

**Building Canadian Jewish Citizens out of the abandoned children of Western Canada: The  
Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage, 1917-1948**

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## **Abstract**

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage only existed for thirty five years, but it deeply affected the lives of numerous children, parents, staff and volunteers, and helped shape perceptions of Western Canadian Jews in early twentieth century Canada. At the time of its closure in 1948 the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage had housed Jewish children who had been assembled from a territory that stretched from northwestern Ontario to British Columbia, and had acted as an orphanage for parent-less children, a boarding school for rural middle-class children, and as a temporary shelter for children whose families were experiencing a short-term crisis. In this dissertation, I argue that the Orphanage was founded in order to ensure that Jewish children were not placed in Christian missionizing childcare institutions, but also to achieve the secondary goal of making the Jewish community a modern participant in the Canadian state and society.

In writing this dissertation, I was privileged to be able to consult the Orphanage's Children's Records, which contained detailed information about the circumstances that brought families to the Orphanage, as well as the lives of the children during and after their time in the institution. These records show that poor families faced significant challenges, and that the power of the staff and volunteers of the Jewish Orphanage to help children was limited by the boundaries established by the state. Yet the staff of the Jewish Orphanage were able to use their influence and knowledge to broker between the powers of the state, other charities and vulnerable families. Similarly, boundaries established within Judaism were also challenged by the Orphanage resulting in strengthened Jewish identities for the children, and religious innovations. Although it was in existence for only a short period of time, the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage's history reveals

the strategies used by this ethno-religious community to successfully navigate the development of the modern liberal Canadian state.

## **Acknowledgments**

I have been working on this history of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage for a number of years, and it was only possible because of the wonderful help and support given by a community of people.

My supervisor, Dr. Royden Loewen, spent many hours reading this dissertation and giving me such kind and invested guidance on matters historical, procedural and spiritual. In a book of Jewish philosophy *Pirkei Avot* (Sayings of the Fathers), it is written that one should be as strong as leopard, as swift as an eagle, as fleet as a gazelle and as brave as a lion to do the will of our Father in Heaven. (5:20) Thank you, Roy, for showing me how that's done.

The members of my committee, Drs. Esyllt Jones, Richard Menkis and Lori Wilkinson worked very hard to ensure that this dissertation was as well-written, complete and as complex as the primary sources deserved. Thank you for all those hours and the care you took. This dissertation is much better because of your input.

This dissertation would have been considerably poorer if I hadn't been granted access to the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage's Children's Records. This was only possible due to the hard work and commitment of Albert Benarroch, Executive Director of the Winnipeg Jewish Child and Family Service. Al patiently navigated the permissions required as well as the research agreement process in order to ensure that this history was written. He did this only because he believed that the history should be written. Thank you, Al.

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Staff at many archives were especially helpful. The University of Manitoba Archives patiently allowed me to use their on-site computer that is connected to the *Winnipeg Free Press* archives, as well as accessing their collection. The Archives of Manitoba held many treasures and its staff were knowledgeable and happy to help. The City of Winnipeg Archives and Record Control staff were extremely helpful and produced many research leads. Thank you to Faye Blum at the Ontario Jewish Archives in Toronto, who helped me gain access to restricted documents on the Toronto Jewish Orphanage. Janice Rosen of the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives in Montreal was a joy to work with; her knowledge of Canadian Jewish history is second to none.

The Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada is a treasure-trove of historical materials. Thank you to current and former staff, including Stan Carbone, Ava Block-Super, Andrew Morrison, Ilana Abrams and Belle Jarniewski. I am especially grateful to Dr. Dan Stone, who hired me as

the JHCWC office manager in the year between my masters degree and the beginning of this doctoral program. Dan, you're a true mentor and friend.

As a single mother, I had to call on a number of people to help our family with childcare as well as emotional support. I could not have even contemplated this endeavor without the support of my children's father, Dr. Jonathan Gabor, and his parents Itamar and Sheila; thank all you so much. Elizabeth Mason and the rest of the Mason-O'Region-Greencorn family made us feel at home and helped raise my kids. The Richters family and the Enkin-Lewis families are not just friends, they are our extended family here in Winnipeg. Thank you especially to Melanie Richters, for all the thoughtful guidance and friendship. Ava Block-Super and her children, Daphne and Robin, took care of us all, including the dogs. Ardith Henoch, thank you so much for the dinners, the yoga and the gentle Judaism which have enriched our family. My children and I have spent many hours around the Rosenberg-Cohen table, which provided us with the spiritual succor to go on. Adath Yeshurn Herzlia synagogue's families opened their doors to us as well, thank you all. Thank you to the Ellis family for teaching my children so much and for being our friends. The Greenfield, Lazar, Dahan, Eviatar-Holt and Smierc families not only stepped up with emergency childcare but their friendship made it possible for us to enjoy countless Shabbatot, summers and holidays. The Friedman-Dagliesh family, the Dai family, the Shteinberg families, the Markhasin family, the Gruskin and Krozkin families, the Amihud family and the Teufack family provided hours of child care and amusement for my very bored daughter. Thank you to the Kosmin-Rose family, for moving to Winnipeg and taking us into your circle. For the hilarious, helpful and enlightening conversations I am grateful to Michael Goldberg and Alon Weinberg.

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## **Introduction – Studying the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage**

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was a significant response of the Canadian Jewish community to the poverty in its own community, the presence of Christian religious attitudes in Canadian social welfare institutions, and the ever-growing reach of the modern bureaucratic state. In order to preserve its religious and ethnic identity in subsequent generations, the Jewish community created parallel institutions to those run by church groups and state organs. The Orphanage was created in order to fulfill both Jewish communal responsibilities and to present a modern face to the rest of Canadian society. In many ways the Jewish community succeeded in its goals: the children who spent time at the Orphanage received a Jewish education and were spared being sent to a Christian institution where their Judaism would have been effaced; impoverished Jewish families were helped by their own community; the Jewish community placed itself as a contributor to the growing social welfare sector in Winnipeg; and the Jewish community was able to present itself as a modern, Canadian community.

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was founded alongside a cohort of local Christian orphanages and Jewish orphanages around the world. These orphanages were responding to the upheavals of urbanization and industrial poverty, which left children homeless, sometimes parentless, and often without extended family support. In the early years of the Industrial Revolution there were no discreet institutions for children outside of schools, and homeless or family-less children were housed within adult institutions like workhouses. As awareness of the different needs of children grew, so did the call for separate institutions. Orphanages, which had always been linked with Christianity, were soon adopted by Jewish communities so as to save the communities' children

from being raised as Christians in other institutions. Jewish tradition, including the corpus of Jewish law, had provided examples of communal and familial assumption of responsibility for the care and education of poor or parentless children. One of these institutions, the community-supported religious school or Talmud Torah, had already been established in Winnipeg by the same founder as one of the two predecessors to the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage. There were also Jewish Orphanages in Toronto and Montreal, so the concept of a Jewish orphanage in Canada was not new. The establishment of a Jewish orphanage in Winnipeg, however, caused a schism in the Jewish community, and some consternation on behalf of the Children's Aid Society of Manitoba, which considered the job of child protection to be solely its own purview. Despite this opposition, the Orphanage was incorporated and became enmeshed into the Winnipeg social welfare sector. Conflict continued between the Orphanage and municipal and provincial funders, and between the Orphanage and Immigration officials on the question of who should pay to support the Orphanage children. However, these conflicts were often overcome by the Jewish community's willingness to assume much of the high costs of maintaining the institution.

After the amalgamation of the two predecessor orphanages in 1917, the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage steadily became more and more staff-run, meaning that they were more professional and fit seamlessly into Winnipeg's developing social service sector. The new Orphanage's superintendent, Louis Greenberg, was professionally trained as a child welfare officer; subsequent superintendents were not trained, but did assume a position of authority and expertise within both the Jewish and non-Jewish social welfare world. Social workers were hired, all them untrained until the 1940s, but working with the municipal social welfare organizations like the Social Welfare Commission and the Children's Bureau. The Jewish superintendents succeeded in

many aspects of their work, including building good relationships with the provincial Juvenile Court judges. Often they were able to move children from the provincial juvenile correctional facilities, so that even those children who were classified as delinquents could be housed in a Jewish institution. Sometimes the Orphanage staff were successful in quite another way, subverting Canadian and provincial laws and dictates, for example, by warning families at risk of deportation and helping them so that they did not access the public services that would qualify them as a “public charge.” The Jewish Orphanage’s social workers, originally only hired to help evaluate families’ admission applications and to help graduates of the Orphanage transition to adulthood, became brokers between the poorest members of the Jewish community and the bureaucratic organs of the social service sector.

The social context of the Orphanage was that its families were affected by structural poverty. Many of the children’s lives before and often after their time in the institution were marked by uncertain employment, illness and poor housing. Many children were institutionalized for only a short period of time while their parents were hospitalized due to illness or pregnancy. Although many of the children had extended families who theoretically could look after them, often these families were also sick, poor and experiencing employment instability. Families were forced to accept a very low standard of living, and often had to cope with inadequate help from municipal social welfare schemes such as relief and Mothers’ Allowance. Housing scarcity was also a problem, and families were forced to move from suite to suite, hoping to find an affordable place to live that was in somewhat decent condition. Despite these challenges, the Orphanage superintendent and Jewish social worker would interject themselves between these families, the relief office and landlords, pushing for better services, food and access to suites.

The achievement of their lofty goals of serving both the Jewish community and creating a modern Jewish identity was enabled by the power that the staff and volunteers derived from their association with the Orphanage. The Orphanage staff were able to help their client families to overcome a crisis, but they also managed to reap their own rewards. Volunteers with the Orphanage were able to parlay their experience working without pay into jobs with the institution. Once they had these jobs, staff used and strengthened their social connections to increase their influence and gain a professional reputation. Similarly, Board volunteers, benefiting personally from spending time with the children in the roles of surrogate grandparents, were able to garner a reputation within and without the Jewish community as being charitable and generous members of Winnipeg society. The Jewish community as a whole was able to use the Orphanage to generate positive newspaper stories and a flurry of social notices in the local *Free Press* and *Tribune*. Nevertheless, these stories helped to enforce a sunny view of the Orphanage and of Jewish children during a time in which antisemitic ideas were commonly held. The Jewish community was seemingly too timid to use all this goodwill to directly address the antisemitism that it was facing by provincial and federal politicians and bureaucrats. Instead the Jewish community chose to subtly emphasize Jews' humanity by highlighting the sweetness of the Jewish Orphanage's children.

Religiously, the Jewish Orphanage was able to provide not only a Jewish education to its charges but a joyous celebration of Judaism. Alumni who left the Orphanage sometimes wrote back to the superintendents about their distress over their lack of access to formal Jewish ritual. Some Orphanage boys were given a scholarship to study for the rabbinate; one, Reuben Slonim,

became a rabbi and another became a Jewish educator. The Orphanage also gave a Jewish education to girls, including leadership roles at the Passover seder and placing them in jobs as Hebrew tutors to rural families. The Orphanage in this way was successful in its attempt to keep its children religiously Jewish. However, although many children were grateful for their time in the Orphanage and its nurturing Jewish environment, others felt that the experience of being housed away from their families had overly sheltered them from real life while creating an emotional distance between them and their families. The Orphanage's closure generated a communal argument, as many of the adults who had gained so much from the institution thought it should remain in place for the dwindling numbers of children who still needed housing. But the Jewish community no longer needed such an institution, as wages and government welfare rates had risen, allowing families to stay together, and the age of a professionally run Jewish social service agency which placed children in foster homes had begun.

These various themes are examined and argued in greater depth in subsequent chapters. I begin by discussing the larger historical context for the Orphanage, and then narrow the focus onto the chronological history of the Institution itself. The relationships between the Orphanage and provincial and municipal authorities are examined in the third chapter. The final three chapters provide more in-depth analyses of the lives of the staff, families and children of the Jewish Orphanage.

Chapter One discusses the background history of orphanages, Jewish children and Jewish orphanages. The institution of the orphanage is Christian in origin, and over time became a civic response to the realities of urban living. In North America, a number of orphanages were created

from the middle of the nineteenth century until the early twentieth. Jewish history is discussed, especially as sites in which Jews educated their children in the context of the Western world's prejudicial view on how Jews treated children. Finally, the history of Jewish orphanages in Europe and in North America is examined, with a special study made of the Toronto and Montreal Jewish orphanages.

In Chapter Two, a chronological history of the Orphanage, establishes the timeline and the historical contexts of its existence. Formal studies of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage have often focused on the events which shaped the institution; however, in this dissertation, a deeper examination of the institution's records allows for a closer analysis of how the Jewish community attempted to both save its children from the Christian-influenced Canadian social service sector and to place itself as a vital contributor to the modern Canadian state.

Chapter Three examines the social service sectors in Canada, Manitoba and Winnipeg, and analyzes the relationships between these sectors and the Orphanage. Relationships between the Orphanage and provincial governments, and the Orphanage with the federal Immigration department, are also discussed. Semi-governmental agencies, such as the Children's Bureau, worked well with the Jewish Orphanage, but also made decisions on its behalf. Children who were refused financial maintenance by the City, sometimes funded by their own families, but more often donations from the Jewish community. In this chapter, I describe how the Jewish Orphanage acted as a broker between the Jewish community and the Canadian state.

Chapter Four takes a deeper look into the lived realities of the families who were involved with the Orphanage. I examine the texture of life in Winnipeg and in Western Canada, including issues around housing, health, employment and family coping strategies. These details are mostly culled from the social workers' notes in the Orphanage Children's Records, and are a rich source of description of the lives of Jewish Canadian families in the early part of the twentieth century. They also allow an insight into the deeper structures that dictated how families lived, such as zoning regulations, social services, childcare options and employment standards. I argue that these structural realities created the conditions that forced the Jewish community to create, maintain and staff an Orphanage.

Chapter Five examines power in the Orphanage, and the limits on that power, challenging the concept that the Orphanage acted as a purely authoritative institution. Power was given to adults through their association with the Orphanage, and this chapter examines the biographies of two key staffers, Aaron Osovsky and Pearl Finkelstein, to see how they used the power they obtained. Parents normally did not consider themselves to be in possession of much power when it came to their relationship with the Jewish Orphanage, however, some resisted the power of the institution by refusing to cooperate. Teenagers who spent their youths in the Orphanage were another source of power disruption, especially if they channeled their frustration at living under a strict set of rules into rebellion. This chapter ends by discussing the reality of sexual abuse in the Orphanage; such abuse gave a lie to the staffer's good intentions and forced the Orphanage to face the limits to its power and the ability to achieve its goals. Although the Orphanage was intended as a place of refuge, in this chapter I argue that it became an institution that generated power, and conflicts over power, for adults over children and adults among other adults.

Chapter Six examines how the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage addressed issues of Canadian-ness and Jewish identity, and argues that its two goals of educating Jewish children and of joining mainstream Canadian society were hard-fought efforts. The Orphanage presented a sunny, positive and charming face to outsiders, especially in the many newspaper articles that focused on it. The charitable aspect of the Orphanage was referenced in the society pages, and brought prestige to the volunteers who were involved. Inside the Orphanage, Judaism was constructed as child-centred and positive, as the staffers hoped to educate their children at a time when Judaism and the Jewish People were facing existential threats. This chapter also argues that the Orphanage staff used unique approaches to answering questions on who was a Jew, thus upending traditional Jewish legal rulings on determining Jewish descent.

In order to research this dissertation, I worked with a variety of documents. They include those generated by the staff and Board of the Orphanage that have been archived in the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, the Archives of Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg Archive, the Canadian Jewish Archives in Montreal and the Archives of Ontario. I also consulted the local newspapers, including the *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Tribune*, as well as the local Yiddish or Jewish papers, the *Israelite Press* and the *Jewish Post*. As per Lisa Chilton and Royden Loewen's article "Documenting Migration and Transnationalism: New Discourses on Old Themes," in order to write complete immigration histories, various sources must be used in order to provide an idea of these multifaceted experiences.<sup>1</sup> In addition to archival sources, I was

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1 Lisa Chilton and Royden Loewen, "Introduction Documenting Migration and Transnationalism: New Discourses on Old Themes," *Histoire sociale/Social history* 48, No. 6 (May 2015), 3.



especially privileged to be granted access to the Jewish Orphanage's Children's Records, held by the Winnipeg Jewish Child and Family Service (JCFS). These records contained both health and social service documents, and thus I needed approval from the Manitoba Department of Health, the Manitoba Department of Families, the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board, and the University of Manitoba Research Agreements Office. In particular, this research required the support of Al Benarroch, Executive Director of JCFS, who obtained permission from the General Authority over social services in Winnipeg for me to study these sensitive records. The records exist now as a microfiche collection, consisting of documents that were originally paper forms, including carbon copies of letters and documents, as well as handwritten letters, notes and photographs. Most of the microfiched documents were readable, but some of the original carbon copies appear to have been smudged.

