti écrasé sous le poids des responsabilités et ce, à une époque où plusieurs membres des deux synagogues de la ville en faisaient partie et où l'indigence était, de fait, peu répandue chez les Juifs. Même dans les années 1880, alors que les effectifs de la communauté juive avaient plus que doublé par suite de l'immigration, cette association a peu fait pour étendre son rayon d'action de façon marquée. C'est ainsi que la crise financière engendrée par l'immigration de 1882-83 n'a pu être surmontée qu'avec l'appui tangible d'organismes de charité animés par des protestants montréalais et des juifs londoniens. L'acquisition d'un foyer d'hébergement pour les Juifs de Montréal n'a en outre été rendue possible que grâce à un don provenant du baron Maurice de Hirsch, établi à Paris. Loin d'accueillir avec bienveillance l'immigration juive, les philanthropes juifs montréalais ont mal accepté la charge qui leur était imposée. À l'occasion, ils ont même tenté, mais sans succès, d'enrayer le flot des nouveaux arrivants.

Indigency and philanthropy were twin aspects of the social and religious setting of nineteenth-century Canada. In the absence of publicly funded relief services, the needs of the "deserving poor" were assumed to be the responsibility of private charities having religious, ethnic or workplace affiliations.¹ While much of the poverty and social distress in Canada

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1. On the philosophy underlying charity in the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century, see David OWEN, *English Philanthropy, 1600-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960) and Robert H. BREMNER, *American Philanthropy* (Chicago:

resulted from the seasonal nature of employment in primary occupations, public works or shipping, these problems were especially acute among immigrants arriving at the major ports.² Until distressed new arrivals moved on—willingly or not—they were aided by voluntary associations of co-religionists, fellow nationals or brother workers.³ By the 1840s Montreal possessed a wide variety of institutions and benevolent associations ministering to the needs of its indigent population. City directories of the time list the numerous orphanages, magdalene asylums, missions and hospitals, all providing “indoor relief”, as well as organizations like the national associations of Irishmen, Scotsmen, Englishmen, Germans, Italians and Jews offering occasional assistance in the form of “outdoor relief”.⁴

As one of Canada's major ports and commercial centres, Montreal in 1850 was the home of a small but well-established Jewish community.⁵ Attracted there in the eighteenth century by the city's economic opportunities, the tiny group of former Army commissary officers, merchants and fur traders had established in 1768 the *Sherith Israel* (The Remnant of Israel) congregation, also known as the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue to denote the national origins of some of its founders and the Sephardic order of prayers followed in its services.⁶ By the late 1830s this synagogue was housed in an impressive new edifice on Chenneville Street.⁷ Over the

University of Chicago Press, 1960). Judith FINGARD “The Relief of the Unemployed Poor in St. John, Halifax and St. John's”, *Acadiensis*, V (Autumn 1975): 32-53, is a perceptive analysis of voluntary social welfare in three Canadian cities. See also Stephen A. SPEISMAN, “Munificent Parsons and Municipal Parsimony: Voluntary vs Public Poor Relief in Nineteenth-Century Toronto”, *Ontario History*, LXV (March 1973): 33-49, and James PITSULA, “The Emergence of Social Work in Toronto”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, XIV (Spring, 1979): 35-42. On New Brunswick's experiences with public welfare, see Brereton GREENHOUS, “Paupers and Poorhouses: the Development of Poor Relief in Early New Brunswick”, *Histoire Sociale—Social History*, no. 1 (April 1968): 103-26, and James M. WHALEN, “The Nineteenth-Century Almshouse System in Saint John County”, *Histoire sociale—Social History*, no. 7 (April 1971): 5-27, and by the same author, “Social Welfare in New Brunswick, 1784-1900”, *Acadiensis*, II (Autumn 1972): 54-64.

2. Judith FINGARD, “The Winter's Tale: The Seasonal Contours of Pre-industrial Poverty in British North America, 1815-1860”, CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, *Historical Papers* 1974, pp. 65-94.

3. Gerald E. HART, “The Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society, 1820-1827: An Early Social Experiment”, *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXIV (June 1953): 109-23; John Irwin COOPER, “The Quebec Ship Labourer's Benevolent Society”, *Canadian Historical Review*, XXX (December 1949): 336-43.

4. Robert MCKAY, *The Directory of Montreal* (Montreal, 1850), pp. 384-90, and John SHEARER, “The Centennial Story of the St. Andrew's Society of Montreal” (unpublished manuscript in possession of the Society, 1935); G.R.C. KEEP, “The Irish Adjustment in Montreal,” *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXI (March 1950): 39-46; J.I. COOPER, “The Social Structure of Montreal in the 1850's,” *Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1956, pp. 63-73.

5. Louis ROSENBERG, “Some Aspects of the Development of the Canadian Jewish Community,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, L (December 1950): 121-42.

6. J. Douglas BORTHWICK, *History and Biographical Gazetteer of Montreal to the Year 1892* (Montreal, 1893), pp. 475-79; Rabbi Solomon FRANK, *Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue* (Montreal: Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, 1970), p. 28.

7. See Newton BOSWORTH, *Hochelaga Depicta* (Montreal, 1839); *History of the Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews “She'erith Israel” Montreal, Canada* (Montreal, 1918), *passim*. See also David ROME, *On the Early Harts - Their Contemporaries*, Part I (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives, 1981).

next decade the city's Jewish community increased slowly. By 1851, there were about 150 Jews and, after 1846, a second congregation was formed in Montreal, the *Sha'ar Hashamayim* (Gates of Heaven), also known as the English, German and Polish congregation. Its members were virtually all recent immigrants who followed the Ashkenazi or German rite and customs.⁸ While the distinction between the two synagogues was far from being a nominal one in the 1850s and 1860s, the divisions began to wane subsequently as the new arrivals acquired social prominence and material success, and as the two groups recognized their common interests and responsibilities towards poor immigrant Jews who arrived during the 1870s and 1880s.

By mid-century then, the Spanish and Portuguese were already a venerable, proud and distinguished community which included prominent merchants, doctors and lawyers, several of whom also held commissions in the militia, as well as offices in the consular corps, the magistracy, and municipal government.⁹ Like their counterparts in the United States, these Sephardic Jews enjoyed a general acceptance in "Society".¹⁰ They were admitted to fraternal orders and lodges, and their Rabbi, Rev. Dr Abraham de Sola, formerly of London, was a distinguished Hebraist who lectured on Hebrew and Oriental Literature at McGill University.¹¹ Inasmuch as the newly arrived Jews from Britain, Germany and Poland included successful merchants and manufacturers, they soon acquired roughly the same social standing as the Spanish and Portuguese. Some were admitted to local Masonic lodges and universities and achieved prominence in literary and sports activities.¹² This was especially true of the Jews of British origin who added considerably to the general Anglophile tone of the whole Jewish community. In March 1881, a number of these British Jews formed a Montreal branch of the London-based Anglo-Jewish Association, a prestigious organization channelling political and educational assistance to distressed Jewish communities overseas.¹³

8. Ben BERNSTEIN, *The History of Congregation Shaar Hashamayim, 1846-1946* (Montreal, 1946), p. 1, and Louis ROSENBERG, *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, Bureau of Social and Economic Research, 1939), p. 10.

9. Benjamin G. SACK, *History of the Jews in Canada* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1965), pp. 143-52.

10. *Ibid.*, chap. 13. For a recent assessment of the historical evolution of the Sephardic communities in the United States, see Stephen BIRMINGHAM, *The Grandees: The Story of America's Sephardic Elite* (New York: Dell, 1972).

11. Carman MILLER, "Alexander Abraham de Sola", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XI (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 253-56.

12. Gerald J. J. TULCHINSKY, *The River Barons: Montreal Businessmen and the Growth of Industry and Transportation, 1837-1853* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 9-34; Arthur D. HART, ed., *The Jew in Canada: A Complete Record of Canadian Jewry from the Days of the French Regime to the Present Time* (Montreal: Jewish Publications Limited, 1926), p. 93 and *passim*; SACK, *Jews in Canada*, p. 171; *Montreal Gazette*, 22 December 1879, 14 November 1879; John I. COOPER, *History of St. George's Lodge, No. 10 Q.R., 1829-54* (Montreal, 1954), pp. 37-62.

13. *Montreal Gazette*, 29 March 1881; Stuart A. COHEN, *English Zionists and British Jews: The Communal Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1895-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 19-20.

Although Montreal Jewry was generally middle-class and prosperous, the immigrants of the 1840s included some who required charity and who turned, quite naturally, to their fellow Jews for help. In the Jewish tradition, charity was called *tsedakah*, a Hebrew word which translates as "righteousness", implying that in helping the poor the donor is fulfilling a religious duty from which he derives a moral benefit. (In his code of Jewish law and ethics, the medieval scholar, Maimonides, taught that the noblest form of *tsedakah* is to provide the poor with economic opportunities to help themselves.)¹⁴ But in whatever form this benevolence was expressed, Jews were required to help their brothers and sisters, and in the long history of the Jewish people the tradition of *tsedakah* was often put to the test.¹⁵ How well did the Montreal Jews meet their religious duties towards their fellow Jews during the late nineteenth century? In what respects did their approaches change during the period 1850-90? And how does the experience of the one relief organization that operated throughout that period reflect changes in attitudes among its supporters in the light of the tragedies befalling the Jewish people in Eastern Europe? In short, what does this experience tell us about the internal coherence of a community that was undergoing such rapid and far-reaching expansion and social change in late nineteenth-century urban Canada?

I

As the pace of Jewish immigration from Europe to Britain and America accelerated during the second half of the nineteenth century, the growing need for welfare assistance led to the founding of Jewish benevolent societies in most of the major eastern North American ports. By the late 1840s the Jews of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston and Montreal possessed associations to help their poor.¹⁶ When the Montreal Hebrew Philanthropic Society was established in 1847, its immediate task was to provide temporary help for thirty of the new immigrants, mainly German Jews, who had arrived in the city that year, as well as ten others already resident in the city.¹⁷ The Society's officers included a theatre owner, the police chief of Montreal, Rabbi Abraham de Sola, and Moses Hays, an entrepreneur in municipal services.¹⁸ Businessmen Simon Hart, David Moses and Joseph Lyons constituted a Relief Committee

14. A. COHEN, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1949), pp. 219-26. See Philip BIRNBAUM, ed., *Mishne Torah: Maimonides' Code of Law and Ethics* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1974), pp. 158-59.

15. H. H. BEN-SASSON, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), *passim*; Mark ZBOROWSKI and Elizabeth HERZOG, *Life Is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken, 1972), pp. 191-213.

16. See list in Jacques J. LYONS and Abraham DE SOLA, *A Jewish Calendar For Fifty Years* (New York, 1854), pp. 148-73.

17. *The Occident*, VI (October 1848): 368-70, quoted in SACK, *Jews in Canada*, pp. 139-40; "Baron de Hirsch Institute," in HART, *The Jew in Canada*, pp. 201-5.

18. Carman MILLER, "Moses Judah Hayes (Hays)", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. IX (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 379-80.

whose purpose was to provide financial assistance.¹⁹ Dr Aaron Hart David, a distinguished local physician, ministered to the health needs of the newly arrived immigrants.²⁰ These few dozen immigrants, most of whom were apparently in transit to the western United States, created an unprecedented but temporary burden for Montreal Jews. A more serious local problem faced the Hebrew Philanthropic Society: the "undeserving" Jewish poor who were badgering their brethren for handouts. According to a contemporary report on the migration of 1847, "the professed and sturdy beggars, by repeated and pressing importunity, obtained an undue amount of relief" while "the respectable, but decayed, has suffered from a modest unwillingness in forcing his claims upon the attention of his co-religionists." The Society intended therefore "to promote a more just and efficient mode of relief". Drawing on contemporary concepts of scientific charity, their object was to investigate "certain persons professing to be poor Israelites . . . [and] use every possible precaution, and institute every possible inquiry to assure itself that the applicants are really what they pretend to be."²¹ The undeserving poor would thus be frowned upon while the Society promised to seek the deserving poor "at the bedside of the sick, in the attic, the loft, the hospital, even at the grave to prove that Jewish benevolence, when invoked by the plaintive voice of suffering, is not invoked in vain; that it has no limit, and that mercenaries can erect for it no barrier over which it will not gloriously and triumphantly pass." As the immigrants of 1847 departed or settled in, the Society was left to assist only a few local and transient indigent Jews and occasional donations seem to have been adequate to meet its needs.²² Perhaps because of the Society's intention to weed out the undeserving poor, over the next few years the organization all but ceased to exist and it apparently was never called upon to implement its goal of genuinely humane charity—real *tsedakah*—proclaimed in its founding declaration.

By the early 1860s, however, a new, larger and stronger organization which would draw more broadly on the community's resources for efficient charity work seemed to be needed as some Montreal Jews expected that more Jewish immigrants would begin arriving, many of them *en route* to the United States. At its formation in July 1863, when L. L. Levey invited "the members of the Jewish persuasion to meet . . . to consider the desirability of forming some association to assist our needy or unfortunate co-religionists", the new group called itself the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society (hereafter YMHBS or the Society).²³ The founders were

19. HART, *The Jew in Canada*, p. 201.

20. SACK, *Jews in Canada*, pp. 131-33. Dr David's brother, Eleazar David, achieved a certain fame and notoriety in early nineteenth-century Montreal society. See Elinor K. SENIOR, "Eleazar David David", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XI (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 234.

21. SACK, *Jews in Canada*, pp. 139-40.

22. *Montreal Gazette*, 8 January 1856.

23. Public Archives of Canada, Baron de Hirsch Institute of Montreal Papers, MG 28, V 86, Minutes, I, 23 July 1863 (hereafter Minutes). The YMHBS was renamed the Baron de Hirsch Institute in 1891. The qualification that members be unmarried was changed in November 1864 to open membership to any unmarried member of the Hebrew faith over 13 years old. In the event of marrying while members, they still retained their membership. Minutes, 27 November 1864.

drawn from both of the city's congregations, especially after the Society's membership was enlarged in 1869 to include married as well as single men.²⁴ From the outset, support seems to have been about evenly balanced between the two congregations;²⁵ both rabbis, Abraham de Sola of the Spanish and Portuguese and Jacob Fass of the English, German and Polish, who were made honorary members, sat on the relief committee.²⁶ Even though differing synagogue affiliation resulted in some friction, this rivalry did not seem to affect the dispensation of charity. In fact, though the Spanish and Portuguese Jews remained an important element in the Society's numerical and financial support until the early 1890s, the executive positions were pretty evenly divided between them and members of the other congregation, indicating that in this endeavour, at least, community leaders were willing to share authority and responsibility between old and new arrivals.