The staff of the JCFS generously tolerated my presence at their on-site microfiche machine. These records were almost lost in 1981, when the building housing the JCFS suffered a fire, and the Children's Records were threatened.<sup>2</sup> Some of the microfiched documents do show signs of fire damage along the edges of the pages, and I was told by Benarroch that an unknown number of complete files were lost. As a result, it is not possible to reconstruct a complete statistical record of the institution, although it is possible to draw some general conclusions. There were 537 files in the collection and included 66 files that did not reference the Orphanage. In these cases I did not record too many details but noted that the record was not relevant and why.

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2 Allan Levine, *Coming of Age: a History of the Jewish People of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, Inc., 2009), 432.

In order to properly anonymize the names of the children in these records, some of whom may still be alive, I assigned an arbitrary letter code to each family according to how I found their record in the collection, beginning at the end of the alphabet, with ZZ. If there was more than one child per family, I assigned them each a number. While I recorded exactly when children were admitted and discharged, many files were incomplete, either due to the fire damage or because the record had not been updated at the time. In an effort to avoid recording anything close to a birth date for the children, I only recorded their age range at the time of intake, such as infant, toddler, pre-schooler, school-aged and teen. The geographic origin of the children were coming from was also obscured, unless they were from Winnipeg; I was concerned that because Jewish rural populations were small, naming those towns would compromise anonymity. I took care in writing this thesis to avoid including any unnecessary personal details. Occasionally, a geographic location is indicated because of the adults involved in the case: for example, Rabbi N. Pastinsky was a Jewish communal official based in Vancouver, British Columbia. I also recorded whether it was a parent, extended family member, or community representative who asked for childrens' admission.

Some of the documents included in the Records were letters from family members or alumni written in Yiddish, Hebrew, or Polish, and a very small number written in Russian. The two longest-serving superintendents were both Yiddish writers, and appeared to have been able to read Hebrew, Polish and Russian, as they sent replies to these letters. I can read Hebrew fluently and can translate Yiddish, but cannot read either Polish or Russian. I was limited in my ability to translate the Yiddish documents fully because I was required by the research agreement to examine the documents within the JCFS office. However, between my reading of the Hebrew and

Yiddish letters and the response letters which were included in the file I could discern the meanings. The Children's Records revealed an astonishing amount of detail, and I had to limit the time I spent on translating.

Theoretical frameworks helped shape my thinking on this vast collection of information into a deeper argument about the Jewish Orphanage. The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage can be seen as one small aspect of the Canadian liberal project. As Ian McKay argues, the history of Canada's development since 1840 can be considered a project of liberalism, in which a country was created with the value of the primacy of the "individual."<sup>3</sup> McKay notes that his perspective is informed by the concept of cultural hegemony that was developed by Antonio Gramsci. In Gramsci's reckoning, intellectual workers, or bureaucrats, develop cultural tools that help the masses "consent" to being ruled by elite hegemony.<sup>4</sup>

This argument of McKay was further explored in the 2009 book *Liberalism and Hegemony*, which engaged with multiple historians on the question of whether it is appropriate to view all of Canadian history using the lens of the creation of a liberal Canada. Canadian liberalism may have predicated itself on a prioritization of the individual and that person's right to hold property, but it then sought to limit the definition of an individual in order to exclude Indigenous people, women, labouring men, and non-European ethnicities. Women were excluded because they were considered the property of men, but other people were likewise rejected from the category of the

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3 Ian McKay, "'The Liberal Order Framework: a Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History.' A reproduction of Canadian Historical Review 81 (2000): 617-45," in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution* ed. Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 41 (623).

4 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 12.

individual because of their perceived inability to act as truly self-possessed.<sup>5</sup> Communal rights in Canada were limited to the Province of Quebec, and to Indigenous populations which were then targeted for destruction.<sup>6</sup>

The qualified rejection of communal rights by Canadian liberalism provided a particular challenge to the Jewish community, which operated within a context of voluntary communalism. In this dissertation, the communal responsibilities undertaken by the Jewish community did not seem to precipitate any anti-communal activity directed at Canadian Jews by Canadian government officials. Antisemitic discrimination against Jews in the workplace and housing was permitted in Canada during this period, and Jewish refugees from the Nazi regime were cruelly blocked from immigrating to Canada. But official assimilationist policies were not leveled against the Canadian Jewish community. The Jewish community was able to preclude anti-Jewish government action by its willingness to establish and help fund its own liberal order projects, but possibly also because the main perceived “enemies” of this regime were the many Indigenous groups with their communal cultures and non-Europeans, such as Asians, who were perceived of as being racially inferior.

There are objections to the framing of Canadian history as the history of a liberal project. Within *Liberalism and Hegemony*, Bruce Curtis, for example, writes that the liberal order framework proposed by McKay allows for Canadian historians to continue with “business as usual,” focusing on marginalized populations, while still studying the political and economic events that

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5 McKay, 629.

6 McKay, 625-626.

make up the familiar structure of Canadian history. Curtis suggests that in order to adopt this framework, three aspects of liberal structures must be studied: the relationships and tensions between individuals, groups and governing structures; the social history of everyday life within liberal structures because studying liberal states requires a study of the history of administration, and this history is best illuminated by the realities of daily life; and that a study of the liberal project of Canada should also include post-structuralism, which Curtis defines as the concept that people create meaning out of events, and therefore events have multiple interpretations.<sup>7</sup>

In this dissertation, the history of the relationship between the Jewish Orphanage and the families who used the institution, as well as the relationship between the Orphanage and municipal, provincial and federal government bodies, is argued to have constituted a set of evolving relationships. These relationships worked within administrative systems, at the same time in which they created meaning for donors, staff and children. The Gramscian conception of the use of cultural tools by elite classes to create working-class consent to elite hegemony, thus, is useful in interpretative the history of the Orphanage. However, pure Gramscian theory assumes that elites are homogeneous, when in fact, elite groups can have competing interests. For example, the elites who ran Manitoba can be seen as responsible for encouraging social welfare culture and strategies in order to obtain the consent of working classes, but they were not interested in creating Jewish orphanages. McKay argues that the development of the liberal order shouldn't be considered merely a top-down project, but instead a process of coercion and collaboration, with the dominant group being forced to consider and accommodate the needs of various groups of

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7 Bruce Curtis, "After 'Canada': Liberalisms, Social Theory and Historical Analysis," in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, ed. Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 177-179.

people.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, the members of the Jewish elite who ran the Jewish Orphanage were not full members of the Canadian elite; for example, Jewish elites during the 1930s and 1940s were unable to persuade Canadian elites to allow any Jewish refugees from Nazism to enter Canada. However, the Jewish Orphanage can be seen as the attempts by a minoritized ethno-religious group to make a place for itself in the Christianizing liberal Canadian project. The kinds of Jews who worked to build and manage the Orphanage were different from the kinds of Jews whose children were committed to the Institution. In this study, the class-based structure of the Orphanage must be considered, and Gramsci's conception becomes more complex, with layered elites (British Protestant, Jewish) negotiating, accommodating and managing the concerns of different groups of working class people.

A similar relationship to those ordering the Jewish Orphanage is the relationship between the British Canadian elites, social workers, and families, that is explored in Franca Iacovetta's 2006 book *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*. In this book, Iacovetta explores the experiences of new immigrants who were greeted by Canadian social workers and other social and cultural governmental agents. According to Iacovetta, Canadians were working with the displaced people of post-World War II Europe in the refugee camps, on the ships, at arrival points in Canada, and in the places in which they had settled.<sup>9</sup> These men and women were stationed at the country's entry points and within the Canadian social service sector in order to guide immigrants and refugees towards "Canadian ways," and eventual social and cultural citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Iacovetta's work illuminates the process of transforming immigrants into members

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8 McKay, 628.

9 Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 4-5.

10 Iacovetta, 10.

of the Canadian liberal order. Unlike this dissertation, Iacovetta's study does not include social workers who actively subverted the state on behalf of their clients, although she does document the many ways in which immigrants resisted those workers' interference. But the Winnipeg Orphanage was not only an instrument of state control, but also sometimes subverted the state in order to safeguard its families from deportation or punitive state action. This resistance may have occurred because during the period under study in *Gatekeepers* social workers were most often professionally trained and outsiders to the immigrant communities in which they worked. The pre-World War II staff of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage were mostly untrained and deeply embedded within the Jewish community. Using their personal connections, they sometimes intervened on these families' behalf with the courts and municipal social welfare organizations. Therefore, the relationship between the Orphanage and its families and the staff of governmental agencies and departments was complicated, with Orphanage staff testing the boundaries of the state's capacity to dramatically alter individuals' and families' lives. The lived experiences of people within state social service agencies varied widely, according to the goals of the community which founded and ran the organization, and the relationships forged between the staff and the families which used it.

The Canadian state, however, is not a clearly defined entity, with discernible goals and leadership. In this dissertation, the state refers to federal, provincial and municipal governments, as all three had funding and judicial powers. However, the use of the term "the state" may indicate an unchanging quality that operated in opposition to working-class people and non-state employed social service sectors. In her book *Engendering the State: Family, Work and Welfare in Canada*, historian Nancy Christie notes that the Canadian state was not a homogeneous entity,

but was composed of elected officials and bureaucrats in constant negotiation with a plurality of groups, who sometimes worked together over class and gender divisions to agitate for government policy.<sup>11</sup> In this dissertation, I argue that the different levels of government also negotiated with the shifting groups of the Winnipeg social sector, each with differing goals and expected outcomes. For example, during the 1930s, when the federal Department of Immigration was barring Jewish refugees from entering Canada under an antisemitic policy, municipal and Juvenile Court bureaucrats were happy to work with the staff of the Jewish Orphanage in an atmosphere of trust and collegiality. Christie observes that the state can therefore be conceived as an entity created by a shifting coalition of different interest groups; if so, how did the Jewish Orphanage help shape the state? On the municipal and provincial levels of governance, the existence and presence of the Jewish Orphanage meant that bureaucrats and legislators became accustomed to the incorporation of Jewish-run charities into the developing social service sector. By assuming the responsibilities of delivering social services, the Canadian Jewish community was able to position itself as an integral part of the ongoing state building project.

The state is not to be confused with the idea of the “nation,” a term which is not used in this dissertation. According to Cynthia Comacchio’s book on Ontario’s history of child rescue social services, *Nations are Built of Babies*, the term “nation” in early twentieth century English Canada referred exclusively to British Protestants. Early child saving discourses in Ontario were based on eugenicist and racist fears of “inferior” immigrants replacing native-born Canadians, a fear which was amplified after the casualties of the First World War.<sup>12</sup> Jews, as immigrants and non-

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11 Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto - Press, 2000), 7-8.

12 Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario’s Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), 56-58.



Christians, were by implication not part of the imagined nation of English Canada. Denyse Baillargeon's book on Québécois child rescue efforts illustrates how the distinction between French Canadian and Jewish populations were made even more explicit in Quebec. Jewish infant mortality rates were compared with French Catholic rates by the doctors who sounded the alarm on the high infant mortality rates in Quebec.<sup>13</sup> Jews were therefore outside the "nation" in both English and French Canada, though they did participate in the state, through efforts such as the Jewish Orphanage.

A complex relationship between representatives of an ethnic group and Canadian state officials is described in another Canadian history, Lisa Mar's book *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945*. In this work, Mar examines the role of the elites of the Chinese Canadian community as "brokers," working between officials and their own community to create opportunities for Chinese immigrants. The first generations of Chinese Canadian brokers worked against the anti-Chinese immigration head tax that became Canadian law in 1885, developing relationships with authorities to allow Chinese migrants to come to Canada. Later generations worked to end Canadian segregation and to extend civil rights to Canadian Chinese. Other elites worked to manipulate and change existing attitudes towards Chinese Canadians by shaping scholarly studies about their community.<sup>14</sup> According to Mar, the history of immigrant communities in Canada is not only the study of exclusions which eventually gave way to inclusion, but also the study of the interactions between actors in these communities and the

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13 Denyse Baillargeon, *Babies for the Nation: the Medicalization of Motherhood in Quebec, 1910-1970*, trans. W. Donald Wilson (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 33.

14 Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5-11.

elites who ran the Canadian state.<sup>15</sup> Mar here emphasizes the relationships between the players who were, willingly or not, building modern Canada, some of them elites and some of them working class and poor. She also tries to frame the meaning that the Chinese community drew from events such as the World Wars and the rise of labour movements, and the ways in which they used this meaning to agitate for civil rights. For Chinese Canadians who were actively excluded from civil equality, the brokering relationships of their community's elites were of vital importance to the community's existence. The similarities between Chinese brokers and the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage are clear, yet there are differences to consider. Although Jewish immigration to Canada was restricted during the period of this study, Canadian Jews were not subjected to the same strict and racist legal restrictions on civil rights experienced by Chinese immigrants. However, Judaism and Jewish culture was viewed with suspicion and sometimes derision by Canadian Protestant elites. This context led the Jewish community to recreate the institutions of the liberal state instead of using those created by Christians, thus avoiding the loss of their children to conversion. Preserving Judaism was therefore the goal of the brokers within the Canadian Jewish community.

But how did the Jews of Western Canada live their ethno-religious identity within the liberal order? According to the watershed 1992 article, "The Invention of Ethnicity," by Kathleen Neils Conzen and other scholars, ethnic identity was continually reinvented and re-imagined within US immigrant communities. It marked a set of changing identities in relationship with both the needs of the ethnic community and the requirements of the surrounding culture. This development does not mean that these ethnic communities were homogeneous or united in common cause, but

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<sup>15</sup> Mar, 14.

instead that the conflict within these communities shaped the process of defining and enacting ethnicity.<sup>16</sup> In this process of becoming, the authors discuss the way that German and Irish American immigrants, for example, lost their village and regional identities in favour of all encompassing “German,” or “Irish” identities once they were settled in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage created a unified public face of the Jewish community to outsiders in its newspaper coverage, obscuring the internal religious and class conflicts, and invented Canadian Jewish identity as something modern, responsible and charming. Conzen et. al. use case studies, including those related to the development of Italian-American identity at the turn of the twentieth century to show how the basis of a particular ethnic identity changed over time. In the case of Italian-Americans, it changed from the performance of class-based, regional saints’ celebrations to the formation of the Sons of Italy Society in 1905, thus subsuming all regional and class distinctions. This public advocacy group then adopted Columbus Day as the premier Italian-American holiday.<sup>18</sup> The creation and maintenance of specifically Jewish versions of state institutions such as the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was also a performance of identity in the public space created by interactions between staff who worked in the social service sector and the mental space created by the use of newspaper articles in the minds of their fellow Canadians.

Canadian Jews are not only an ethnic group sharing characteristics with other ethnic immigrant North American groups, but are also a particular group with a unique history. The specific challenges that faced Canadian Jews included antisemitism, internal religious and cultural

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16 Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta and Rudolph J. Vecoli, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, No. 1 (Fall 1992), 4-5.

17 Conzen, Gerber, et. al., 12.

18 Conzen, Gerber, et. al., 26-29.

conflicts, and class divisions within the Jewish community. Canadian Jewish historiography has grappled with these questions of power wielded by both state authorities and Jewish communal leaders. In these works, the relationship between agents of the Canadian state and Jewish leaders was often conflictual, with the state authorities using their power to exclude Jews. The classic Canadian Jewish history, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper, examines the negotiations between Jewish communal representatives and government officials. Abella and Troper analyze the antisemitic policies that were established and enforced by the federal Department of Immigration, especially under the Liberal government which began in 1935, and the ultimately fruitless lobbying that Jewish community leaders undertook.<sup>19</sup> The Jewish community was at that time fractured by class and ideological differences, but Abella and Troper show that despite heroic efforts, its diverse members were unable to shift the government's position on Jewish refugees no matter which lobbying tactic they used.<sup>20</sup> Abella and Troper frame the confrontation between the federal officials and the Jewish community as a power struggle which Jewish leadership approached cross-communally through tireless advocacy and creativity, but one in which it was out-matched by the structural authority granted to politicians and bureaucrats. In this thesis, I argue that the relationships between municipal and provincial government officials and the Jewish community was usually one of collaboration, although there were times in which the Jewish Orphanage subverted the policies of the state, either by avoiding municipal or provincial bureaucrats or by negotiating with them.

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19 Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, Publishers, 1986), 7-15.