During its first decade the relief work of the YMHSB was limited because the number of Jews in the city before 1871 was small. Although the Jewish population of Canada East had grown by 1861 to 572 people, with all but a few dozen of them living in Montreal,²⁷ over the next ten years the community actually declined in size as many immigrants and some established residents left the city. An upswing in immigration to Canada during the 1870s increased the Montreal Jewish population by 1881 to about 950 and over the next ten years Montreal's Jewry grew to about 2,473 people.²⁸ Many of the new arrivals came from Central and Eastern Europe and needed considerable help. As early as October 1874 the Society felt that it had to bear heavy financial burdens due to "the fact that many families having arrived here from Germany and other adjoining countries in a state of utter destitution".²⁹ Aid to forty-two families cost only \$542 but depleted resources, even occasioning some deficit financing. But the strain was brief and by no means overwhelming.

The sums of money raised and spent on relief were in fact very small, usually between two and five hundred dollars in one year, except for two years in the mid-1870s. From October 1874 to November 1875, \$1,090 was spent on 103 applicants, an average of \$10.58 each, and about the same amount on 153 persons, \$7.13 on each, in 1875-76. However, expenditures for an unspecified number of relief cases dropped the following year to \$490 and remained at approximately that level until 1882. The funds for these outlays came almost entirely from the members' annual fees or from special contributions requested whenever the treasury was especially low. At that point, collection committees were struck to encourage members to pay up and to collect from other local Jews as well.³⁰ Occasionally con-

24. The religious affiliations of most original members can be established from HART, *The Jew in Canada*; BERNSTEIN, *Congregation Shaar Hashamayim*; and FRANK, *Life of a Synagogue*.

25. Minutes, I, 23 July 1863.

26. Minutes, I, 14 April 1867.

27. ROSENBERG, *Canada's Jews*, p. 308.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Minutes, I, 18 October 1874; *Montreal Gazette*, 7 January 1875.

30. For one such instance see Minutes, I, 17 November 1867.

tributions were received from non-Jewish donors, including an annual grant from the Montreal City and District Savings Bank.³¹ The Society attempted to augment its finances by planning theatrical performances of various kinds.³² However, for the most part its members, albeit slowly, paid the costs of relief work.

Although most expenditures were for the alleviation of distress among resident and transient Jews, providing necessities such as food, clothing, coal and medicines, money was also spent on assisting transients to move on. The Society's relief committee which handled these cases reported briefly to the Society at the quarterly or half-yearly meetings and to the annual general meeting usually held in October, where the Committee provided full and detailed reports of all their cases.³³ There was also a visiting committee to determine need while medical assistance was provided by Dr David, and hospital care at the Montreal General.³⁴

Notwithstanding the relatively light load of Jewish indigency—and the ancient tradition of *tsedakah*—the extent of the Society's obligations to assist indigent Jews became an issue at one of its earliest meetings. Reflecting current Victorian ideas of charity and perhaps also some members' dilatoriness in paying their annual dues, one prominent member argued in 1863 that the Society "is not based on the principle of granting permanent relief" and therefore "no application [should] receive assistance oftener than once in three months."³⁵ The same member also tried to limit relief payments to an annual maximum of ten dollars for any single applicant or family group. Most members of the Society recognized that to become committed to "permanent relief" would necessitate the raising of much larger amounts of money. They were clearly unwilling to do this and therefore reiterated their agreement to providing only "temporary" relief, as was laid down in the Society's bylaws.³⁶

Rabbi de Sola raised this matter again a year later, in open disagreement with these views. De Sola argued "that in view of the desirableness of affording permanent relief required by the parties hitherto receiving the same from the Society", a special committee be formed to raise enough money to continue that relief. He argued that the Society could not confine itself to alleviating immediate distress because there were growing numbers of indigents whose rehabilitation would take much longer. A decision was made to extend permanent relief to "selected applicants", but it was re-

31. Minutes, I, 25 March 1876.

32. Minutes, I, 4 January 1864, 25 February 1872. See also the *Montreal Gazette*, 4 February and 11 February 1873, for a lengthy description of one of these entertainments.

33. No records of the Relief Committee have survived for this period.

34. Dr David was Dean of Medicine at the University of Bishop's College from 1870 to 1880. The Montreal General Hospital later received a financial contribution from the Society in return for its services. Minutes, I, 1874 et seq.

35. Minutes, I, 1863. Levey persisted in his efforts to limit the Society's relief activities by giving notice of a motion in 1868—which he apparently did not push any further—that would have limited relief payments to a maximum of \$15 per applicant. Minutes, I, 12 July 1868.

36. Revised by-laws of YHBSM, Art. II, Object, section 1, included in Minutes, I, 13 Aug. 1871.

versed a short time later "in view of this Society not having been sufficiently supported by some of our co-religionists".³⁷ Thus the decision to make only limited commitments was reasserted.

II

Over the next decade, however, the problem of long-lasting poverty became a serious one in the Montreal community. In 1876 Moses Gutman called attention to the several families that were annually dependent upon the Society during "our long winters" because of their inability to find employment. He felt that these families should be denied relief altogether if they refused to be moved "to some other place where they might perhaps find friends or relations to assist them or constant work and pay the year round".³⁸ This view was supported by Rabbi E. M. Myers of the English, German and Polish Congregation who voiced the opinion that the "Board of Relief should take a decided stand in the matter, and refuse any longer to submit to such regular imposition." He even suggested that "these families were unable to support themselves any longer and should be forced to go away."³⁹ Precisely how many families were regularly imposing on the Society is not clear, nor were either Gutman or Rabbi Myers prepared to recommend where or how these families could make a more regular income.

In an effort to improve its efficiency in helping immigrants and lessen its own obligations, the Society attempted to establish co-operative contact with other philanthropic organizations in Montreal, not all of whom, however, were friendly towards these overtures.⁴⁰ In 1874 Mona Lesser recommended that the YMHBS participate with "all the National and Charitable Societies in this City" in the formation of a "Colonization Society" whose purpose would be to secure a grant from the Dominion government for relieving immigrants landing in Montreal. But the Dominion government, which maintained an Immigration Bureau in Montreal to assist immigrants, was unwilling to oblige while local national or ethnic societies like the St Andrew's Society, the Irish Benevolent Society, and the German Society, were also apparently not interested.

While only partially successful in its efforts to restrict its philanthropic assistance to one-time local and transient indigents, the Society attempted to stem the flow to Canada of what it called "too many destitute and helpless Israelites".⁴¹ In 1875, alarmed by the rumours of a large Jewish migration on its way to Canada, the executive dispatched strong protests to the *London Jewish World* and the *Jewish Chronicle* of London in the hopes of preventing various Jewish organizations, such as the Ladies' Emigration Society, from shunting too many of the European Jews arriving

37. Minutes, I, 1 February 1864.

38. Minutes, I, 25 March 1876.

39. Minutes, I, 25 March 1876.

40. Minutes, I, 14 July 1867.

41. Minutes, I, March 1878.

in England out to North America. "Our transatlantic brethren object—and we confess, very properly so . . .", commented the *Jewish Chronicle* in October 1875, "to being burdened with the poor and unskillful Jews who are assisted to emigrate from Europe to the United States and Canada."⁴² But this and other sympathetic comments did not stop the London agencies from continuing to export their problems. Two years later the Montrealers found it necessary to complain again about the London organizations sending to Montreal too many Jews "in a state of destitution and generally incapable of self help".⁴³ In addition to writing hostile letters to the London Jewish newspapers, the Society sent Rabbi de Sola on a mission to London in 1877 to protest personally on behalf of Montreal Jewry against the London Jewish Emigration Society which was chiefly responsible for sending poor Jews to Canada.⁴⁴ While there, he was partly persuaded that "the statements of the immigrants that they had been sent [to Canada] by the Jewish Emigration Society, should not always be accepted". In any event his protests seem to have had the desired effect and for the time being the London migrations ceased abruptly.⁴⁵

During the Jewish influx of the mid-1870s, the emergence of other charities in Montreal resulted in some duplication of relief efforts. The most important of these organizations, the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society, concerned with the welfare of women and children, had, since its formation in 1877, exchanged information with the YMHBS on those people seeking help. However, similar co-operation or agreement to share responsibility for indigents apparently had not been established with any of the other newer charities, most of them self-help associations formed by the immigrants. This resulted in considerable confusion and animosity because of the increasing numbers of overlapping appeals for money to the Jews of Montreal.

Observing this proliferation of effort and perhaps influenced by the success of New York's recently formed United Hebrew Charities, one of the Society's most active early members, Moses Gutman, suggested in 1874 that a similar body be established in Montreal since "the time has now arrived when a more general co-operation is demanded."⁴⁶ In his view, "the interest of charity will be best served by this Society merging itself into a more general organization, embracing all the Jews of Montreal as its members." Few people were ready for that. Such action, claimed the members, should be taken "only after mature deliberation" since it "threatened the very existence of the Society".

The objections suggest that the officers of the YMHBS preferred to retain their control. The alteration of the Society into a mass charity

42. *London Jewish Chronicle*, 22 October 1875; Minutes, I, 14 November 1875.

43. Minutes, I, 4 November 1877.

44. Lloyd GARTNER, *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960), pp. 49-50.

45. Minutes, I, 17 November 1878.

46. Minutes, I, 1874. Gutman then pointed out that the YMHBS "should be a general one, open to all Israelites in the city".

organization embracing the entire Montreal Jewish community was an unwelcome prospect at a time when the immigrants were beginning to outnumber the established Jewish residents. These newcomers were more likely to be receivers than givers of philanthropy and they might well have more traditional concepts of what Jewish charity should be. Moreover, the directors and a good number of the Society's members were either Canadian-born or long-time residents of Canada, in comfortable if not well-to-do financial positions. There was little common ground on which they could meet the immigrants: they were not likely to mix socially and their contacts on the economic level would be on an employer-employee basis, usually in the clothing or tobacco industries in which several Jewish families were involved. Nor would they meet in the synagogues, for the immigrants tended to avoid the older congregations with their imposing buildings in the alien west end of the city and dignified services which included sermons in English. Organizations such as the Jewish Literary and Social Union Society founded in 1876 by the McGill graduate and poet, Isidore Gordon Ascher, would have been of little interest to these new arrivals from Eastern Europe.⁴⁷ And the Montefiore Club for Jewish businessmen had little to do with immigrant Jews. Indeed, the residential patterns of the two groups differed, with the newcomers clustering in a part of the city where they worshipped in tiny makeshift synagogues of their own, prayed in their own fervent manner and extended *tsedakah* in the traditional way. A brief announcement in the *Gazette* in December 1882, concerning the formation of a new congregation of Jews from Denmark and Russia, reflects their activity: "A charitable society has been organized in connection with the congregation to administer to the sick. Another object of this society is to furnish whatever assistance may be possible to Jewish immigrants in securing employment."⁴⁸

III

The anti-Jewish pogroms that erupted in Russia in 1881 and 1882 resulted in the emigration of tens of thousands of Jews to the United States and Canada. The Jewish communities were then challenged to provide relief on an unprecedented scale. As hundreds of Russian Jewish refugees landed in Montreal, the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society was obliged to become a more diversified philanthropic organization.

Reports began reaching Montreal of the persecution of Jews in Russia as early as May 1881, when the newly formed Anglo-Jewish Association held a public meeting to protest against the murder, rape, arson and mass expulsions taking place in Kiev.⁴⁹ A city-wide organization with support in the Christian community, the Citizens' Committee and the Jewish Relief Fund, was quickly formed as Montrealers learned of the Russian atrocities. Meanwhile long descriptions of the Russian persecutions and editorials

47. *Montreal Gazette*, 6 March 1876.

48. *Ibid.*, 18 December 1882.

49. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1881.

appearing in Montreal newspapers began to arouse considerable sympathy for Russia's Jews and public support for assistance to any refugees who might arrive in Canada. In early February 1882, the *Montreal Gazette* asserted that:

It is the duty of the Dominion to make proper provision for the hospitable reception of such of them as may land on our shores . . . The people of their own race and faith, of whom many living amongst us occupy positions of respectability and influence will of course do all that is in their power for the succor of their unfortunate brethren, but it is no less incumbent on Christians of all denominations to give a helping hand, which shall atone, to some extent at least, the brutal usage by those who profess to serve the same master.⁵⁰

The Anglican Bishop of Montreal, William Bennett Bond, a deeply spiritual champion of Evangelicalism, headed the Citizens' Committee. Other members included prominent Montreal businessmen David Morrice, George Hague, Hon. Justice Ferrier, P. E. Grafton, Hugh McLennan and two local MPs, Mathew Hamilton Gault and Thomas White, as well as a number of Protestant clergymen and professors. The committee solicited subscriptions of over \$4,600 from the local citizens: contributions came in daily and the *Gazette* kept its readers informed of the latest donations.⁵¹ Assisted by John Redpath Dougall, publisher of the widely circulated temperance newspaper, *Montreal Witness*, the Citizens' Committee called a public meeting at the YMCA on 13 March 1882 to express their indignation over the Russian atrocities, "these inhuman barbarities . . . a foul blot on the name of Christianity, a disgrace to our civilization, and a wound inflicted on our common humanity."⁵²

Meanwhile, in order to co-ordinate their efforts to help the expected flood of refugees, all important Jewish charity groups in the city, the YMHBS, the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society and the Anglo-Jewish Association joined in forming the Jewish Emigration Aid Society (hereafter JEAS).⁵³ Probably modelled on the similarly named New York society established the preceding year, this committee took on the task of caring for the immigrants, providing food, clothing, housing, furniture, medical aid, jobs and, if necessary, transportation to other parts of Canada.⁵⁴ The fact that its executive and Board of Directors consisted mainly of YMHBS members, most of them drawn from the Jewish immigrants of the 1840s and 1850s, is a strong indication of the recognition the other two associations gave to the experience of the Society in performing this kind of service.⁵⁵ They were also taking advantage of the leadership skills of this small but influential élite.