20 Abella and Troper, 283.

Still, across Canada in the 1930s, concurrent with the Jewish Orphanage's heyday and its successful relationships with Winnipeg bureaucrats, antisemitism was becoming popular, and its rise shaped the Orphanage's history. Janine Stingel's book, *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Discredit, and the Jewish Response* illuminates the antisemitism at the core of the Social Credit ideology in Canada, especially in the Alberta government and its effect on Alberta's Jews. Although Alberta's Social Credit government did not attempt to limit Jewish civil rights during its time in power from 1935 onward, party leadership expressed antisemitic ideas publicly. The Canadian Jewish Congress, which was working hard during this time period to try to open Canada's immigration policy to Jewish refugees, also tried to address the antisemitism in Social Credit, meeting with leaders to plead with them to moderate their language about Jews.<sup>21</sup> Stingel not only analyzes how the Social Credit leaders expressed antisemitic ideas and why the party purged its most vocal antisemites beginning in 1947, but she also argues that confronting this provincial government changed the philosophy and tactics used by some Jewish leaders. The Canadian Jewish Congress became far more proactive, aggressive and unafraid when confronting antisemitism, and this refusal to accept prejudice was led by those Jewish leaders who were on the front lines in Alberta.<sup>22</sup> Stingel especially references the experiences of individuals such as Louis Rosenberg, a Congress member, worker in the Jewish Colonization Association, and a Western Jew who acutely felt the threat of Social Credit's blatant antisemitism. *Social Discredit* describes a relationship between the Alberta provincial government and the Jewish community that was defined by conflict, involving the government's acceptance of bigotry and the failure of the Jewish community's policy of quiet and discrete diplomacy. Unlike the collegial relationships

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21 Janine Stingel, *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Discredit, and the Jewish Response* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), 4-5.

22 Stingel, 5-6.

between the Jewish Orphanage staff and the provincial and municipal child welfare authorities, the Jewish leadership and the Alberta Social Credit party were not working towards the same goal.

But this dissertation is not only concerned with the relationship of the Jewish community with the state, but also how Jewish communal needs were expressed internally in the running of the Orphanage. One Canadian Jewish history that addresses the changes that happened within Jewish communities' operations is Jack Lipinsky's *Imposing their Will: an Organizational History of Jewish Toronto, 1933-1948*. Lipinsky argues that the elites of the Toronto Jewish community spent the period of the 1930s and 40s responding to international and local pressures on Jewish community social services by seeking to professionalize and "rationalize" the provision of these services. Lipinsky classifies this as a struggle between the "uptowners," or the richer, more established Toronto Jews, and the "amcha," or the poorer Jews who received charity. He also describes how political events changed the answer to the question of Jewish identity, as the Toronto Jewish leadership decided that the ideal Canadian Jewish worker was professional.<sup>23</sup> By creating a more unified, professional Jewish social service sector, the Toronto Jewish community was letting the non-Jewish Canadian social service sector know that they were meeting standards that allowed them to operate as an equal player in the system. Lipinsky focuses more on the power struggles that occurred between organizations within the Jewish community than on the struggles between the State and the community. These internal struggles highlight the fact that the Jewish community was not homogeneous or unified, similar to the class and religious differences

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23 Jack Lipinsky, *Imposing their Will: an Organizational History of Jewish Toronto, 1933-1948* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), xxii-xxiii.

that existed within the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage between the staff, volunteers, and families. Canadian Jewish communities, with their mix of business owners and labourers, international socialists and Zionists, and other groups, were particularly fractious during this time period. Social service organizations were spaces where the diverse elements of the Jewish community could meet, both as clients and as volunteers, but the power dynamics within organizations such as the Orphanage, or within the funding and governance model of the Toronto community, ensured that the poorer members of the community were less likely to have their voices heard.

Jewish communities were not homogeneous, and they were also not sealed against outside influences. Canadian cultural attitudes towards children and their education influenced more than the stated policy of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage, it also influenced the attitudes of the staff and volunteers who worked with its families. Contemporary Canadian ideas about child-rearing were in flux during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, moving from a family-based model to one in which children were seen as a valuable part of the Canadian liberal project. For example, in her extensive study of adoption in Canada, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s*, Veronica Strong-Boag writes that the processes of legalizing adoption and the independence of Canada from Britain occurred at the same time because, "...both represent modern efforts to establish rules for the forging and control of diverse communities."<sup>24</sup> According to Strong-Boag, the family itself is like a nation, and the adopted child is an immigrant to its culture. Her work illustrates the prevailing attitude in pre-World War II Canada that religious communities were supported in their efforts by adoption and

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24 Veronica Strong-Boag, *Finding Families, Finding Ourselves: English Canada Encounters Adoption from the Nineteenth Century to the 1990s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), x.

child welfare policy which enforced sectarianism for all Canadians, including but not limited to Jews.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Jewish community's desire to ensure that its children were spared missionizing efforts from Christian institutions was reinforced by the general Canadian culture of enforcing religious "matching" between children and the services or adults who helped them. The goal of the Jewish Orphanage, to create a Jewish-oriented social service sector, was matched by the Canadian state's desire to allow religions and cultures to avoid mixing.

Canadian social history has provided other examples of institutional childcare beyond orphanages, including sleep-over summer camps. Sharon Wall's book, *The Nature of Nurture: Childhood, Antimodernism and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955* discusses the way that anxieties about modernism's effects on children led to innovative new institutions, most notably children's summer camps. Sleepover summer camps in the country were meant to counter the effects of urban environments, which were dirty, noisy and full of perils that could cause a child to become a delinquent.<sup>26</sup> Summer camps for poor children, or Fresh Air camps, were used by charitable groups to rehabilitate the health of these children, which was impacted by the lack of adequate nutrition and the bad city air with which they lived.<sup>27</sup> Like orphanages, summer camps proposed temporary solutions to long-standing, structural problems that plagued working class Canadians. Elites chose to create and maintain these institutions instead of agitating for fairer wages and other supports that would permanently allow families to live year-round in a state of good health. As Wall writes, Fresh Air camps sought to redirect class resentments held by poor

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25 Strong-Boag, 113-114.

26 Sharon Wall, *The Nature of Nurture: Childhood, Antimodernism and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 5-7.

27 Wall, 109-111.



children into happiness and gratitude.<sup>28</sup> The Jewish Orphanage therefore not only saved Jewish children from poverty and from Christian institutions, it also helped to save the liberal state from the desperation of the very poor, as did Fresh Air camps.

Canadian social history has produced many works that focus on people who lived on the margins, as analytical tools to expose the values of the centre. Tamara Myers' 2006 book on girls in the Montreal Juvenile Court system, *Caught: Montreal's Modern Girls and the Law, 1869-1945*, studies girls who were classed as "delinquent," often for their sexuality. The creation of delinquency offenses meant that the state could extend itself into the lives of adolescent girls and their families through the judicial system. But Myers not only examines the Montreal judicial system as a method of state control, but also as a deeply gendered structure. Girls were treated as potential mothers, and their sexuality was seen as having been corrupted by the modern world, which would eventually affect their own children. Juvenile Court became an instrument of social control that sought to keep girls within a subordinate place in their families.<sup>29</sup> Myers' work therefore considers gender as central to the project of modern state building, and to the anxieties which spurred the project. In my dissertation, gender is examined as an element of social control. The experiences of mothers and female children in the Orphanage were different than the experiences of men and boys, especially in the case of sexual behaviour. However, the Jewish Orphanage was not only a tool of social control of the state, but was also a means by which the Jewish community subverted some of the efforts of that state. Jewish society had its own ideas about what constituted appropriately gendered behaviour, especially seen in the prevalence of

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28 Wall, 118.

29 Tamara Myers, *Caught: Montreal's Modern Girls and the Law, 1869-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 6-8.

divorce. The Jewish Orphanage was not a tool to further marginalize children; instead, it took marginalized children and placed them at the centre of an ethnic community, in its beloved Orphanage. In this dissertation, I argue against a monolithic view of social services in Canada, as the different cultures which participated in the formation of these sectors in Canada meant that families' experiences with social services varied.

As the twentieth century developed, the liberal Canadian state incorporated Jewish communal institutions within its funding and governance models. This incorporation was due to the Canadian Jewish community's willingness to adopt institutions that were not traditionally Jewish but could be amended to meet the community's needs, as well as its willingness to work with governments. The Jewish communal workers who brokered between the social service sector in Western Canada and their own community members did so in order to deflect deportation decrees, keep families from starving and prevent the community's children from being sent to Christian institutions. Creating the Jewish Orphanage allowed the Jewish community to fit itself into the structure of the modern Canadian state, but it also allowed the community to educate its children and to help its families according to its own needs. In this way, the Jewish community was able to actively participate within the liberal project of inventing Canada as well as ensuring that its own values were respected. In this dissertation, I argue for the dual function of the Jewish Orphanage, but I also hope to give a voice to some of the children and families who used it. Having access to the Orphanage's Children's Records gave me a view of their lives, albeit influenced by the authors of those records. These families were often caught between their own desire to take care of their children and the cold fact that poverty and illness had trapped them into surrendering them to the care of the Orphanage. The children involved in the Orphanage had

the least amount of agency and their voices are the least-often recorded or heard, even in these records. When examining the actions of the adults who created the institutions of the modern Canadian state it is important to study how the grand project of liberal Canada affected some its youngest citizens.

## **Chapter 1 - Orphanages, Jews, and Jewish Orphanages**

Orphanages did not exist in Jewish communities until the eighteenth century, although there were a number of other institutions and strategies that they used to educate children, including parentless children. Why then did the Winnipeg Jewish community feel the need to establish an institution that was a cultural innovation, especially one which was expensive and time consuming to administer? This chapter explores the historical reasons for the creation and maintenance of a Jewish orphanages in Europe and North America, including assimilationist pressures that were placed on Jews from hostile governments and missionizing churches. The history of Jewish educational institutions and trends will also be examined, revealing how Jewish culture changed over time to accommodate the demands of surrounding non-Jewish societies. In order to ensure that Jewish children remained within their own community and religion, the Jewish orphanage in history not only housed and educated its children, its ethos was shaped by interactions with host societies.

The orphanage is only one form of childcare that has been used to care for parent-less children. For centuries, communities were able to find homes for children with extended family, by enslavement or within an apprenticeship context. Although some historical events such as wars and epidemics kill parents and leave children orphaned, in most historical periods very few children were completely alone in the world. Most children in orphanages were, in fact, half-orphans or the children of the poor, and could have remained with parents if those parents had been offered financial or childcare help. Orphanages were appealing to the elites who founded them because children were removed from their homes and neighbourhoods and put under the

care of other people. In this chapter, I examine the history of orphanages as a form of social service institution, the history of Jewish communities and Jewish children, and the development of Jewish orphanages in the modern world.

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was created and maintained by people who lived within the dual context of the social service sector in Western Canada and the Jewish community. These contexts were considered by the founders of the Orphanage and shaped the goals of the Orphanage to both save Jewish children from Christian missionizing as well as to present as a modern community capable of running its own modern institutions. The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was not unique, but was instead one of many Jewish orphanages established around the world. By creating their own orphanages, Jewish communities were able to control what Jewish children were taught, therefore protecting them from the efforts of Christian organizations and the State to erase or minimize their Jewish identity. The founders of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage were driven to do so because they were aware of Christian hostility to Judaism and how anti-Jewish violence had marked Jewish history for centuries. Most of Winnipeg's Jews came from Eastern Europe, particularly the Russian Empire, where anti-Jewish violence and legislation was common, especially during the Orphanage's founding in the early 1910s. Jewish orphanages tended to operate according to modern childcare principles, in order to gain acceptance by local social service sectors and states. Jewish Orphanages throughout the world helped Jewish communities remain Jewish and yet integrate into the modern world.

## The Orphanage in History

The orphanage as an institution was not a traditional Jewish institution, like the synagogue or the yeshiva (academy of Jewish learning). According to Duncan Lindsay and Paul Stewart, the orphanage is a Christian institution, first created by early Christian bishops who were invested with the responsibility of caring for orphans. Christian monasteries often established institutions specifically for homeless children; for example, in 358 CE a Christian orphanage was established in Alexandria.<sup>30</sup> During the medieval period, there were multiple institutions in Europe that cared for abandoned and orphaned children. Hospitals were institutions where many kinds of needy people, including children, were cared for by civic and Church authorities. In these hospitals, the sick and the well shared rooms and sometimes even beds. Other forms of care could include civic authorities paying foster parents to care for children in their own homes, or placing children with monastic orders or within households run by nuns.<sup>31</sup>

Orphanages were institutions that had an additional educational purpose to raising children, although each community and institution seems to have differing goals. Juliane Jacobi has described how these goals were informed by ideas about poor people and charity. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward, European thought seems to have viewed the poor with fear. This fear resulted in a splitting of the poor into “good” or “deserving” and “evil” or “undeserving” categories. Of course children of the non-working poor (evil, undeserving) were at risk of becoming

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30 Duncan Lindsay and Paul H. Stewart, “Orphanages in History and the Modern Child Welfare Setting: an Overview,” in *Home Away from Home: the Forgotten History of Orphanages*, ed. Richard B. McKenzie (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), 25-26.

31 Nicholas Terpstra, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 17, 18.

undeserving themselves if not cared for properly and guided away from their parents. Another change occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the numbers of poor people flooding into cities rose. This rise in the number of poor people resulted in cities using taxes to support them. The evil, undeserving, or, in another term, “idle” poor were to be pushed out of society through the courts, prisons, hospitals and other institutions. Deserving poor were usually women, urban, very young or very old and rooted in their communities and therefore considered entitled to charitable support.<sup>32</sup>

In his 2005 book, *Abandoned Children of the Italian Renaissance: Orphan Care in Florence and Bologna*, Nicholas Terpstra argues that orphanages were not static institutions. In early modern Europe, the orphanage institution underwent a sea change, as secular authorities became more involved in the provision of care for parent-less children. Urban life in early modern Italy, writes Terpstra, generated unwanted infants from servants and slaves who were unable to marry. These children were known as foundlings and were abandoned throughout town, sometimes on garbage heaps. The Florence Ospedale, which was founded by the Silk Guild specifically to baptize abandoned infants, gradually fell under civic control.<sup>33</sup>

Jacobi’s comparison of orphanages that were founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century throughout Europe found that their goals varied from the baptismal goals of the Ospedale. The Augsburg Orphanage, founded in 1572, sought to educate the legitimate (children of married parents) children of deceased burghers.<sup>34</sup> In Paris, two orphanages, Saint-Esprit and Trinité, were called

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32 Juliane Jacobi, “Between charity and education: orphans and orphanages in early modern times,” *Paedagogica Historica*, 45 (2009): 1-2, 52-53.

33 Terpstra, 9-19.

34 Jacobi, 57-58.

hospitals and were originally connected to the Hôpital-Général. Both institutions only took in legitimate children, aged 5, but Saint-Esprit would only accept full-orphans. The focus of these institutions was to provide poor children with a trade.<sup>35</sup> The Venetian *conservatorio*, founded in 1588, only admitted attractive or graceful girls who were at risk of losing their virginity. The institution became renowned for its bobbin lace work that the girls painstakingly produced.<sup>36</sup> The Great Orphanage in Potsdam was established by Freidrich Wilhelm I for the sons of his soldiers. They were prepared for military service.<sup>37</sup> In Puritan England, a move away from charitable giving led to the creation of children's workhouses instead of orphanages or specialty schools, which was meant to teach these children the value of hard work.<sup>38</sup> Jacobi notes that with the Enlightenment, German philosophers began to question if orphanages were the best place for children, especially considering how many of them were horrible places for anyone to live.<sup>39</sup>

Another shift in Western conceptions of poverty occurred in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when British and French authorities discovered the existence of the working poor.<sup>40</sup> The Christian nature of orphanages was further developed by the efforts 19<sup>th</sup> century British missionaries to the industrial poor. Inspired by romantic poets and thinkers, British missionaries such as Thomas Bernardo believed in Christian theologies of salvation and end times. According to Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, men like Bernardo decided to bring the Christian message to the poor in their own London's East End instead of being missionaries to foreign people.<sup>41</sup> These domestic

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35 Jacobi, 59-60.

36 Jacobi, 60-61.

37 Jacobi, 63.

38 Jacobi, 64.

39 Jacobi, 65.

40 Jacobi, 52.

41 Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2010), 17.



missionaries had roots in the Ragged School Movement, which established schools that over time began to house homeless children or children whom missionaries thought were poorly cared for. These children went to refuges (orphanages) or were sent to British colonies to work. According to Ragged School discourses, parents were universally scourged as harmful to their own children. Moving children to far away places was seen as both helping the child and the Imperial project of settling the New World with white Christians by providing colonies with young British workers.<sup>42</sup>

Scores of orphanages, asylums, refuges and industrial homes were established around the world, especially in areas of colonial expansion, some by clerics, some by laymen. Orphanages had come across the Atlantic to North America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the establishment of the Ursuline convent's orphanage to care for the child survivors of "Indian attacks."<sup>43</sup> According to Timothy Hacsí in his book, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America*, orphanages grew in popularity in the United States after 1830, when mercantile capitalism was changing the economy and the class structure of American cities. These cities were at the mercy of epidemics such as cholera and yellow fever, which killed many adults. The population of the Americas was growing rapidly with immigration being encouraged, which created cities full of families without extensive kin networks.<sup>44</sup> The problem of children without parents increased after the American civil war, which led to an explosion in the establishment of orphanages in urban centres. By the 1880s, many urban centres in the United States had Jewish orphanages as well as Catholic, Protestant and Black orphanages.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Swain and Hillel, 11.