50. *Ibid.*, 1 February 1882.

51. *Ibid.*, 13 September 1882. From May to August 1882 almost every issue of the *Montreal Gazette* included a list of contributors to the JEAS and the Citizens' Committee. On Archbishop Bond see John I. COOPER, *The Blessed Communion: The Origins and History of the Diocese of Montreal, 1760-1960* (Montreal: Diocese of Montreal, 1960), chaps 12 and 15.

52. *Montreal Gazette*, 16 March, 26 May, 1882.

53. *Ibid.*, 14, 22 May 1882.

54. Irving HOWE, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976), p. 47.

55. Besides the four Moss brothers who were garment manufacturers, the Montreal JEAS board included L. Lewis, B. Kortosk, Jacob Ascher and David Ansell. Ansell became a major figure in Montreal Jewish philanthropic affairs from the 1880s to the early 1900s.

The JEAS barely had time to organize before the first group of 260 Russian refugees who, according to the *Montreal Gazette*, "were not particularly distinguished for cleanliness", arrived at Bonaventure station on 16 May 1882.⁵⁶ With its own emergency funds and the monies flowing in to Bishop Bond's Citizen's Committee, the JEAS, spearheaded by the venerable Rabbi Abraham de Sola, moved in swiftly to aid them. Within days a large building in Montreal's waterfront area was converted to a dormitory with relief and medical assistance for the refugees, many of whom had to be boarded with poor Jewish families for the interval.⁵⁷ The Mansion House Committee of London, organized by that city's major Jewish Societies to assist Russian Jews immigrating to Britain, and to encourage them to continue moving westward, dispatched some of its money to help the Montrealers cope with their new responsibilities. By 21 June, besides the many whom the JEAS had helped as they passed through Montreal to the United States, Ontario, or Manitoba, 180 refugees had been received at the "home" and employment had been found for most of them.⁵⁸ Although it was maintained for only a few months, the "home" filled a very important need in the first stages of immigrants' adjustment to Canadian life, because it provided a refuge in which they could convalesce after the terrors of the pogroms. Donations of all kinds poured in to the home from all over Montreal to help the Jewish refugees: clothing, bags of potatoes, groceries, crockery, shoes, fish, fruit, a sewing machine, a telephone from the Bell—and shrouds for the dead.⁵⁹

Once the refugees of 1882 moved on or settled in during the next few months, the JEAS was disbanded and its remaining assets handed over to the YMHS.⁶⁰ Although short-lived, the JEAS represents one of the most significant developments in the history of Canada's Jews in the nineteenth century. It marked the beginning of a general understanding of the need for co-ordinated action by all Jewish philanthropic societies. It was clear to many that the immigrants presented the entire Canadian Jewish community with a common responsibility entailing far-reaching responsibilities. Emergency organizations similar to Montreal's JEAS were set up in Toronto and Winnipeg where both Jews and sympathetic Christians contributed to the relief work.⁶¹ In Montreal indeed the financial contributions of Bishop Bond's Citizens' Committee (\$4,700) surpassed those of Jews themselves (\$4,000). This development suggests interesting dimensions of contemporary Christian perceptions of Jews and of Jewish-Christian relationships.

56. *Montreal Gazette*, 16 May 1882.

57. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1882.

58. *Ibid.*, 21 June 1882. Of the 180 persons who had used the home since it was opened, 80, mostly women and children, still remained, 48 of whom had been on their way to Manitoba where "they were most anxious to take up farming, with which they were acquainted."

59. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1882.

60. *Ibid.*, 12 March 1883.

61. Stephen SPEISMAN, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), p. 58; Simon BELKIN, *Through Narrow Gates: A Review of Jewish Immigration, Colonization and Immigrant Aid Work in Canada, 1840-1940* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing Co., 1966), p. 31.

The influx of Jews to Canada during the 1880s increased Canada's Jewish community by 165 percent. It was to some extent a directed immigration based on a belief that, as well as providing refuge from persecution and poverty, Canada offered the possibility of large-scale Jewish agricultural settlement. While Canada's West was generally seen by both Canadian and imperial planners as a new Eden, a land of opportunity for large-scale agricultural development, it was also thought of as a place where Europe's displaced Jews could be settled as farmers.⁶² Indeed, many of the Jews who came in 1882 had expressed an interest in taking up farming. In May 1882, London's Mayor, J. Whittaker Ellis, wrote to Louis Davis, President of the Anglo-Jewish Association of Montreal, that "at the suggestion of Sir Alexander Galt [Canada's High Commissioner in Britain], the Mansion House Committee are sending a considerable number of the Russo-Jewish refugees to Canada, the more able-bodied to Winnipeg." He added that "Sir A. Galt had given my committee so glowing an account of the charity and benevolence of the Canadian Jews that I feel sure that this suggestion will meet with your ready acceptance."⁶³ In fact, Galt strongly supported, if indeed he did not originate, the idea of moving "the agricultural Jews to our North West", as is indicated in a letter he wrote to Baron Rothschild in January 1882.⁶⁴

At that moment a number of Montreal Jews such as John and Hyam Moss, David and Samuel Davis and Moise Schwob—all prominent manufacturers and merchants—were discussing the formation of an International Colonization Association, with a capital of \$1,000,000 to establish communities of Russian and Polish Jews in the Canadian Northwest. They proposed to begin the project by locating one hundred families in the Territories as early as the following spring.⁶⁵ Supported by other influential members of the Montreal community and the local press,⁶⁶ the Montreal group sent Lazarus Cohen, a dredging contractor and foundry owner, to Ottawa to discuss the matter with the Minister of Agriculture, John Henry Pope, who assured Cohen of his interest and desire to assist the settlement scheme.⁶⁷ Acting on his own initiative in London meanwhile, Galt began sending Jews to Winnipeg, which he viewed as the best starting point for

62. Doug OWRAM, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), *passim*; Arthur A. Chiel, "Herman Landau's Canadian Dream", *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, 2 (Fall 1978): 113-20.

63. *Montreal Gazette*, 27 May 1882.

64. The most thorough account of Galt's efforts in 1882 on behalf of Jewish colonization in the Northwest is in Abraham J. Arnold, "Jewish Immigration to Western Canada in the 1880's", *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, 1 (Fall 1977): 82-95. In the early 1890s the Berlin (Jewish) Conference on Emigration considered Canada as a suitable destination for refugee Russians; see Jonathan D. SARNA, "Jewish Immigration to North America: the Canadian Experience, 1870-1900", *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 18 (June 1976): 31-41.

65. *Montreal Gazette*, 18 January 1882.

66. *Ibid.*, 23 January 1882.

67. *Ibid.*, 1 February 1882.

any settlement project.⁶⁸ These efforts in 1882-83 resulted in the establishment of the Jewish colony called New Jerusalem, near Moosomin, Saskatchewan,⁶⁸ with the assistance of the Mansion House Committee which provided each family with cattle, implements and food for three years.⁷⁰ In this way, the first of several Jewish farming communities in Manitoba and the North West Territories was established. Montreal's Jewish élite was greatly interested in these colonization schemes but only as an auxiliary to foreign Jewish benefactors like Baron de Hirsch and the Rothschilds who initiated the programmes and who, it was assumed, would pay the costs.⁷¹

While the movement of immigrants to the Canadian west and the growth of Jewish agricultural settlements there constitute an interesting aspect of the YMHB's work during the early 1890s, between 1882 and 1891 its most pressing responsibilities lay in providing assistance to the immigrants who, despite all encouragements to move elsewhere, elected to remain in Montreal. Once the JEAS was disbanded, the YMHB again was forced to shoulder the main burden of all forms of Jewish relief work, among both immigrants and local long-term indigents in the city just as it had until the spring of 1882.

Even after the experiences of that year, however, or perhaps because they had been so taxing, the Society was still unprepared and, to a great extent, unwilling to accept such a burden. The long-standing reluctance to make major or lasting commitments still prevailed. Although its members were aware that many more immigrants would soon be *en route* to Montreal, they also knew that they would not easily be able to raise sufficient funds in the community. An emergency lasting a few months was manageable, although only with help from outside the community. But a continuing flow of more and more impoverished Jews to a community that considered itself already overburdened financially was quite another matter. Without adequate funds, the Society would be unable to meet the obligations which the continuing flood of immigrants thrust upon it during the decade. This prospect, in fact, so depressed some members, once strongly active and anxious to accept office, that they now shied away from taking responsibility. At the annual election of officers in 1883, "a great amount of reluctance [was] shown on the part of members to accept office."⁷² During the next three years, the problem was so serious that the executive pro-

68. On 8 November 1882, the Society requested Galt "to refund to this Society, out of the fund granted for the Winnipeg batch of refugees, under his charge, any sums that may have been expended by the Montreal community to assist such Winnipeg batch". See Minutes, I, 12 November 1882.

69. Abraham J. ARNOLD, "The Jewish Farm Settlements of Saskatchewan: From 'New Jerusalem' to Edenbridge", *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, 4 (Spring 1980): 25-43; S. BELKIN, "Jewish Colonization in Canada", in HART, *The Jew In Canada*, pp. 483-88; N. MACDONALD, *Canada: Immigration and Colonization, 1841-1903* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), pp. 220-22.

70. Samuel J. LEE, *Moses of the New World: The Work of Baron de Hirsch* (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1970), p. 279.

71. *Montreal Gazette*, 16 August, 15, 17 November 1884.

72. Minutes, I, 11 February 1883.

posed to retreat altogether and "hand over the affairs of the Society to the Young Men as was heretofore carried on by them."⁷³ Presumably, the younger members of the community would have more time and energy for these matters than their elders.

So uneasy had the executive become at the prospect of dealing with the numbers, costs and social problems of the immigrants, that they angrily protested to London's Mansion House Committee which, like its predecessors a few years earlier, was simply dispatching to the United States and Canada many poor European Jews almost as soon as they arrived at the London docks. Resentful of the fact that both Galt and London were imposing on them by sending indigents to Canada,⁷⁴ the Society's executive in November 1882 even considered returning to London as many refugees as possible so as to compel the Jewish organization there to recognize Montreal's need for assistance. In a gesture of appeasement, Mansion House replied in March that a \$500 grant was on its way to the resentful Montrealers.⁷⁵ This seems to have placated them for a few years but, as immigration to Canada increased again later that decade, small sums were clearly not enough. In 1887 the executive recommended that "some measures must be brought to bear, so that this community should not receive more than its share of immigrants."⁷⁶ But the London Jews were also under serious pressure. The protests from Montreal were mild in comparison to the objections voiced by London's prestigious Jewish Board of Guardians to continental European Jewish aid committees for sending to London so many refugees.⁷⁷ The burdens were so serious that Jewish organizations actually sent refugees back to the continent just as German, Austrian and French Jews were returning thousands of newcomers back to Russia and Romania.⁷⁸ Perhaps because such a solution was too costly, the Montreal Society never resorted to it. But it did continue to complain.

It was not just the prospect of large numbers that alarmed the Society but the manner of their coming. Frequently, immigrants landed with no advance warning, often in groups of two and three hundred at a time. In late September 1886 a large but unspecified number of sick, bewildered and bedraggled Romanian and South Russian Jews landed on the Montreal docks with no money or food and little clothing. The most pitiful of these cases was that of the young wife of a man who had died aboard ship leaving

73. Minutes, I, 10 February 1884, 22 February 1885 and 14 February 1886.

74. Minutes, I, 12 November 1882.

75. Minutes, I, 11 February 1883.

76. See "Annual Report of the Board of the YMHS of Montreal, for the Fiscal Year Ending January 1, 1887", in Minutes, I, 13 February 1887; and GARTNER, *Jewish Immigrant in England*, p. 54.

77. See V. LIPMAN, *A Century of Social Service, 1859-1959: A History of the Jewish Board of Guardians* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), *passim*.

78. Between 1880 and 1886, the Jewish Board of Guardians sent a total of 12,000 Jews back to Eastern Europe, according to Jay M. PILZER, "Jews and the Great 'Sweated Labour' Debate: 1888-1892", *Jewish Social Studies*, XLI, (Summer-Fall 1979): 257-74, esp. 273. The only recorded instance of the Montreal Society's doing the same thing occurred in 1890 when "a young Roumanian who had consumption" was sent back to Hamburg. See Minutes, I, 13 April 1890.

her with eight children, one of whom was dying in her arms.⁷⁹ During the voyage these hapless people were often fleeced of both baggage and money, and some even arrived without knowing whether they were landing at Montreal or New York.⁸⁰ In 1888, a group of sixteen people arrived from Hamburg where they had been sold tickets to Montreal instead of to New York where they hoped to go.⁸¹ The Society requested the German Consul in Montreal to see that the port authorities in Hamburg prevented frauds of this kind. The Anglo-Jewish Association in London was also asked to have the British Home Office prevent similar irregularities from occurring at British ports. These complaints, however, apparently had little effect and when the same swindles occurred in Hamburg the following year, the Society lodged protests directly with the Allan Line, whose agents were believed to be responsible, and again with the German Consul in Montreal.⁸² Similar frauds were perpetrated on immigrants on the North American side of the ocean as well. The Society felt compelled to protest these conditions for because of them "this society . . . in the end, is the heaviest sufferer."⁸³

Notwithstanding the need on occasion to furnish "indoor relief" in the form of housing and food for weeks at a time for particularly piteous cases, the Society mainly supplied "outdoor relief" such as food, clothing, coal, medicine and Passover *matzos* (unleavened bread). Sums were also spent on transportation to move people to other places; in some years more than one-third of all expenditures were spent on railway tickets.⁸⁴ While a few individual members privately assisted some of the immigrants to get jobs—L. Harris seems to have been acting as an employment agent for immigrants—many of the new arrivals could not find work. The *Gazette* in late September 1886 reported that Jewish carpenters, locksmiths, sewing machine operators, mechanics, tinsmiths, tailors, shoemakers, and railway workers were languishing in the dockside immigration sheds: "industrious men anxious for work . . . entirely penniless and . . . subsisting on almost nothing".⁸⁵

In 1883 the Society began experimenting with interest-free loans to a number of immigrants who proposed to operate apple carts on Montreal streets.⁸⁶ By February 1884, \$556 had been loaned in amounts of \$10 to \$30 "on security which satisfied the Board"; some nineteen to fifty-six such loans were repaid in sums of between \$0.25 and \$1.00 per week. Everyone was pleased with the success of this loan policy since it "has worked so advantageously and thereby saved to the Society unlimited

79. *Montreal Gazette*, 22, 24, 29 September 1886.