43 Timothy A. Hacsí, *Second Home: Orphan Asylums and Poor Families in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17.

44 Hacsí, 20-22.

45 Hacsí, 27-28, 30.

All of this changed in 1909, with the White House Conference on Dependent Children. President Theodore Roosevelt called the conference out of concern for the state of child protection in the United States. The conference came to an unequivocal finding: children should not be removed from their parents because of poverty. Foster homes were better for children than orphanages, and if orphanages were to be used, “cottage” style orphanages, where a large institution was divided into smaller family-like groups, were to be established. The main concern was that orphanages did not allow children to develop their individuality, and made them unable to cope with regular life. Although orphanages continued to exist in the United States after the conference, their popularity was waning. Mothers’ allowances, given by charities or states to help widowed and abandoned married women, dramatically reduced the number of children in institutions.<sup>46</sup>

As in Europe, the quality and purposes of North American orphanages varied from institution to institution. In her analysis of Baltimore orphanages, *Orphanages Reconsidered*, Nurith Zmora has found very different approaches to the process of educating children in three orphanages. The Samuel Ready School was an orphanage that acted as a boarding school. It focused heavily on the academic achievements of its female inmates, ensuring that they essentially graduated from a competitive and prestigious high school.<sup>47</sup> The Hebrew Orphan Asylum, however, took in both boys and girls and sent them to the local public school, with very high achieving children being sent to a local preparatory school and from there to high school. Those children who were not studious were sent to the city to learn a trade.<sup>48</sup> Children in the Catholic Dolan Home left by age

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46 Hacsí, 37-42.

47 Nurith Zmora, *Orphanages Reconsidered: childcare Institutions in Progressive Era Baltimore* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 97-99.

48 Zmora, 99, 105.

thirteen, either returning to their parents, boarding with foster families who were usually farmers, or sent to an industrial school. Placing children in farming families was thought to be superior to keeping them in the dirty city, which was full of bad influences.<sup>49</sup> It seems that in the United States, as it had been in Europe, orphanages had vastly different goals for their children.

Canada was influenced by American childcare thinkers, although in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this wasn't apparent. According to Patricia T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, the first legislation that addressed children without families was in 1799, in Upper Canada, allowing town wardens to find apprenticeships for orphans and other poor children. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British North American colonies established what was referred to in British parlance as "indoor relief" or social care institutions, such as Houses of Industry or Houses of Refuge. These housed all kinds of poor people, including children.<sup>50</sup> As time went on, charities, some of which were religious orders or run with Church authorization, began to deliver assistance to women and children.<sup>51</sup> There were concerns, however, that children being raised in workhouses would acquire the bad habits of their parents with whom they were living in the institution. British North American prisons also had their share of child inmates, who were being influenced by other prisoners when they could be reformed. These concerns led to an 1839 appeal to raise funds for an orphan asylum in Halifax.

John Bullen has studied how the idea of the child rescuer or child saver arrived in Canada in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Bullen, J. J. Kelso, a Toronto printer, was shaken by his 1887 meeting

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49 Zmora, 110-111.

50 Patricia T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum: From Child Rescue to the Welfare State in English-Canada (1800-1950)* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 36-37.

51 Rooke and Schnell, 46-50.

with a pair of begging children, who told him they would be beaten by their father if they returned home without any money. He used his influence as a journalist to pressure the Ontario Premier to introduce child protection legislation in Ontario in 1888, and he then proceeded to establish the province's first Fresh Air Fund (to send children to summer camp), the first Santa Claus Fund (to provide children with Christmas presents) and the first Children's Aid society. He also spurred an investigation into Ontario prisons and especially children in prison.<sup>52</sup> Kristine Betker describes how in Winnipeg a similar encounter with a homeless child led Wilfred Knowles to create the Knowles Home in 1907, twenty years after J.J. Kelso met the two children in Toronto.<sup>53</sup> Kelso and Knowles exemplified how individuals and small groups could act as the founders of child protection and child-centred service organizations in pre-World War I Canada.

### ***Orphanages in Winnipeg***

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was one of a constellation of orphanages that existed in the city of Winnipeg before World War II. All of them were founded and run by charities or individuals, inspired by Christian movements like the child rescue movement. The Knowles Home for Boys was begun by Knowles renting a larger apartment for himself, the first homeless boy he met, and that boy's friends. In 1910 he incorporated the Home and established a Board of Directors. Knowles believed that every boy was a product of his environment, and was determined to give them a better chance. Although the Home was run completely by the Board, 70% of the boys

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52 John Bullen, "J.J. Kelso and the 'New' Child-savers: The Genesis of the Children's Aid Movement in Ontario," in *Dimensions of Childhood: Essays on the History of Children and Youth in Canada*, eds. Russell Smandych, Gordon Dodds and Alvin Esau (Winnipeg: Legal Research Institute of the University of Manitoba, 1991), 135-141.

53 Kristine Betker, *From Boys Home to Treatment Centre: a History of Knowles Centre Inc.* (Winnipeg: Knowles Centre Inc., 1995), 1.

were sent to it by the Juvenile Court System as a way of steering boys away from the Portage la Prairie Industrial School for Boys. In 1911 the Board purchased 40 acres of land for a purpose-built home, and in 1917 an on-site school was opened. The reason for the expansive grounds was so that the boys could, “be placed in closer harmony with Mother Nature, the greatest teacher a boy could have.”<sup>54</sup> A 1941 *Winnipeg Tribune* article about the Knowles Home noted that the first boy that Knowles had befriended and housed was actually Polish, and could therefore be considered in need of Canadianization.<sup>55</sup> Children in Winnipeg orphanages were there in order to be saved from delinquency and to be educated with middle-class values. This was true of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage as well.

Boys were sent to the Knowles Home, and girls were sent to the Children’s Home of Winnipeg, founded 1884 by the Women’s Christian Union. Provincial and municipal governments partially funded the Children’s Home, which housed boys until they were aged nine but girls until they were aged thirteen. A school was permanently opened on site in 1906; like the Knowles Home, they didn’t attend the local public schools.<sup>56</sup> In 1916 the Home moved from River Avenue to a location on Academy Road, both prestigious neighbourhoods far from the working class areas of Winnipeg. The Home appeared to focus on giving its girls (older boys were transferred to the Knowles School) a good education, promoting the professionalism of its female staff and the high scholastic achievements of its girls. The children attended a Protestant church, St. Andrews, every Sunday, in order to ensure their religious education. By the 1930s, the Home was organized

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54 Betker, 2-3.

55 “Knowles School Burns Mortgage in Fine Fete,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, December 18, 1941, 23.

56 Nathan Kramer, *Historic Sites of Manitoba: Children’s Home of Winnipeg/Children’s Home School/Winnipeg Winter Club (198 River Avenue, Winnipeg)*. [www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/childrenshome.shtml#sources](http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/childrenshome.shtml#sources). Accessed November 10, 2016.

according to the then-popular “cottage system,” where the children were divided into small groups with a nurse assigned to each, intended to act as a surrogate family.<sup>57</sup> The girls’ families were not discussed in any of the press materials about the Home, nor the reasons why they were living in the Children’s Home. The hope was that they would leave the Home molded into women like their teachers and nurses - well-educated and church going.

Winnipeg also had Catholic childcare institutions, established by the Church to ensure Catholic children were raised in the Church, similar to the Jewish community’s desire to educate its children within a Jewish Home. St. Joseph’s Orphanage, later called Vocational School, was begun by Father Didace E. Guillette in 1900, and was run by the Grey Nuns. St. Joseph’s was firmly steeped in the child rescue ideology of saving children from undeserving parents, many of whom were immigrants. Helping poor families was not good enough – children had to be removed from their homes in order to be remade. From its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative booklet, “When you consider that these little ones, belonging to the under-privileged classes, frequently arrive at the Orphanage without a knowledge of English and are taken from homes where they had suffered tremendous handicaps, and are not always in a healthy condition – then one may readily see the large responsibility assumed by the institution. It is the aim of St. Joseph’s Orphanage to return the child to society properly developed and educated so that it can take its place in the world on a par with children from normal homes.”<sup>58</sup> Although St. Joseph’s did take in some girls, most of the children seem to have been boys, especially after the re-

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57 Carolyn Cornell, “Little Stories of Good Work: Children’s Home Wards Kept Happy,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, October 5, 1932, 8.

58 *St. Joseph’s Orphanage, Winnipeg, Manitoba: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Publication, 1900-1930. Published by the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns). “Suffer Little Children to Come Unto Me.”* (Winnipeg: Sisters of Charity, 1930), 32.

naming of the Orphanage in 1938 to St. Joseph's Vocational School when the Benedictine Sisters took over the school from the Grey Nuns.

The Catholic institution that re-housed “delinquent” girls was Marymount, an institution established by five members of the *Soeurs du Bon Pasteur* after a request for such an institution by Winnipeg Juvenile Court Judge Thomas Mayne Daly. This institution was meant as a reformatory for changing children, without the fiction of parent-lessness that was implied by other institutions using the term orphanage. Marymount was moved in 1916 to a location in West Kildonan that was suitably out of the polluting city. Although the title indicated that the girls in Marymount were referred by the courts, some of the children there were merely poor, abused or neglected and were housed at the more gently named St. Agnes Priory, in the same building as Marymount but separated from the other by fire doors. Both types of girls were seen as being in need of reformation, although the Sisters categorized the girls according to their type of delinquency so that each could get the appropriate “treatment;” girls who were poor or abused were seen as being pre-delinquent. Some of the children were voluntarily admitted by their parents or social service agencies. Life was regulated, watched and managed. The girls were given both academic and domestic training, as well as the catechism, in order to give them a moral foundation based in Catholicism.<sup>59</sup>

The un-regulated, amateur and ad-hoc nature of Winnipeg orphanages is best revealed in the history of the Home of the Friendless. Len Kaminski 2016 article on this institution shows that

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59 Tanya Woloschuk, “A Promise of Redemption: the *Soeurs du Bon Pasteur* and Delinquent Girls in Winnipeg, 1911-1948,” *Manitoba History* 51 (February, 2006): 16-18.

government officials and charitable individuals would accept religiously founded orphanages' legitimacy, despite evidence of child abuse and neglect. Laura Crouch was from Kansas, heard about Winnipeg in 1900, and traveled to the city to minister to the masses. Crouch was convinced that she was doing Christ's work by rescuing women and children from sin. In 1913 the Home was incorporated and a Board of Directors was elected, one of whom bought a 250 acre farm for the Home in Rosser, just outside the city. The farm was an economic operation, with dairy cattle and market gardens. But it was a nightmarish place where children laboured in the gardens and yet experienced under-feeding; the children were given skim milk while the butter was sold. Punishment for children included long sermons, whippings with a switch over bare buttocks, solitary confinement, and, for older boys, being expelled with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Their teachers were untrained and the education the children received was of a low standard. Children and their families were not always allowed visits and all incoming and outgoing mail was read by Crouch. Some children were told their parents didn't want them or had died when this wasn't the case. This huge operation did not escape notice, and in 1926 an investigation, the Fletcher-Cottingham Commission of Inquiry (FCCI) was struck to investigate the financial running of the home as well as allegations of abuse. The Commission discounted the children's testimony, viewing it as exaggerated or malicious, but did note that the Home refused to grant government inspectors access to records and to meet the children. The Home was again investigated in 1928 during Charlotte Whitton's Royal Commission Investigation into Child Welfare in Winnipeg, and she was not persuaded of the Home's good intentions, proposing more government oversight and scrutiny for all child welfare organizations.<sup>60</sup> The fifteen-year history

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60 Len Kaminski, "Laura Crouch and the Home of the Friendless," *Manitoba History*, 80 (Spring 2016): 37-46.



of the Home for the Friendless was proof that childcare institutions in Manitoba had very little scrutiny and required little more than a religious founder to acquire a respectable reputation.

Winnipeg orphanages, aside from the Jewish Orphanage, were therefore steeped in Christian child rescue and reform ideologies. They each sought a particular kind of child for their institutions, boys or girls, delinquent, abused or merely poor, but all in need of being changed in an environment away from their parents, who were seen as bad influences. Until 1928, there was little to no oversight of these institutions' activities by the government or anyone else. Jews would not view these child saving endeavors as benign. Jewish history had shown that Christians viewed Jewish children as also being in need of change and Jewish parents as obstacles to that change. Jewish communities were aware of the Christian nature of their local orphanages and of the attitudes of Christians towards their ability to raise children. This motivated their construction of Jewish orphanages.

### **Jews, Children and the History of Raising Jewish Children**

Jewish communities did not create their own orphanages before the pre-modern period, although the lack of a specific institution for the care of parent-less children is not because there were no such children in the Jewish world. Sources for information about Jewish culture in the Roman period are mostly found in the books of Jewish law. In his book *The Child in Jewish History*, John Cooper describes how after the final rebellion against Rome in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, the rabbis of the Jerusalem Talmud responded to the deteriorating Jewish family system by mandating, by force of *halacha* (Jewish law), that a father must care for his children themselves

and not to rely on charity, indicating that charity was necessary for some parents to access.<sup>61</sup>

According to Cooper, it seems that the Greek and Roman practice of abandoning unwanted infants at birth may have been practiced by the Jewish communities of the Hellenic world, but the legal justification to do so in those societies was rejected by the Jewish texts.<sup>62</sup> Talmudic rabbis also discussed another form of families in crisis, those who experienced such deep debt that they sold their children into slavery. The rabbis curbed a father's right to sell his sons, and limited his rights to sell his daughter. It appears, therefore, that male and female children were sold by their families as well as forcibly taken into slavery by the Romans and other slave traders.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Jewish Children in Medieval Ashkenaz***

In his 2013 work Dean Phillip Bell describes how in medieval Europe, the spiritual homeland of the Ashkenazi Jews who immigrated to Winnipeg, populations were small. Mass expulsions of Jews occurred during this time: Jews were permanently expelled from England in 1290, from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497. Jewish communities were expelled from French, German and Italian principalities, some temporarily, some permanently. The violence associated with this period led to the European Jewish migrations to the Ottoman Empire, Northern Africa and also to Eastern Europe, which became the Ashkenazic Jewish heartland. Jewish populations were usually around 1% of the population, although in some places they reached 3%.<sup>64</sup> Because most communities were very small, and it appears that orphaned children were folded into the

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61 John Cooper, *The Child in Jewish History* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 99.

62 Cooper, 36-42.

63 Cooper, 100-101.

64 Dean Phillip Bell, "Early Modern Jews and Judaism," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Jewish Studies*, ed. Dean Phillip Bell (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 152-153.

households of other families, although in larger communities, like pre-Expulsion Spain, children from families in crisis were still sold into slavery. Cooper refers to the Cairo Genizah, which has documents showing that medieval Egyptian Jewish communities allocated bread for orphans and ensured they were not homeless.<sup>65</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> century German work *Sefer Hasidim* by Judah He-Hasid of Regensburg admonishes the reader not to raise, "...an orphan who tells tales because he will get no thanks for doing so."<sup>66</sup> This indicates that families raising orphans was not unknown in medieval Germany. According to Jacob Katz's *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the end of the Middle Ages*, by the end of the Middle Ages, extended families considered themselves obligated to support relatives (presumably including children) to an extent that was greater than providing charity, and it was especially meritorious to arrange the marriage of an orphaned female relative.<sup>67</sup> Slavery aside, there appears to have been two Jewish approaches to caring for children who were parent-less: individual families taking them in or some level of communal oversight to their care. John Cooper notes that for all Jewish children, it appears that parents, or in larger centres, communities, made efforts to ensure an education. Hebrew literacy was necessary for all Jewish males at the very least, so that they could participate in prayer services, and children were introduced to formal schooling in towns with enough families to support an elementary school, or *cheder*. The focus of Jewish traditional education was limited to Hebrew and Jewish texts. In smaller towns parents would hire tutors for their children.<sup>68</sup> All of this communal activity occurred within societies that had deep anti-Jewish attitudes at the heart of their culture.

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65 Cooper, 194.

66 Jacob Rader Marcus, "Books and Schools, Germany, about 1200," in *The Jew in the Medieval World, a Source Book: 315-1791*, ed. Jacob Rader Marcus (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1990), 377.

67 Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the end of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 126.