80. Zasa SZAJKOWSKI, "The Jewish Emigration Policy in the Period of the Roumanian 'Exodus', 1899-1902", *Jewish Social Studies*, XIII (January 1951): 47-70; Minutes, I, 13 February, 16 October 1887.

81. See Minutes, I, 8 April 1888.

82. Minutes, I, 21 April 1889.

83. Minutes, I, 16 October 1887.

84. *Ibid.*, I, 15 November 1885. "Most of the visitors [transients] after making futile attempts to earn a livelihood here, beseeched to be sent to other parts".

85. *Montreal Gazette*, 24, 29 September 1886.

86. Minutes, I, 11 November 1883.

expenditure and unnecessary trouble, while at the same time benefitting in a more efficient degree the deserving poor."⁸⁷ Inexplicably, however, the Board decided to discontinue the practice the following year, thus ending an interesting and potentially highly beneficial—although limited—method of assisting people.⁸⁸ Perhaps the fear of competition, of the Jewish "image" as peddler, or the desire by manufacturers to encourage immigrants to work in their factories might help to explain the termination of this brief experiment.

The Society also made arrangements for the burial of indigents after protracted but unsuccessful attempts to have local synagogues accept responsibility for the burial of Jewish paupers in their own cemeteries. Many years later, the Society was forced to purchase a special burial ground on the outskirts of the city.⁸⁹ Even in death, the social barrier remained.

Despite the growing number of problems as Jewish immigration increased during the 1880s, the YMHBS actually reduced its annual relief expenditures. In fact, although early in the decade a fairly consistent relationship existed between total relief expenditures and the amount of assistance per capita (Table 1), such outlays declined drastically at the end of the 1880s. In the wake of the refugee migration of 1882, the outlay in 1883 amounted to \$1,863, which was spent on 205 "cases" involving approximately 600 people, an average of \$3.05 each.⁹⁰ By 1890, however,

Table 1 Relief Expenditures of Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society, Montreal, 1883-1891

Year	Total Expenditure \$	Individuals Aided N	Per Capita Expenditure \$
1883	1,863	600 ^a	3.15
1884	1,400	—	—
1885	815	239	3.41
1886	699	200	3.45
1887	492	113	4.43
1888	592	180 ^a	3.26
1889	673	374	1.80
1890	398	245	1.50
1891	1,035	433	2.39

Sources: Public Archives of Canada, MG 28, V 86, Baron de Hirsch Institute of Montreal Papers, Minutes, I, 1 October 1889.

^a Estimated from number of "cases" or families.

87. Minutes, I, 10 February 1884.

88. Minutes, I, 22 February 1885.

89. Minutes, 1903, Report of the Baron de Hirsch Institute, p. 5.

90. The annual reports after 1886 usually included a table indicating the nationality of applicants for relief, the number in each family and the amount spent on each national group. It is not clear whether "nationality" was determined by citizenship, most recent previous abode, or place of birth. If it were based on immediate past residence, it is possible that some "English" or "Americans" were really Russians who had previously lived for short periods in London or New York.

the Society spent less than half that amount per person, although expenditures per capita increased significantly the following year.

Aside from soliciting special donations during crises, the organization's finances came entirely from the members' annual dues or from local supporters or "subscribers" who chose to contribute money rather than join the Society. Frequently, total receipts were exceeded by relief outlays which in those days of volunteer work, was the only significant item of expenditure. Besides its initial \$500 grant in 1883, London's Mansion House Committee provided more funds in 1884, sending a further grant of \$2,400 for immigration relief.⁹¹ After 1890, an annual grant of \$250 came from the government of Quebec, symbolizing official recognition of the Society's work.⁹² Thus the Jewish community of Montreal continued to draw on external sources of funds for aiding Jewish immigrants.

IV

Membership in the Society was never large during the 1880s. Except for the emergency year of 1882-83 when it grew from 72 to 125, membership increased slowly. Thirty new members joined during 1884. By February 1887 membership had grown to 176, but it levelled off to about 150 by 1891. Although the Society in the 1860s and 1870s probably included a large portion of the heads of Jewish families in Montreal as well as a considerable number of the unmarried young men, in the 1880s it was far less representative of the majority of Montreal's Jewish male population.⁹³ While the Jewish population of Montreal mushroomed in the 1880s and 1890s, the membership of the YMHS increased only modestly. Efforts to induce more people to join and support its charitable work were not successful. Circulars proclaiming the Society's work and asking for the Jewish community's support were distributed widely and frequently; members exhorted one another to bring in friends and so enlarge the Society's resources but with little effect.

By 1885, some members of the Montreal Jewish community asserted that they would soon require a permanent "refuge" or "home" of a type already in existence for the city's Roman Catholics and Protestants. That year more extended care was required for four orphans whom the Society had been supporting for several months. After an unsuccessful attempt to place the children in Jewish orphanages in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Rochester and New York, the Board decided to investigate the possibility of establishing a Jewish "home" which would serve the needs of the entire

91. Minutes, I, 17 May 1885. See also entries for 13 May 1883 and February 1884.

92. Minutes, I, 12 November 1882, 13 April 1890; *Montreal Gazette*, 2, 14, 20 November 1889.

93. According to L. ROSENBERG, "The Diamond Jubilee of the United Talmud Torahs of Montreal, 1896-1956" (typescript, Jewish Public Library, Montreal, 1956), there were only about 200 Jewish families in Montreal in 1881; and, according to ROSENBERG, *Canada's Jews*, p. 20, probably about 500 in 1891.

Canadian Jewish population for an orphanage, refuge for the "aged, infirmed and decrepit", as well as for the inevitable transients. In October 1886 the issue was aired again at a public meeting of Montreal Jews, many of whom opposed establishing such a home, apparently on the grounds that it would encourage indigency and cost too much for the community to maintain. Rabbi Friedlander, spiritual leader of the *Sha'ar Hashamayim* Congregation, was one of the most active participants in the discussion; he stated his belief that immigrants sheltered there "would acquire habits of laziness", while clothing manufacturer David Friedman argued that such a home "would be a shelter for the paupers of America".⁹⁴ Others contended that the existence of such an institution would be a "public boon, not only to the Jewish residents of Montreal but of the whole of Canada generally, as the custom of shipping paupers from one city to another will be discontinued."⁹⁵ For the time being, the establishment of a Jewish house of refuge failed to receive enough support but the question itself did not disappear. Premises of some kind were required to house transients and such services as a used clothing depot. Moreover, the transients, mostly immigrants from Eastern Europe, also had to adjust to their new environment by learning some English or French. A night school was organized for this purpose in 1890 with the support of a grant from the Quebec provincial government.⁹⁶