68 Cooper, 169, 178.

The medieval and early modern Jewish European societies which became the source of Winnipeg's Jewish community, lived under Catholic and Protestant Christian rulers. As David Nirenberg's book *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition* has shown, anti-Jewish ideas were incorporated into Christian theology, with theologians' ideas about Jews and Judaism acting as a foil for Christian values and behaviours.<sup>69</sup> This manifested in escalating series of anti-Jewish legislation beginning with the Emperor Constantine in 315 who eliminated the right of Jews to convert non-Jews to their religion. By the time of Justinian, Jews had been stripped of their rights to marry a Christian, own a Christian slave and convert him or her, hold city office, build a new synagogue, hold position as a judge or testify against a Christian in court.<sup>70</sup> These later anti-Jewish aspects of Roman law were carried forward into Christian and Islamic legal systems. By the medieval era, Jews became property of the king of their jurisdiction and were therefore placed outside of the feudal system. Jews were prohibited from owning land, often excluded from trade guilds and usually confined to the financial pursuits of money lending and tax collecting. The Jewish bankers were thus owned by the king, used to procure loans and buy the debts of enemies, and to deflect negative attention from the monarch by acting as financial proxies.<sup>71</sup> Jewish kinship networks and the emphasis on textual literacy meant that Jews were able to raise funds internationally and by 1000 CE, Jews in Europe were working mostly as merchants, buying and selling throughout many places. As the medieval era continued, Jew merchants faced increasing competition from Christians and turned toward banking for royalty and others.<sup>72</sup> These anti-

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69 David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2013).

70 Marcus, "Jews and the Later Roman Law 315-531," in *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 3-7.

71 Nirenberg, 195-197.

72 Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: the Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 80-82.

Jewish legislation and systems encouraged an accusation that Jews were particularly bad for children.

There are two allegations against Jews that include their relationship to children: the first that they murder Christian children, and the second that they are ruthless in preventing their own children in accepting Christianity. The charge of Jewish ritual murder of Christian children is better known as the blood libel, which first occurred in 1144, in Norwich, England, when the body of a twelve year old boy was found tortured and murdered. But even before the first accusation of Jews killing Christian children for religious reasons had occurred, stories were circulated as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century about Jews murdering their own children for having accepted Christianity.<sup>73</sup> The accounts of these murders stressed the saintliness of the murdered child and the details of the torture inflicted by his or her parents.<sup>74</sup> Accusations of Jews killing a Christian child for its blood to be used in Passover unleavened bread or for revenge was leveled as late as 1913 in the Mendel Beilis trial in Kiev. Jews were not only excluded from the estates of feudal society, they were viewed as being bad for children, both their own and others.

Jews, of course, were aware of these accusations, and lived in fear that their communities would be punished for a blood libel or their children would be taken away from them. In the riots that often accompanied medieval crusaders' attempts to forcibly convert Jews, some Jewish communities may have chosen mass suicide. Jewish crusade martyrologies often describe the mass murder of Jewish children by their parents to prevent their conversion to Christianity. The

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73 Nirenberg, 204-205.

74 Marcus, "Accusation of the Ritual Murder of St. William of Norwich," in *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 121-126.

facticity of mass suicide crusade narratives is not known for certain, but a significant aspect of them is the desire of the parents to save their children from religious conversion and therefore the breaking of one of the three ultimate prohibitions in Judaism, the rejection of monotheism. From the description of the events in Mayence during 1096 came the purported words of a woman named Rachel, “I have four children. Do not spare even them, lest the Christians come, take them alive, and bring them up in their false religion.”<sup>75</sup> In this narrative, the medieval Jewish mother facing crusaders sees two choices: death or forced conversion.

### ***The Enlightenment and its effects on Jewish Children***

During the early modern period, Jewish populations in Europe became concentrated in Alsace-Lorraine, central Europe including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. The Jews were re-admitted to England by Oliver Cromwell in 1656 and in Amsterdam former Spanish New Christians re-converted to Judaism and entered the New World colonization projects in the Americas. The new Jews of Amsterdam established an excellent Jewish elementary school in 1639 for the purposes of re-judaizing their society. The first political thinker to advocate for Jews being granted a measure of civil rights was the Berlin thinker Christian Willhelm von Dohm. In his 1781 essay “Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews,” von Dohm argued that if the Jews were more morally corrupt than Christians it was due to their oppression and exclusion from all professions, and not due to their religion. Dohm argued that Jews should be educated in state schools (universal education being an Enlightenment invention) while receiving a different education during the hours allocated to religion. Von Dohm thought it

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<sup>75</sup> Marcus, “Rachel and Her Children,” in *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 119.

would be best if Jews became yeoman farmers as opposed to landowners, but he was confident that if they received the same education as Christians, they would be encouraged to embrace reason and reject superstition.<sup>76</sup> According to Dohm, it was Jewish education, not necessarily Jewish parents, which posed a danger to Jewish children.

Faith in the value of a state over a Jewish education was expressed the following year, when Joseph II of Austria released his *Edict of Toleration*, where some rights were extended to some of the Jews of the Austro-Hungarian empire, mostly the Viennese population. The preamble to the Edict explicitly calls for a new education system for Jews: “As it is our goal to make the Jewish nation useful and serviceable to the State, mainly through better education and enlightenment of its youth as well as by directing them to the sciences, the arts and the crafts...”<sup>77</sup> The Edict allowed Jews to send their children to Christian primary and secondary schools, and to establish in Vienna a Jewish school of their own, to be overseen by the state, and to create their own religious instructions books, also to be approved by the state.<sup>78</sup> The necessity for state approval of Jewish religious textbooks meant that the State did not trust Jews to choose appropriate lessons for future Austrian citizens.

The Edict’s focus on folding Jewish children into the modern educational system was met by the German Jewish Enlightenment, the *haskalah*. The *haskalah* sought to reconcile Judaism with modernity, especially linguistics and scientific inquiry. The experiments that most engaged the

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76 Christian Willhelm von Dohm, “Concerning the Amelioration of the Civil Status of the Jews,” in *The Jew in the Modern World: a Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 33-34.

77 Joseph II, “Edit of Tolerance (January 2, 1782),” in *The Jew in the Modern World: a Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 37.

78 Joseph II, 38.

proponents of the *haskalah* was Jewish education, which they thought was overly traditional, with the use of impure language (Yiddish) over the pure Hebrew, and a focus on Talmudic study over the pure texts of the Tanach. Naftali Hertz Wessely was a Jewish thinker who wrote a pamphlet calling for a total restructuring of Jewish education that would include little Talmudic study and include secular subjects. His work was roundly rejected by leading rabbis in Germany. Wessely hoped to change the Jewish character; Enlightened Jewish thinkers believed that Jews needed to change their education and attitudes before they would be ready for citizenship in a modern state.<sup>79</sup> This negative attitude towards traditional Jewish education (and therefore Jewish parents) extended to Jewish thinkers as well; in his 2002 book *The Jewish Enlightenment*, Shmuel Feiner has framed this feeling among Jewish intellectuals in Germany as one of intellectual inferiority, because of both the separate and distinct role of Jews in society but also because Jewish intellectual systems had been left behind by Enlightenment scientific advances.<sup>80</sup> Education ideals were put into practice by the *Haskalah* when Isaac David Itzig and David Friedlander established the Jewish Free School in Berlin in 1778. This school was made for poor Jewish children (rich Jewish children, the class to which Itzig and Friedlander belonged, were tutored at home), and taught mainly secular subjects along with a reader that included excerpts from some Jewish biblical texts. A small amount of Hebrew was taught, but other traditional Jewish topics were eschewed, as the students were supposed to graduate into working as clerks for the wealthy industrialists and not into a rabbinic career.<sup>81</sup> German Jewish educational innovators focused on the children of the poor; like the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage, theirs was a class-based endeavor.

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79 Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2002), 91-93.

80 Feiner, 27.

81 Feiner, 111.



They also might have been influenced to create institutions that served both the state's needs as well as their communal needs, similar to the Winnipeg Orphanage.

### ***Jewish Children's Lives in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia and Europe***

By the mid-18th century, the most demographically numerous Jewish community was in Poland. Despite the Chmelnitsky revolts and corresponding pogroms of 1648, Gershon Hundert has calculated that Jews reached 5.35% of the total population of Poland by 1765.<sup>82</sup> The reason for this vigor was the economic structure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. According to M. J. Rosman, Jews were the only group occupying the middle class in the market towns (called *shtetls* in Yiddish), and were the prime leasers of the infrastructure in the noble estates under as the *arenda* system.<sup>83</sup> In this Jewish world, a complete educational system existed, with *heder* (elementary school) leading to *yeshiva* (secondary education) which could possibly lead to a rabbinic career. Katz describes how the *heder* was overseen by the community, but the *yeshiva* drew students from outside the local area.<sup>84</sup> Eventually, for those who excelled in their *yeshiva* studies, there would be a marriage arranged with a wealthy family's daughter, and the couple would be supported for the first few years of their marriage by the bride's family. This system of support, known as *kest*, applied to about 25% of Jews in Poland.<sup>85</sup> This system therefore existed to educate the children of the upper classes of Jewish society.

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82 Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: a Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 23.

83 M. J. Rosman, *The Lord's Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 106-110.

84 Katz, 164-165.

85 Hundert, 24.

Another educational institution that had existed for a long time in Jewish society was the Talmud Torah, a school for poor children financed by the community. The idea of a free school became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Jewish organizations that were interested in modernizing or reforming Jewish culture, similar to how the Berlin Jewish Free School operated as a method of changing the Jewish people. The new Talmud Torah schools offered religious instruction and practical education for the workforce. For example, ORT, the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training, was founded in St. Petersburg in 1880 that sought to train Jews in manual and agricultural work, and established Talmud Torah schools to facilitate that training in shoe making, tailoring and carpentry.<sup>86</sup> Hasia Diner has studied how in North America, the Talmud Torah was a popular institution for ensuring that Jewish children (including girls) received a Jewish education. The first Talmud Torah that operated as a religious school unaffiliated with any synagogue was opened in 1821 in New York. Most North American Talmud Torahs were not free, as they had been traditionally, but many offered reduced tuition heavily subsidized by the community and charity fundraisers.<sup>87</sup>

Between 1790 and 1840, as Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern has shown in his book, *The Golden Age Shtetl*, the Polish Jewish shtetls were economically robust.<sup>88</sup> This success, however, was constrained by the takeover of parts of Poland by Russia in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Legislation passed in 1827 marked a shift in the Czarist approach to its Jewish subjects: it included Jews within its byzantine draft regulations. It is clear that Czar Nicholas extended the

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86 Cooper, 293.

87 Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States: 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 143.

88 Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *The Golden Age Shtetl: a New History of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 2.

draft to Jews in order to better subject Jewish children to conversionary attempts.<sup>89</sup> Unlike other Russian subjects, those Jews who qualified could be drafted as young as at age 12, and these recruits were to be placed into special Cantonist battalions until they reached the age of 18. Jewish draftees could only be billeted in Christian homes. Full religious privileges were to be extended to Jews in the army, but Michael Stanislawski in his 1983 book *Tsar Nicholas and the Jews* has found that this provision was often violated.<sup>90</sup> In fact, the army and the Cantonist battalions actually confiscated all Jewish religious items, children were forbidden from speaking Yiddish, officials often spoke of the benefits of converting to Christianity, most food was cooked in lard, and Cantonists were prohibited from Jewish prayer.<sup>91</sup> Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of the draft was that Jewish communal officials were responsible for making the enlistment quotas.

This tore Jewish communities in Russia apart, and led, not to mass Christianization, but to the splintering of Jewish life, with ramifications in the lives of children. It was communal elders and rabbinic authorities, together with czarist bureaucrats, who decided which families lost a son and which did not. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Jewish ages at their first marriage was traditionally younger than the European norms. Chae Ran Freeze has studied how Jewish culture in the Russian Empire encouraged early marriage in order to ensure that sexuality was channeled into family-building, and that there was a correspondingly lower number of births outside of marriage.<sup>92</sup> But this system of early marriage meant that Jewish communal authorities had to

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89 Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas and the Jews: the Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983), 15.

90 Stanislawski, 18-22.

91 Stanislawski, 24-22.

92 ChaeRan Y. Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 53.

choose between sending married young men to the Russian army, or sending even younger teens who had fewer obligations. In reality, this meant that children younger than twelve were sometimes sent to serve.<sup>93</sup> But most terrible of all, it seems that communal officials turned on their less-fortunate community members, ensuring that all recruitment lists kept poor families at the top. Special deputies, called *khappers* in Yiddish, were hired by the Jewish leadership to grab the conscripted boys.<sup>94</sup> The ensuing bitterness and riots undermined Jewish society, and may have contributed to the rejection of religious life by the following generations of Eastern European Jews. Between 1827 and 1854 50,000 Jewish boys were conscripted.<sup>95</sup> Many of the Winnipeg Jewish had come to Canada from the Russia Empire, and would have known about the Russian government's targeting of Jewish boys, increasing the Winnipeg Jewish community's anxiety about Jewish children being housed in Christian settings.

The Russian government tried other approaches to regulating its Jewish subjects, attempting to change them into what they considered useful subjects, including legislating the end of the autonomy of the official Jewish community, appointing state rabbis, creating state Jewish schools, colonizing Jews on state land, dividing Jews into useful and non-useful categories, and outlawing traditional Jewish clothing.<sup>96</sup> Russian officials also granted some funding to a Jewish *maskil* to produce a plan to introduce secular education and "productive" economic activities to the Jews. This plan was met by suspicion by traditional Jews, as was the *maskil's* relationship with the hated Russian state.<sup>97</sup> The Russian state sought to transform Jews into loyal subjects and

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93 Stanislawski, 25-26.

94 Stanislawski, 28-30.

95 Stanislawski, 25.

96 Stanislawski, 47.

97 Stanislawski, 52-53.

to wrest all power away from Polish gentry, and in doing so, created a Jewish industrial proletariat and eventually the Jewish portion of the Great Migration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pushing Jews toward the New World, including to Canada.<sup>98</sup>

Away from the increasing poverty of mid-19th century Eastern Europe, Jews in other European countries wrestled with the task of remaining different from the norm and yet proving themselves to be loyal citizens. But the focus on Jewish children and their inadequate parents resurfaced, this time in Italy, with the kidnapping of the Jewish child Edgardo Mortara, age 6, in 1858 in Bologna by the Catholic Church. Edgardo had been secretly baptized by a teenage maid when he was very ill as an infant. Years later, the maid told the story of his improvised baptism to another maid, who told a priest. The maid was then taken by the Inquisition and forced to tell the story of the baby's baptism.<sup>99</sup> The hierarchy of the Catholic Church took the child from his parents to a House of Catechumens, an institution created by the Jesuits for conversion to Catholicism and dedicated in Italy to the conversion of Jews.<sup>100</sup> Despite intense international and political opposition the Church refused to let Edgardo return to his family.<sup>101</sup> The Church managed to keep Edgardo away from his family until he decided to become a priest.<sup>102</sup> The case was covered around the world by newspapers, and was known to Jews everywhere, who could now be sure that the Catholic Church in Europe wanted to kidnap their children. Therefore, the threat that Jewish children could find themselves in a Catholic orphanage would fill early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish communities

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98 Petrovsky-Shtern, 342-345.

99 David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 40-41.

100 Kertzer, 55-56.

101 Kertzer, 174.

102 Kertzer, 265.

with dread, as they knew that the Church had a history of refusing to return those children back to their own people.

### ***Jewish Migration to the New World***

Beginning in the early modern period, Jews were moving to the New World in the Americas and beyond. The first emigrating Jews were from Amsterdam to the Dutch colonies in Brazil, and from there spread to colonies in the Caribbean, Surinam and, eventually, into the North American British colonies. The first Jewish immigrants in North America were refugees from Recife, fleeing the retaking of that colony by the Portuguese from the Dutch. These Jews landed in New Amsterdam and were open about wanting to establish a permanent Jewish community. The governor of New Netherland, Peter Stuyvesant, asked the Dutch West India Company to refuse them settlement. But the directors of the Company had already received a petition from several prominent Amsterdam Jewish shareholders, and insisted that their refugee brethren be allowed to stay.<sup>103</sup> Other Jewish communities along the east coast followed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including Savannah, Charleston, Philadelphia and Newport. The early North American Jewish community set another precedent that was followed by subsequent Jewish communities: the Jews in New Amsterdam were committed to remaining Jews, but they were less interested in the observance of Jewish law. With the establishment of the synagogue Shearith Israel, in 1704, however, it appears that the Jews of New York had recreated the old kehillah or community, with authority to oversee education as well as other religious functions.<sup>104</sup> That being said, Jonathan Sarna notes that no

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103 Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: a History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 1-2.

104 Sarna, 12.

American congregation sought a rabbi until after the Revolution in 1776, and it was unusual to find rabbis in America until the 1840s.<sup>105</sup>

After the American revolution the Jewish community grew dramatically. Between 1820 and 1877, the Jewish community in the United States grew from 3,000 to 250,000. Most of these Jews were from German speaking states, although some were also from Poland.<sup>106</sup> Within these communities were not only synagogues but also organizations of a social nature, especially the B'nai Brith fraternal organization. Lee Shai Weissbach writes that the B'nai Brith was modeled on non-Jewish fraternal organizations, like the Masons or the Oddfellows.<sup>107</sup> Hasia Diner's history of nineteenth century American Jewry explains how the order was founded in 1843 by a group of young Jewish men of German origin in New York. They were primarily middle class men, small business owners, a clerk and a shoemaker. By the 1860s there were B'nai Brith lodges across the United States, and cards were distributed to its members to show their membership; thus a man could move to another city and instantly join the local lodge.<sup>108</sup> In some small American towns, B'nai Brith lodges were established as the first Jewish organization in town.<sup>109</sup> This was true in later Canadian Jewish small town communities, and in fact I found that it was sometimes members of the local B'nai Brith lodges who communicated with the Winnipeg Orphanage about families in crisis.

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105 Sarna, 15.

106 Sarna, 64-68.

107 Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America: a History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 232.

108 Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: the Second Migration 1820-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 109-112.

109 Weissbach, 232.

After the 1880s the majority of Jews migrating around the world were Eastern European in origin. The ascension of Czar Alexander III meant that for the Jews of the Russian Empire, the era of the state-sanctioned pogrom, or antisemitic riot, began. Although Russian governmental authorities did not plan or encourage the pogroms, they also did not prevent them or put them down until after Jews had lost their lives.<sup>110</sup> The pogroms began in 1881, and by 1882, the government passed the May Laws, which severely limited Jewish rights, specifically the right to move to new towns. The May Laws had the effect of leaving those Jews who were made homeless by violence to have literally nowhere to go except for a bigger city or town. The legislation also impaired Jewish businesses, which negatively impacted the economy of their locales as a whole.<sup>111</sup> The Jews of the Russian Empire had ample reasons to leave, and so they did in huge numbers to the countries of the New World, including Canada. In addition to these Russian Jews, Jews under the Austro-Hungarian Empire (mostly Galicia, in what is now Poland), were also experiencing hardships due to a sharp growth in their population and a rise in nationalist Polish legislation that shut Jews out of industries that were not trade.<sup>112</sup> Galician Jews also migrated around the world, searching for greater economic opportunities. Romanian Jews were the final group who faced antisemitic regimes and a worsening economic situation. They too joined the masses of Eastern European Jews who were migrating around the world.<sup>113</sup> 2.5 million Jews left Eastern Europe; two million Jews migrated to the United States between 1881 and 1914.<sup>114</sup>

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110 Greenberg, Louis, "Volume II: 1881-1917," in *The Jews in Russia: the Struggle for Emancipation* edited by Mark Wischnitzer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 24.

111 Greenberg, 31.

112 Klaus Hödl, "Galician Jewish Migration to Vienna," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume Twelve: Focusing on Galicia: Jews, Poles and Ukrainians 1772-1918*, ed. Israel Batal and Antony Polonsky (London: the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1999), 149.

113 Sarna, 152.

114 Sarna, 151.



### ***Jewish Arrival in Canada and the development of the Winnipeg Jewish Community***

The Jewish communities of Canada swelled under this mass immigration. Although the first Jewish settlers in Canada arrived with the British after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham and had made some small congregations, the number of Jews in Canada before 1882 was very small. As Gerald Tulchinsky describes many were Jews who had been born in Central and Eastern Europe but had lived for some time in Great Britain or the United States.<sup>115</sup> According to Allan Levine in his history of the Jews of Manitoba, the first Jews in Winnipeg were similar to this pattern: they arrived soon after the city was incorporated in 1874, with the Alsatian Coblentz family arriving in 1878.<sup>116</sup> In 1882 the Jewish community numbered at about 100 people, and had a kosher butcher but no synagogue.<sup>117</sup> Meanwhile, Russian Jews began arriving in London in 1881, refugees from violence in the Pale; noticing this, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, Alexander Galt, wrote to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald to urge him to allow a colony of refugee Jews into the Western frontier of Canada. Macdonald answered with an antisemitic canard that would deftly sketch out the picture that the Canadian Anglo elite held of the Jewish community: “The Old Clo’ move is a good one. A sprinkling of Jews in the North West would do good. They would at once go in for peddling and politics and be of much use in the New Country as Cheap Jacks and Chapmen.”<sup>118</sup> “Old Clo’s” was the stereotypical cry of the clothing re-sellers of London; cheap jacks were sellers of cheap goods, and chapmen were

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115 Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada’s Jews: a People’s Journey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 37-61.

116 Levine, 34.

117 Levine, 41.

118 Levine, 49.

peddlers. Jews, according to the Macdonald, were useful in their own way, as sellers of notions and cheap goods, but not the highest quality of person.

In addition to the stereotypical view of Jews as being good at second-hand merchandising, Christian supersessionism was also an aspect of Protestant Canadian culture. R. Gruneir's article on the Toronto Jewish Mission describes how as early as 1855, the Presbyterian Congregations of Canada began fundraising to establish their own Jewish mission in an effort to bring Christianity to the Jews. Under the authority of the Presbyterians, Dr. Ephraim Epstein, a convert to Christianity, traveled to Monastir in the Balkans to operate a medical clinic and convert the local Jews, but after two years closed the mission and returned to Canada. The Presbyterians kept collecting funds for Jewish missions and another was undertaken thirty years later to the Jewish community in Haifa, but this was also soon deemed a failure. Missionizing to Canadian Jews by the Presbyterian Church first began in Montreal in 1892. This and another Presbyterian missionizing effort in Toronto again failed within a few years, and so the Church gave the funds it was raising for the conversion of Jews to Toronto's non-denominational evangelical pastor Harry Singer.<sup>119</sup> Singer's Toronto Jewish Mission not only preached to local Jews and ran prayer services, it also provided Jewish immigrants with job-finding services and English classes using the Christian Bible as the teaching text. Later, another Jewish convert to Christianity, Sabetai Rohold, was hired by the Presbyterians to establish a new mission in Toronto's Jewish neighbourhood, this one offering prayer services in Yiddish, a free medical clinic and dispensary, and English classes. Eventually, a Christian synagogue for "Hebrew Christians" was opened by

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119 R. Gruneir, "The Hebrew-Christian Mission in Toronto," *Canadian Ethnic Studies = Etudes Ethniques au Canada*, 9, no. 1 (Jan 1, 1977): 19.

this mission.<sup>120</sup> The Canadian Presbyterian Church had come to acknowledge a complicated truth about Jews, that they are both individual practitioners (or non-practitioners) of Judaism and members of the Jewish People. It was the Jewish People, as a whole, who needed to convert in order to vindicate Christianity, and according to the Presbyterians they could remain cultural “Hebrews” while embracing Christianity.<sup>121</sup>

To further spread the evangelical message to the Jewish People, Rohold supervised the opening of a Jewish mission in Winnipeg in 1911. This mission was also staffed by converts to Christianity and offered services appealing to immigrants, such as a nursery, a Boy Scout troop, night school classes, a reading room, sewing classes for women and a free dispensary. The Winnipeg Jewish Mission was a project of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, and was opened under the auspices of the All People’s Mission, which had been founded by Reverend J. S. Woodsworth.<sup>122</sup> Woodsworth was later renowned for his involvement in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 and his time as a Labour Member of Parliament. But the popularity of classes for children and adults, in both Toronto and Winnipeg, failed to result in the mass conversion of Jews to Christianity. It was observed in Winnipeg that only British Canadians seemed to attend the Sunday services of the mission, while the weekday children’s programs remained popular.<sup>123</sup> Gruneir concludes that the Toronto missions failed because as the Jewish community grew and acclimatized to Canadian society, it was able to provide the services that its members needed, reducing Jewish immigrants’ reliance on Christianizing missions.<sup>124</sup> The Jewish Orphanage was

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120 Gruneir, 21-23.

121 Gruneir, 20-21.

122 Ross, 67.

123 Ross, 67.

124 Gruneir, 26.

one of these institutions which met the needs of immigrant families. It's no coincidence that the Orphanage was begun in 1912, in the year after the opening of the Jewish Mission. The Winnipeg Jewish community was aware of local attempts to missionize to them and were willing to take steps to prevent the loss of its children to Christianity.

One of the reasons why Jews were allowed to immigrate to Canada was due to the fact that Jewish culture is known to emphasize communal charitable giving and organizing. Tulchinsky describes how the Lord Mayor of London wrote to the Anglo-Jewish Association of Montreal, saying that London was sending Russian Jewish refugees to Canada, the more able-bodied to Winnipeg, stating 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 this suggestion will be met with your ready acceptance."<sup>125</sup> Canada, it was clear, would be a place where Jews would be accepted, as long as they committed to the burden of each other's care – a state enforcement of the Jewish principle that all of Israel helps each other.

In April 1882 Galt brought refugees directly from Russia to Hamburg, from there to Liverpool, and from Liverpool a trip in steerage to Quebec City, with a week marooned in ice in the North Atlantic. From there most of the settlers traveled by rail to Winnipeg. Twenty three men and women arrived over a four week period from late May until mid-June, completely penniless.<sup>126</sup> These refugees were housed in the immigration sheds by the rail yards. Members of the tiny Jewish community immediately attempted to help the refugees, including accompanying each

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125 Tulchinsky, 79.

126 Levine, 50-52.

man when he was given work so as to ensure that the instructions were relayed to him in Yiddish. The earliest historian of the Manitoba Jewish community, Arthur Chiel, describes how the refugees informed their new benefactors that a further 247 Russian Jews would be arriving in a few days. In a panic, the Winnipeg Jews turned to their non-Jewish neighbours, and asked for some financial assistance from the City. A number of prominent citizens did donate large sums, and the City attempted to get more funds from the Dominion government, jobs from the provincial government and pledged to send the refugees relief, or social financial assistance. The first arrivals were able to leave the immigration sheds just in time for the new refugees.<sup>127</sup> The support from the non-Jewish citizens of Winnipeg, however, did not prevent the second group of refugees from experiencing antisemitic violence during their work building the railroad in rural Manitoba. In the second case of violence, the antisemitic instigator was charged and tried, and found guilty. Around the same time that the trial was underway, the *Winnipeg Daily Times* published an editorial accusing the refugees of being lazy and dirty, and worthy of being deported. In response the *Free Press* then published a reported story about how the refugees were actually very industrious and were attempting to overcome their historic disadvantages.<sup>128</sup> It seems that Winnipeggers were expressing both antisemitism and unprecedented kindness and fairness to the new Jewish settlers of Manitoba. Notable in this response was the civic government's helpfulness to the Jewish community in settling newcomers. The City of Winnipeg would be very helpful to the Jewish Orphanage throughout the years.

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127 Arthur Chiel, *The Jews in Manitoba: a Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 31-32.  
128 Chiel, 34-37.

In his new book, *Communal Solidarity: Immigration, Settlement, and Social Welfare in Winnipeg's Jewish Community, 1882-1930*, Arthur Ross argues that the newcomers and their needs spurred the establishment of a whole host of Jewish institutions, beginning with synagogues.<sup>129</sup> In early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish community was split along class lines, with more established and wealthy Jews often living in the neighbourhood south of the Assiniboine River, and immigrant and working class Jews living in the North End neighbourhood, separated from the city's financial heart by the rail yards. Jews of all classes and religious views were dedicated to providing their children with a Jewish religious or cultural education, and established a constellation of educational institutions. The Talmud Torah was established by the elites of the Jewish community to ensure that Jewish children had a knowledge of written Hebrew and key religious texts. But the existence of not only religious schools but also non-religious Yiddish schools like the I. L. Peretz Folkshul in 1914, meant that Winnipeg's socialist Jews wanted to do so on their own terms. In 1920 the Peretz Shul began to operate as a day school. Parents were concerned not with their children learning Jewish law or even Hebrew, but with them retaining a Jewish identity. Providing their children with a Yiddish, socialist and Zionist education meant that these immigrant parents were resisting the British elites who ran the Winnipeg school system. That being said, the Peretz school was happy to prepare the children for the higher grades in the public schools.<sup>130</sup> In fact, the school required the help of the public school system to exist; the first space for the school was in rented rooms in the Aberdeen School after hours. Some parents found the school's motto, "The Jewish Child for the Jewish People," incompatible with their international Marxist goals and actually agitated against the school with the Winnipeg

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129 Ross, 40.

130 Levine, 151-152.

School Board, forcing it to rent a separate building.<sup>131</sup> This idea of ensuring that Jewish children remained in the Jewish nation was the reason behind the establishment of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage.

## **Jewish Orphanages**

The Jewish culture of communal support which had nurtured schools and funds for the children of the poor would influence the creation of Jewish orphanages. The orphanage, however, remained a solely Christian institution until Jewish communities began to establish their own in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in communities that were experiencing high immigration. The first orphan asylum of any kind in London, for example, was established by the grandees of the Sephardic Bevis Marks Synagogue in 1703 as the Spanish and Portuguese Jews Orphan's Society, London.<sup>132</sup> There is almost no information about this institution available, except that it housed boys only. With so little information, it is difficult to know what the motivations were for the establishment of this institution. The next orphanage was opened in 1807 as a hospital, or care home, for both children and the elderly. The institution had been founded as a response to the mass migration of poor Ashkenazi Jews to London, and, according to Edward Conway, it wished to re-educate those children of the poor so that they were more likely to confirm to British ideas

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131 Harvey H. Herstein, *The Growth of the Winnipeg Jewish Community and the Evolution of its Educational Institutions* (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 1964), 103-105.

132 "Spanish and Portuguese Orphan's Society, London," *Children's Homes: the Institutions that Became Home for Britain's Children and Young People*, accessed May 24, 2019, <http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/LondonSpanishJews/>.

about respectability while still receiving the Jewish education that the founders found necessary.<sup>133</sup>

As historians of later Jewish orphanages have found, these institutions' shared goals were similar: to mold the poorer children of its community into a version of respectability that conformed to the surrounding culture without eliminating the children's Jewish identity. As the historian of American Jewish Orphanages, Reena Sigman Friedman argues, Jewish communities felt pressure to found their own orphanages to siphon Jewish children away from Christianizing institutions. For example, in Philadelphia in 1855, the Jewish Foster Home was established by the women of Mikveh Israel Synagogue to save the child match-peddlers of Chestnut Street. The women sought to rescue either orphans or poor children from the "...evils of ignorance and vice."<sup>134</sup> It was therefore a Jewish version of child rescuing; notably, the founders did not call their school an orphanage, and nor was there an implication that the children selling matches were parent-less or homeless. Hyman Bogen who wrote the history of the New York Hebrew Orphan Asylum describes how in New York, in 1857, the editor of the Jewish newspaper, the *Messenger*, published an article about a family of Jewish half-orphans (one parent still living) who were being housed in a Christian home; the editor was in favour of merging the two existing Jewish social service societies in order create a Jewish orphanage. The news of Mortara affair the next year was then used by the *Messenger* to further make the case for a single charitable foundation that could spare Jewish children from Christian conversion efforts. By 1860 the two groups had

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133 Edward S. Conway, "The Origins of the Jewish Orphanage," *Transactions & Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)*, 22 (1968-1969): 53.

134 Reena Sigman Friedman, *These are our Children: Jewish Orphanages in the United States, 1880-1925* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, University Press of New England, 1994), 11.



merged and in April of that year the Hebrew Orphan Asylum was opened.<sup>135</sup> But Gerald Edward Polster describes a different motive for the founding of the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum. It was first planned in 1863, when the B'nai Brith discussed opening a Mid-West orphanage to house the Jewish orphans of the Civil War. Around five hundred Jewish soldiers eventually lost their lives in the American Civil War; whether or not these men had children and whether or not those children were in need did not seem to be considered. Objections raised by Mid-West lodges to this fundraising effort were ignored. The orphanage was opened in 1868, as a Jewish answer to the drive to create Christian orphanages after the war.<sup>136</sup>

Eventually, these orphanages became places where the poor, of mainly Eastern European parentage, were raised by German-American Jews, who wished to shape them into American Reform Jews. According to Polster, in Cleveland, a city which had a vibrant German Jewish community who were mostly Reform Jews, the arrival of mass numbers of Eastern European Jews after 1881 was cause for concern; they felt that the new immigrants would draw too much negative attention to their community.<sup>137</sup> Rabbi Samuel Wolfenstein of the Cleveland Orphanage hoped that his children, after being released from the institution, would return to their families and change them from the inside. Rabbi Wolfenstein said of his Orphanage's alumni, "Into dirty and shiftless homes they bring habits of cleanliness and order, into petrified and aimless poverty they bring ambition, and striving for higher things; into ignorance they bring useful knowledge; unto soulless superstition, a firm and reasonable religious foundation."<sup>138</sup> Some Jewish

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135 Hyman Bogen, *The Luckiest Orphans: a History of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum of New York* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 14-19.