On 13 April 1890, the Society's semi-annual meeting discussed an idea that, when pursued successfully, was to enable the association to provide greatly improved social services for the Jewish community of Montreal. Many of the needs of the poorer section of the Jewish population could perhaps be met by an enthusiastic, dynamic and financially stronger organization aided by the Baron de Hirsch, the Paris-based Jewish railway tycoon and philanthropist, and the organization he had established in 1885, the Jewish Colonization Association (hereafter JCA). It was suggested that the Society apply for part of the \$120,000 that the Baron was prepared to donate to American Jewish philanthropies that were aiding immigrants. Although there was some fear that the receipt of this money would attract immigrants to Canada thus compounding the Society's problems, the Board decided to apply to the Baron.⁹⁷ In August he replied that he would send them \$20,000 to establish a Jewish house of refuge in Montreal.⁹⁸ This was only the beginning of the Baron de Hirsch's generosity to Canadian Jewry through the YMHBS, for in subsequent years both he and the JCA, greatly assisted the Society in helping to settle Jewish immigrants both in Montreal and in other parts of Canada.⁹⁹ For a number of years the Society became the agent of the Baron's colonization schemes in the Canadian West while it was also heavily dependent upon his largesse for

94. *Montreal Gazette*, 28 October, 1 November 1886.

95. *Ibid.*, 28 October 1886.

96. *Ibid.*, 2, 14, 20 November 1889; Minutes, I, 13 April 1890.

97. Minutes, I, 13 April 1890.

98. Minutes, I, 24 August, 1890.

99. The Baron is said to have donated approximately \$100,000,000 to various charities in his lifetime. See Samuel JOSEPH, *History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund: the Americanization of the Jewish Immigrant* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1935), *passim*.

acquiring and maintaining a house of refuge and, gradually, offering a range of new social services for impoverished Jews in Montreal.

V

Vulnerability and dependency were two of the leading characteristics of Jewish relief work in Montreal during the period from the 1840s to 1890. Firstly, it was clear that the responsibilities of the Society and its more transitory sister associations were a function of the growing numbers of immigrants who were so badly in need of material assistance. Yet, it became evident that this voluntary association, on which the overwhelming portion of that burden fell, and whose resources were inadequate to meet those responsibilities, had no control over the numbers landing in Montreal. Though London's Mansion House Committee sent remittances to the Society to help provide for the immigrants, and acceded temporarily to demands to limit the numbers of East European Jewish refugees coming to Canada, Montreal's Jewish community was highly vulnerable to decisions of these external agencies and, indirectly, to European migration trends over which it had no control. This was a situation in which the Society found it more difficult to operate. As Montreal's primary Jewish philanthropic association, it could not fail for the immediate effect would be widespread distress among the immigrants. This situation made it necessary for the Society to seek substantial outside assistance. Both the nature and source of that aid, almost entirely from the Baron de Hirsch and his agency, the JCA, were to influence the work and character of the YMHBS in the future.

The Montreal Jewish community, tiny, divided and comprised of people who were for the most part only newly established themselves, was especially ill-prepared to handle the demands of immigration in the 1880s when the city's Jewish population increased by nearly 300 percent. Powerless to stop the flood of people and to cope with their problems, Montreal Jews had to appeal for local non-Jewish assistance as well as for aid from London and Paris. They also considered the aid they were giving to be temporary. Ideas of establishing a permanent refuge or home, with local resources, and of undertaking long-term relief were strongly and successfully resisted. Moreover, the Montreal group expressed keen interest in passing on as many of their immigrant problems as possible to other cities or to the Canadian prairies. The forty-year experience of Jewish philanthropy in Montreal during the late nineteenth century suggests that the tradition of *tsedakah* was not very widespread among Montreal Jews. Instead, what seems to have been demonstrated is the validity of the Yiddish proverb: "If charity cost no money and benevolence caused no heartache, the world would be full of philanthropists."¹⁰⁰

While this example of Jewish charity indicates some major similarities with the ideas and practices of philanthropy current in the English-speaking

100. Hanan J. AYALTI, *Yiddish Proverbs* (New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 107.

world during the late nineteenth century, it also suggests certain subtle differences. For example, the reluctance to establish an institutionalized refuge or to couple philanthropy with religious evangelism or social meliorism indicates an absence of moral and religious reform ideas that underlay much of the philanthropic work of many Roman Catholic and Protestant groups during the same era.¹⁰¹ North American Jewish charity organizations were not generally inclined to mix religion with philanthropy, not because religion was thought to be unimportant, but because they were behaving more as a national or ethnic organization like the local St Andrew's or St Patrick's societies. Despite the reluctance or inability to respond in the true tradition of *tsedakah*, there was an understanding that Jews were one people in which religion was not the only common denominator. Most Jews understood the truth of the Talmudic admonition that "without bread, there is no Torah" and seem to have believed that it was not religious faith or practice (then almost universally Orthodox) that was at fault, but material circumstances and political forces over which Jews had no control.

From 1847 to 1890, however, Montreal Jewish philanthropy demonstrated several additional characteristics which distinguish it from that organized by New York's Jews. In a masterful study of New York Jewry from 1870 to 1912, Moses Rischin underscores the social and economic divisions between the older German and the newer Russian immigrants.¹⁰² Self-confident, well-to-do (if not wealthy) and practising "enlightened" Reform Judaism, these gentlemen dispensed a detached philanthropy without *tsedakah* to the Russian Jews because, as Germans, they believed themselves to be culturally superior to Russians. Although Montreal at the end of the nineteenth century, unlike New York, had no significant number of wealthy and prestigious German Jews, it did possess a community of prosperous bourgeois who filled the same function. By the 1880s many of the immigrants from the 1840s and 1850s were already well on the road to prosperity. They included tobacco manufacturers, furriers and growing numbers of clothing contractors and manufacturers whose increasing wealth was reflected in the impressive new synagogue they erected on fashionable McGill College Avenue in 1885. The older Spanish and Portuguese congregation built an equally imposing synagogue a few years later on Stanley Street, still farther into Montreal's well-to-do west end. Between these two congregations, as the early history of the YMHBS suggests, a certain co-operation and common middle-class identity—strengthened by some marriages and business associations—seem to have emerged by the end of the 1880s. A similar process of successful upward mobility by immigrant Jews in Toronto about a decade later and of acceptance by that city's older Jewish élite suggests that class rather than national identity was the most important criterion in determining the social structure of the Jewish communities of Canada before 1914.¹⁰³ What

101. See Charles S. ROSENBERG, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), *passim*.

102. Moses RISCHIN, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970), pp. 74-115.

103. SPEISMAN, *Jews of Toronto*, chaps 5-7.

distinguishes Jewish immigration to Montreal in the 1880s from that of the period 1830-61 was its very size and apparently significant occupational differences. The experience of the city's principal Jewish charity indicates that these realities tended to create two communities. More important still is that the older Montreal Jewry was too ill-prepared, poorly financed and ineffectively led to confront the problems of the large later migrations. Without aid from non-Jewish Montrealers and, more significantly, from London and Paris, they could not have coped.

Dependency upon outside assistance allowed not only the perpetuation of these two distinct communities but also the attempt by one to control the other. Jewish charity in Montreal during these transitional years was to remain limited and dependent until the Montreal Jewish élite—still using Hirsch money—was forced to recognize larger dimensions of Jewish adjustment in urban Canada.