136 Gary Edward Polster, *Inside Looking Out: The Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum, 1868-1924* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990), 5-6.

137 Polster, 54-55.

138 Polster, 74.

orphanages were therefore conceived of as being forces for Jewish acculturation into the behavioural and living standards set by North American Christian elites.

### ***Canadian Jewish Orphanages in Toronto and Montreal***

Canadian Jewish orphanages were established much later than the above examples. The Montreal Hebrew Orphans Home was founded in 1909 and the Toronto Jewish Children's Home was established in 1910. Benjamin Sack, the editor of the *Keneder Adler*, the Montreal Yiddish newspaper, states in his history of the Jewish community that the Montreal Hebrew Orphans Home was established due to the arrival of a large number of Jewish immigrants in 1907-1908. The Baron de Hirsch Institute, Montreal's social service agency (which also oversaw the Jewish Colonization Association), founded the Home in order to divert Jewish children from Christian institutions.<sup>139</sup> According to Judy Gordon's history of the Montreal Jewish orphanages, nine children were removed from a Protestant children's home at its founding, and later more children came to the Montreal Jewish Orphan Home from other orphanages.<sup>140</sup>

The Toronto Jewish Orphanage did not actually begin as an institution meant to house children full-time. According to the early history of Canadian Jews by Hart, it was begun by the Ladies' Aid Society as a way of helping a widowed mother who was hired as the first superintendent of what was meant as a day nursery, not an Orphanage. Its first location was shared with a soup kitchen and a dispensary.<sup>141</sup> In his book about the professionalization of the Toronto Jewish

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139 B. G. Sack, "Canadian Jews Early in this Century," 1975, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress, 49, 69.

140 Judy Gordon, *Four Hundred Brothers and Sisters: Their Story Continues* (Toronto: MJ Publications, 2004), 10.  
141 Hart, 222.

Community, Jack Lipinsky describes how the Home was actually a battle ground between the immigrant-supported Toronto Jewish Maternity Aid organization, and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies from which it stood aloof, resisting both funding and any kind of control over its activities.<sup>142</sup>

In the files held by the Ontario Jewish Archives, I found a document called a *Mental Hygiene Survey*, done by Mae Fleming in 1934, which provided a detailed description of the Toronto Jewish Orphanage. Fleming found an institution that was adequately providing for children's physical needs but was very cold emotionally. The staff were untrained in social work or in children's education, and spent much time on admonishment and little time on developing intimacy. Younger children's needs were not considered, so there were too few toys and behavioural expectations were unrealistic. Conflicts between the children were unaddressed or exacerbated by the staff. There appears to have been no musical education or clubs on site.<sup>143</sup> Earlier in the 1920s, the children's religious instruction was provided by Holy Blossom's Hebrew School, the synagogue of the less-religious and more established upper class Jewish leaders.<sup>144</sup> This orphanage appears to have been considered unnecessary by factions of the community, especially the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, run by Toronto elites. Lipinsky relates how the Yiddish newspapers cried that the children were going to be sent "to the Gentiles!" when it was closed.<sup>145</sup> It closed none the less.

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142 Jack Lipinsky, *Imposing their Will: An Organizational History of Jewish Toronto, 1933-1948* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 70.

143 Mae Fleming, "Mental Hygiene Survey of the Toronto Jewish Orphan's Home," July 5, 1934, Ontario Jewish Archives, Fonds 86-1, Series 8, File 2.

144 "8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report Federation of Jewish Charities United Jewish Welfare Funds 1924-1925," Ontario Jewish Archives, Fonds 66 and 67, Box 3, File 3, 18.

145 Lipinsky, 73.

Gordon's work describes how for a long period of time there were two Montreal Jewish orphanages because the second, the Montefiore Hebrew Orphan's Home, was opened in order to ease overcrowding at the Montreal Hebrew Orphan's Home. The Montefiore Home was located at 4650 Jeanne Mance, in the downtown area known as the Main where the Eastern European immigrants lived, and the Montreal Home was in Westmount, the home of the upper-class Uptown Jews. Although the Montreal Hebrew Home was well-funded and pleasant, the immigrant or Downtown Jews had problems with the institution, which is best exemplified by the crisis over a deadly fire which swept through the Orphanage's summer cottage in 1922, killing eight children as well as the supervisor and his three children.<sup>146</sup> This fire aroused the Downtown Jews' anger because the children's bodies were housed temporarily in a Christian mortuary before their return to Montreal. Although it probably couldn't have been prevented, this digression from Jewish tradition confirmed to the immigrant Jews that the Montreal Hebrew Home was lax when it came to observing religious law. Gordon quotes M. Ginzburg, writing in Yiddish in the *Keneder Adler* in August of 1931, "the Jewish spirit is missing" from the Westmount Home.<sup>147</sup> It was this feeling of a lack of attention to the most important moments of Jewish life that led to the establishment of the Montefiore Home in 1919, which in a subsequent article Ginzburg stated did raise its children in the "Jewish spirit."<sup>148</sup> Simply put, the immigrant or Downtown Jews didn't trust the Westmount Jews to do right by their children.

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146 Judy Gordon, *Four Hundred Brothers and Sisters: Two Jewish Orphanages in Montreal, Quebec 1909-1942*, (Toronto: Lugus Publication, 2002), 83.

147 Gordon, *Four Hundred Brothers and Sisters: Their Story Continues*, 20-21.

148 Gordon, *Four Hundred Brothers and Sisters: Their Story Continues*, 35.

## **Conclusion**

Christian child rescuers moved children to orphanages to get them away from their families and corrupting home streets. Jewish orphanage creators moved children to orphanages to get them away from Christian orphanages, away from their corrupting neighbourhoods. Jewish children had to be kept away from Christian institutions because of Jewish awareness of Christian impulses to convert children. These same children had to be kept away from their parents in order to elevate the children into more modern versions of Jews, and only when they were grown could they be sent back, to retrain their immigrant Jewish families and neighbours. Some Jews had to get children away from other Jews who couldn't be trusted to raise children within Jewish tradition. There was no higher authority to appeal to for Canadian Jews; the state could not even bestir itself to close orphanages that were obviously abusive and neglectful, like the Home of the Friendless. It was up to the Jewish community of Winnipeg to protect its children from Christianity, the state, their parents, and other Jews.

Orphanages were created with the purpose of housing children away from adults. Beginning with the early Christian orphanages, these institutions were each created with different goals, be it providing specific kinds of children (boys, girls, virgins) with a specific education (high school or lace making). The goals of orphanages depended in many ways on how these institutions' founders thought about poor children: were they deserving, in need of reformation, or the product of the working poor? During the 19<sup>th</sup> century child rescuers brought the Christian message to the children of the urban poor, moving from providing schools to housing children in need. But what about those children whose community didn't want them to receive a Christian message?

An integral aspect of Christian anti-Jewish thinking was that Jews were a danger to their own children and to Christian children, and this ideology had been expressed in many ways over the two centuries of Christian and Jewish relations, both as Crusade-era martyrdoms and as blood libel accusations. When Jews encountered the Enlightenment, some set about to radically change Jewish education for children to incorporate less Jewish law and more secular subjects. But the Russian state decided that the best form of dealing with its Jewish subjects was to kidnap its poorest boys to its army. The Catholic Church also kidnapped a Jewish child in order to raise it away from his family. At the same time that this was occurring, the Jews of the United States were caught up in the national craze of building orphanages in the wake of the Civil War, whether there was a glut in the number of war orphans or not. This trend reached Canada, so that in the pre-World War II era the three largest Canadian Jewish communities all had Jewish orphanages of their very own. But childcare institutions soon were folded in some way into the social service sector of modern Canadian cities. By creating their own institutions, the Jewish community was able to retain its difference from Christian society while acquiring respectability for their integration within the social service sector.

## Chapter 2: The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage, 1912 - 1948

A strong communal desire for an orphanage meant that between 1912 and 1917, the Jewish community in Winnipeg, which numbered about 8,934 people, had two Jewish orphanages.<sup>149</sup> It existed for 31 years after the two orphanages amalgamated in 1917, housing at least 719 children. Later, despite becoming clear that the Orphanage was admitting fewer and fewer children and this large institution was no longer needed, some members of the Jewish community strongly objected to any closure. The Orphanage was more than an institution that housed children in need; its establishment and maintenance carried meaning for the adults who worked with it. The existence and the maintenance of the Orphanage helped the Jewish community reshape itself as modern and compatible with the Canadian social service sector, while saving its children from living within a Christian institution. The chronological history of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage will be explored in this chapter, in order to ensure that the focus of the remainder of this dissertation moves beyond the events of its founding and dissolution.

The founders of the two predecessor Jewish orphanages' shared goal were to remove children from Christian orphanages and to prevent more children from being raised in a Christian environment; they did not express any wish to be accepted by the non-Jewish social service world. Only after the orphanages merged in 1917 and embarked on its building campaign, did the staff and leadership of the new institution begin to consider how it could function within the Winnipeg social service sector. The leaders of the Orphanage were first hoping to create the most modern orphanage building that could possibly be built. As the twentieth century went on, the

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149 J. Blanchard, *Winnipeg 1912* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2005), 191.

Winnipeg social service sector and the Jewish Orphanage became steadily more professional and offered more services to their clients. While saving children from Christian environments was the founding goal, the other goal was to show that the Jewish community could be a valuable actor within the running of Winnipeg, Manitoba and Western Canada.

In this chapter, a number of sources, primary and secondary, will be consulted. The timeline of the establishment of the Winnipeg Jewish orphanage was first written by Arthur Daniel Hart in his 1926 *The Jew in Canada*. Then, too, an internal history written by H. E. Wilder, one of the Superintendents of the Orphanage, is preserved in the archives of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada. Arthur Daniel Hart was a community insider, and his history was informed by a Board of Advisors consisting of Jewish communal *machers* (communal lay leaders). The focus of that history was to present an optimistic view of the achievements of the Jewish community. The other history, titled, *The Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada. Historical Sketch*, is undated, not meant to be read by anyone except for the Board of Directors, incomplete, and focuses more on the discord at the heart of the establishment of the Orphanage than the achievements. Previous to his work in the Orphanage, Mr. Wilder was the editor of a local Yiddish newspaper, the *Israelite Press*, and he was not only a compelling writer but also someone who had had observing the Jewish community at least since 1915.<sup>150</sup> It's not clear why Wilder created this history. The *Winnipeg Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Tribune* also reported on the establishment of the Jewish Orphanage, and the Archives of Manitoba and the City of Winnipeg Archives all hold documents that describe how the Orphanage was founded.

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150 Lewis Levendal, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press: 1880s-1980s* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989), 24.



The common beginning to the story of the Orphanage is that the Jewish community of Winnipeg was forced to establish an orphanage because Jewish children were being housed in Christian institutions. Wilder's report states that in the spring of 1912 there was a rumour in the Jewish community that there were Jewish children being housed in a Roman Catholic institution in St. Boniface and at the Children's Aid on Mayfair Avenue. "It became the topic of debate wherever a few Jews congregated. They became excited, and as it is the custom with our people when they get excited, - they 'got busy' - which means they began charging our Balabatim [householders] that they are not attending to their duty."<sup>151</sup> The *balabayis* (householder) who took up the cause was R. S. Robinson, one of the founders of the Winnipeg Hebrew Free School, which later became known as the Talmud Torah. Robinson circulated a resolution in the spring of 1912 suggesting that a house be rented, Jewish widows be hired, and the Jewish children in Christian institutions be removed at once. Although he acquired some co-signers, the real import of this resolution was revealed when the Winnipeg B'nai Brith Lodge met two days later and Robinson promised to donate a piece of land in the North End neighbourhood of Winnipeg for an Orphanage. The Lodge was enthusiastic and created an Orphanage committee. In early 1913, a group of women who were not involved in the B'nai Brith Lodge also became concerned about the Jewish children in Christian orphanages, and began fundraising separately. The B'nai Brith Orphanage committee did not notice this competing group, as it was on hiatus in late 1912-early 1913 while Robinson concerned himself with the opening of the Talmud Torah. By the spring of 1913, Robinson had completed his part of the Talmud Torah project, and his mother had died. He decided to pledge funds towards an Orphanage to be named after his mother, but at a meeting on

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151 H. E. Wilder, "The Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada," JHC 10, F10, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, 1.

July 17<sup>th</sup> the Orphanage committee of the Lodge rejected this proposal, as they did not want to name the institution after an individual. Although it is now common for Jewish organizations to bear the names of substantial donors, the 1913 Orphanage committee found it unacceptable.<sup>152</sup>

The *Tribune* reported on a meeting that was called after Robinson met with the Lodge at the Shaarey Shomayim Synagogue in which the community at large was asked to support the formation of the Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage. The article mentioned that a “local family” (Robinson) was contributing \$7,000 towards a building.<sup>153</sup> No mention was made of the B'nai Brith Lodge, nor that Mrs. H. Fenson, the woman named as President of the group of women who were also fundraising for a Jewish orphanage mentioned in Wilder's history. Wilder reports that by the end of July, two houses, 73 and 75 Robinson Street, were purchased for the Orphanage.<sup>154</sup> It appears that while Robinson decided to go ahead and buy buildings for an orphanage, the women who had independently decided to form one gave their future institution a name, the Canadian Jewish Orphanage, and allied themselves with the B'nai Brith Lodge which had rejected Robinson's offer. The B'nai Brith planned to build a complex that contained an orphanage, a home for the aged and a Jewish hospital.<sup>155</sup> It was clear to the founders of the two Orphanages that the Jewish community was going to continue growing in population. From 1901 to 1911, the Jewish population of Winnipeg had grown from 1,156 to 9,023 people.<sup>156</sup> This impressive growth continued over the lifetime of the Orphanage. According to Louis Rosenberg, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canadian Jewish demographer, in 1921 the Jewish population of Winnipeg

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152 Wilder, 1-3.

153 “Jewish Orphanage for Winnipeg and N.W. Canada – Institution Established at Meeting Held at Shaarey Shomayim,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 24, 1913, 15.

154 Wilder, 4.

155 Wilder, 4-5.

156 Levine, 105.

had grown to 14,837, and by 1931 it had reached 17,660 people, or 6.1% of the city's population.<sup>157</sup> Western Canada's Jewish population had likewise grown in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia from 2,272 in 1901 to 15,558 in 1911.<sup>158</sup> Over time the Jewish population of this region continued to grow, reaching 26,987 in 1921 and 30,922 in 1931, with the largest concentration of Jewish settlement and growth occurring in Winnipeg. The founders were correct to be concerned over the growing need for services that could help the ever-increasing numbers of Jewish families.

One month later, the *Tribune* reported that an argument had occurred at the August 26, 1913 meeting of the B'nai Brith Lodge between Robinson and the Lodge over the issue of naming any orphanage after Robinson's mother. Apparently, no resolution was reached at this meeting.<sup>159</sup> The Ladies group with the B'nai Brith rented a house for the Canadian Jewish Orphanage at 113 Selkirk Avenue and the Robinson-led group began populating the double houses on Robinson Avenue. Throughout 1914, the Canadian Jewish Orphanage group fund-raised and investigated property on which to develop their planned complex, and they also kept in touch with the Esther Robinson Orphanage leadership, attempting to negotiate a merger. A joint committee was struck, and met three times, but the Esther Robinson Orphanage leadership refused to change the institution's name. After the outbreak of World War I, the grand plans of the Canadian Jewish Orphanage stalled, and the location changed to another rented home on Manitoba Avenue.<sup>160</sup>

Meanwhile, the Esther Robinson renamed itself the Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage and

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157 Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada in the 1930s*, ed. Morton Weinfeld. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 34.

158 Rosenberg, 41.

159 "Jewish Orphanage for Winnipeg and N.W. Canada – Institution Established at Meeting Held at Shaarey Shomayim," *Winnipeg Tribune* (July 24, 1913), 15.

160 Wilder, 5-7.

Children's Aid Society, which Wilder states was due to the institution being more heavily funded and having greater prominence. This adoption of Children's Aid Society functions brought the organization greater scrutiny from provincial and municipal authorities.<sup>161</sup>

The Esther Robinson Orphanage appears to have been the only Jewish orphanage that created government registration documents that were archived, and was the only one which received any press. I have found references to it in the *Tribune* and the *Free Press*, as well as a recorded presence in the provincial and City of Winnipeg archives. The Esther Robinson Orphanage was able to secure an excuse from paying some municipal taxes in 1916; the leadership felt emboldened enough to ask for a provincial grant to help fund their 40 to 50 orphans' expenses, also in 1916.<sup>162</sup> Even a newspaper article about multiple orphanages enjoying an outing courtesy of the Automobile Club records the Esther Robinson -- but not the Canadian Jewish Orphanage -- as having taken part.<sup>163</sup> The records of the children who lived in the Orphanage do not include any children who lived in the Canadian Jewish Orphanage. In fact, in the Children's Records I did find a record that included a letter from S. Spenser Page, the Provincial Superintendent of Dependent and Delinquent Children in Saskatchewan, to P. Stephany, who was then the Superintendent of the Esther Robinson Orphanage, dated March 8, 1915, stating, "My remark as to your being the only Jewish Children's Aid Society was caused by the fact that I was told by good authority that a second Jewish Children's Aid Society had been formed or was in process of being formed. However, I am glad to see this is not the case, as I do not believe in an unnecessary

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161 Wilder, 7.

162 "Jewish Orphanage," *Manitoba Free Press*, Thursday, January 20, 1916, 8; "Exempted from Taxation,"

*Manitoba Free Press*, Wednesday, August 9, 1916, 5.

163 "Orphan Kiddies 'Hardly Can Wait for Auto Jaunt,'" *Winnipeg Tribune*, Tuesday, July 25, 1916, 6.

multiplication of such organizations.”<sup>164</sup> By designating itself a Children's Aid Society, it seems that Esther Robinson Orphanage was able to distinguish itself from the Canadian Jewish Orphanage.

According to Wilder, the Canadian Jewish Orphanage, in spite of having a competitor, was growing so large that it had to move from its first location at 113 Selkirk Avenue to a double house at 327-329 Manitoba Avenue in September of 1914, only a year after having secured their first location. This institution was run by a large group of women, who not only raised the funds but also oversaw every aspect of life in the home.<sup>165</sup> The Esther Robinson Orphanage, however, experienced not one but two major fires at their double house on Robinson Avenue in 1915 and 1916; both fires were caused by an electric iron being left plugged in overnight in the laundry room.<sup>166</sup> After the June 1916 fire, there seems to have been some incentive to resolve the outstanding problem of having two competing Jewish Orphanages to support. Wilder's history states that this is due to the burden of cost to the Jewish community becoming increasingly unpopular, but I also think that the problems associated with renting homes, in varying levels of good construction and suitability for housing many children, was another motivator.<sup>167</sup>

The first amalgamation meeting happened October 14, 1916, with lawyer Max Steinkopf chairing the meeting at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue. At this meeting it was decided that if the two organizations could raise enough money, the Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada would be

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164 Record SQ, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

165 Wilder, 7.

166 “Orphans Flee Fire in Orderly March,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, Monday, October 11, 1915, 5; “Tots Flee Fire in Night Robes. Matron of Jewish Orphanage Struggles Through the Smoke to Awaken 30 Children,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, Monday, June 19, 1916, 5.

167 Wilder, 8.

created through amalgamation.<sup>168</sup> Although there were some legal issues to settle, by November 13, 1916 all the children from the Canadian Jewish Orphanage had been moved to the (fire-prone) premises of the Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage at 73 and 75 Robinson Street.<sup>169</sup> By 1917, the new Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada had hired its first professional superintendent, Louis Greenberg, the former Assistant Superintendent of the Chicago Jewish Orphanage, and his wife, Florence. Arthur Ross, who has written about the establishment of the Winnipeg Jewish community, notes that the amalgamation ended the period of schisms in the community. The next institution that was created by the Jewish community, the Jewish Old Folks Home, was established in a relatively conflict-free process.<sup>170</sup>

Staff who worked in the Orphanages before the hiring of Mr. and Mrs. Greenberg have remained unnamed. It was only once I was working within the children's records of the Orphanage that I found that the Secretary of the Esther Robinson Orphanage for the years before amalgamation was P. Stephany, Esq. He was certainly the Secretary by 1915, although he may have been working earlier; the files before 1920 are often incomplete and lack even the intake and discharge information that became standardized later. Mr. Stephany wrote with a fine copper hand and appears to have had a good working relationship with municipal and provincial child welfare authorities.<sup>171</sup> A slip of Orphanage letterhead that I found in the Children's Records indicates that a Dr. A. M. H. Levin was the Superintendent of the Esther Robinson Orphanage when they were housed on Robinson Street.<sup>172</sup> I cannot tell if Stephany interacted with the children or just

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168 Wilder, 9.

169 "Amalgamate Orphanages," *Winnipeg Tribune*, Monday, November 13, 1916, 5.

170 Ross, 163.

171 Records JS1, 2 and 3, NF, SQ, Jewish Child and Family Services Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

172 Record SQ, Jewish Child and Family Services Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

managed the correspondence, including provincial reports, for the Orphanage. Nor can I tell if he was a volunteer or a paid staff. The length of Dr. Levin's tenure is also unknown.

Newspaper reports regarding the Orphanage fires from the pre-Greenberg era give further hints about the staff who lived with the children. For example, in the *Manitoba Free Press* of October 11, 1915, a fire in the Esther Robinson Orphanage included the mention of a matron, but failed to report her name. "The matron marshaled the children and they marched from the building in good order."<sup>173</sup> A more detailed story about a fire in the Orphanage earlier that same year in the *Winnipeg Tribune* features the matron of the Esther Robinson Orphanage without naming her either, "The matron was making her early morning rounds at the Jewish Orphanage, Robinson Street, Sunday. Smoke filled the east building...In the dormitories of the west building, 30 children were sleeping peacefully. The matron thought of them first."<sup>174</sup> Whoever she was, she saved her charges from fire twice. Information about the staff at the Canadian Jewish Orphanage is non-existent.

Louis Greenberg was the first staff hired whose name was publicized. After the merger of the two orphanages the Board of Directors was able to focus on providing care for the children. The Greenbergs were excellent choices for the role of Superintendent and Superintendent's wife.<sup>175</sup> Greenberg had spent some years of his childhood in the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Asylum, and stayed on past his official discharge to work as a caretaker. After graduating high school

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173 "Fire in Orphanage," *Manitoba Free Press*, Monday, October 11, 1915, 5.

174 "Tots Flee Fire in Night Robes," *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, Monday, June 19, 1916, 5.

175 Married men and their wives were exclusively hired from this point forward until the retirement of Mr. Wilder, the third Superintendent. I have been unable to discover if the wives of the superintendents were paid their own wages.

Greenberg studied childcare at Columbia University while continuing to board at the Hebrew Orphan Asylum and to work with the children. Greenberg was hired by the Marks Nathan Orphan Home in Chicago before he finished his degree.<sup>176</sup> In 1917, Greenberg was hired away from the orphanage in Chicago and he moved his family north.

A year after the two orphanages in Winnipeg amalgamated, the Spanish Influenza epidemic arrived in Winnipeg. About 1,200 people died in the city, many of them parents of small children.<sup>177</sup> The Jewish Orphanage, still located in two houses on Robinson Street, was not equipped to house many children, and soon experienced a sharp increase in enrollments that strained already over-crowded conditions. A diphtheria outbreak in 1917 meant that the Robinson location was condemned for a time by the City, and even after the illness ended, the health hazards to the children from the two crowded and fire-prone cottages continued.<sup>178</sup> A November 28, 1918 letter found in one of the children's records written by the president of the Board of Directors to a parent stated,

We have over sixty children, whereas we have room for only forty, and as a consequence it is necessary to have two children sleeping together in some of the cots.

On account of the Influenza epidemic many Jewish children have been made orphans in Western Canada and we find that we must make room for these children, who in some cases have lost both of their parents. In addition to being short of room we will be put to the extra expense of maintaining these extra children and we have great difficulty at the present time in paying for our maintenance.<sup>179</sup>

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176 David Himmel, *A Camp Story: the History of the Lake of the Woods & Greenwoods Camps* (Charleston: The History Press, 2012), 14-15.

177 Esyllt Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Struggle and Death in Winnipeg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 5.

178 Ross, 157.

179 Record KL1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



The Orphanage Board soon found another location, severing its last tie to the Robinson family by moving away from Robinson Street. Complicated arrangements had to be made in order to free the Orphanage from the last financial considerations of the two previous institutions.<sup>180</sup> Another large house was rented, this one at 1280 Main Street at the corner of Main and Anderson, north of the Jewish neighbourhood, which was closer to the rail tracks and centred around Selkirk Avenue. The rented house was intended to be temporary, and the Board of Directors prepared themselves for a huge fundraising effort to build their own Orphanage. The Orphanage turned to the Manitoba Association of Architects to run the design competition, which eventually selected the firm of Woodman and Cubbigie.<sup>181</sup> Greenberg and John Woodman, the architect, then took a trip throughout the United States, visiting eighteen orphan's homes during July of 1918 in order to learn from these other institutions about what was needed in an orphanage.<sup>182</sup> In order to raise the money for the Orphanage, Greenberg instituted the practice of the Superintendent traveling throughout Western Canada to fund-raise in the tiny Jewish communities of small-town merchant Jews. This became an annual trip, with the three primary Superintendents or, one year, one of the Superintendent's wives, riding the train to collect donations. They were trying to cover the costs of the children who not only came from Winnipeg but were sent to the Orphanage from all over Western Canada, from Fort William to Vancouver.<sup>183</sup> The children were able to move into their brand new building on 123 Matheson Avenue East on February 29, 1920. The building, which eventually cost \$125,000, was intended to be one of the most modern and well appointed

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180 "Report for the Year 1917 of the Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada," JHCWC, JHC010, File 1, 5.

181 John Woodman, *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada 1800 – 1950*, accessed April 11, 2019, <http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/1282>.

182 Arthur Daniel Hart, *The Jew in Canada: a Complete Record of Canadian Jewry from the Days of the French Regime to the Present Time* (Toronto: Jewish Publications Limited, 1926), 228.

183 Ross, 156.

educational institutions in Winnipeg. Its exterior was in a style reminiscent of a Tudor home, and fulfilled functions both institutional and domestic. It was situated on 5.5 acres of park-like grounds, which had a vegetable garden, a playground, and in the winter, an ice rink.

Inside the Orphanage had space for about 100 children, although occasionally more children lived there. According Hart, the Orphanage was built to be fireproof, including a lack of woodwork trim throughout the building, as the Board had learned its lessons after the Esther Robinson fires. The building was divided into male and female spaces, with separate entrances for boys and girls leading directly to the gender-segregated dormitories and washrooms with showers, which were both overseen by a window in the matron's room, creating an informal kind of panopticon. Each dormitory was filled with windows, to let in the light and fresh air. The main floor had a clinic that served as an isolation space for quarantined children, the administrative offices, the Superintendent's living quarters, the board room, library, study room, dining room and kitchen. The staff quarters were located above the kitchen and the boiler room below; separating the children from the kitchen and the boiler was meant to provide them with better ventilation (the staff, apparently, could handle the fumes). The basement was close to grade level and held playrooms, classrooms, another set of washrooms equipped with showers, as well as storage and a refrigerator unit. In addition to the boiler there was an "electrically equipped laundry." The top third floor had a large assembly hall that was used as a synagogue on Shabbat by the both children and by the Jews in the surrounding newly-developed neighbourhood. Water fountains were located around the building.<sup>184</sup> The building was therefore safer and more convenient than a regular home, and intended to be more comfortable than the traditional idea of

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184 Hart, 228-229.

a charitable institution as a semi-prison. Hart emphasized that the Orphanage was open to visitors all year round.<sup>185</sup>

Soon after opening, the Orphanage's first and last professionally-trained Superintendent left. According to Greenberg's biography, the move was caused by his young son's death from scarlet fever in 1920.<sup>186</sup> Allan Levine states that Greenberg was fired because he was "too liberal" in his interpretation of Jewish practice than was comfortable for the Board.<sup>187</sup> I have found no indication that Greenberg was censured by the Board, although I did find a newspaper notice that the Jewish Orphanage band played at a Christmas children's event run by the Police. Perhaps this participation in a Christmas event was seen as transgressive by the Board?<sup>188</sup> Later superintendents of the Orphanage had no problems with allowing the children to attend movies on Friday nights or traveling on Jewish holy days, even though both practices are against traditional interpretations of Jewish law. What is clear is that Greenberg established the Orphanage musical program, help to shape the construction of the Orphanage building, and began the process of professionalizing the Orphanage.

The next Superintendent was a local man, Aaron Osovsky, who became the head of the Home along with his wife, Fanny. Osovsky had no formal childcare training, although he and his wife were parents themselves. Before serving as Orphanage staff it appears from some documents in the Children's Records that he was working, possibly as a volunteer, with the Admissions and

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185 Hart, 230.

186 Himmel, 18.

187 Levine, 172.

188 "Children of Police Greet Santa Claus," *Manitoba Free Press*, Wednesday, December 24, 1919, 2.

Discharge Committee, as he signed some admission forms.<sup>189</sup> Osovsky had otherwise worked as a railway employee, a journalist in the local Yiddish press and as an actor in the Yiddishist theatre groups in Winnipeg.<sup>190</sup> He was an intensely energetic person who was able to work effectively with donors, the Board and non-Jewish child welfare authorities. Osovsky was a passionate writer who cared deeply about raising the Jewish children of Western Canada in an enriching environment. He was also abusive, manipulative and sometimes nasty, even to small children under his care. There is a rumour in the Jewish community, fictionalized in Adele Wiseman's novel *Crackpot*, that Osovsky sexually abused some of the girls under his care. I have found no evidence of sexual abuse in any of the files that I searched, but there are documented examples of his violence towards children and women. Documentation of Osovsky committing acts of sexual abuse are missing from the records, but Osovsky's unaddressed physical abuse of children and women means that a Superintendent of the Jewish Orphanage would have been able to sexually abuse a child in his care. This will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Osovsky managed all aspects of the orphanage life, at times jousting with the Board of Directors and the Ladies Auxiliary for power. He held authority over the staff of the Orphanage, which included matrons, nurses, a secretary, teachers at the Hebrew school, the choir director, the cooking and physical plant staff, and the social worker who worked for the Jewish Children's Aid section of the Orphanage (by that time the institution was formally known as the Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada). It was the social workers who compiled the notes that made up the more complete children's records that began in the 1920s. The early social

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189 Record RW1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

190 Chiel, 121, 124.

workers were probably not trained formally. The first social worker employed by the Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid according to the records, was Mrs. Bertha Koyle, who was an Orphanage nurse before she assumed the duties as the social worker.

The Orphanage became a small world within itself, albeit a world with open gates. Children who lived in the Orphanage had better access to food, medical care and education than other working class children in Winnipeg. The children slept, ate all meals, played, prayed and received their religious instruction on the grounds. They were allowed to wander the neighbourhood, as the records are full of children who stayed past their curfew to run away or visit family and friends or to get into trouble. The curfew indicates that the children were expected to leave the grounds and come back by themselves. A committee of doctors and dentists ensured that the children received medical care free of charge, and glasses and other corrective devices like special shoes were provided by the Orphanage if their parents could not pay the costs. They attended public schools during the day and came home for Talmud Torah classes taught by Mr. Rachlis and Mr. Frankel, two men who remained on staff for decades and who were much beloved. In 1928, a baby house was built that allowed the Orphanage to accept children under the age of two.<sup>191</sup> Clubs and special activities abounded, and the food was plentiful. There was a dedicated choir teacher, Mr. Ostrow, and orchestra band; most children learned at least one instrument. Osovsky was able to liaise effectively with Juvenile Court authorities, once removing a child from the more punitive Institute for Boys in Portage la Prairie to the Orphanage.<sup>192</sup> The men and women who served on

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191 Levine, 171.

192 Record LL, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

the Board and the Ladies and Girls Auxiliaries were often on site, as were visiting parents and relatives. Few children had no parents or extended family at all.

Osovsky left the Orphanage under suspicious circumstances in 1934. The exact reasons why he was forced out are disputed: Levine states that it was because the Orphanage Board was seeking a change away from the Institutional model toward foster care. In a letter to a former student, Osovsky did admit that he was fired.<sup>193</sup> Next hired was H. E. Wilder, editor of the *Israelite Press*, and another man who had no formal training in childcare. Once again a married couple was hired, although the power and the recognition was only given to the husband of the pair (and possibly the salary as well). He and his wife took on the role vacated by Osovsky and his wife, living in the Orphanage and traveling throughout the hinterlands during the summer to solicit donations. Wilder had a different temperament from Osovsky. He kept handwritten psychological sketches and observations about the children in the files, using little formal psychological language but showing a desire to understand his charges. In 1935, Wilder opened the Orphanage up to boarding students from rural towns and villages who were sent to the Orphanage so that they could attend the excellent Winnipeg public schools as well as the Jewish school on site. Wilder was also more open to criticism of the Orphanage, allowing a review of the institution by Irving K. Furst, Supervisor of the Jewish Children's Bureau of Chicago, in 1939. The foster care model was fast becoming the norm for child welfare agencies in the United States, and it had been suggested for the city of Winnipeg by Charlotte Whitten in a government-funded study of childcare in Winnipeg in 1929.<sup>194</sup>

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193 Record ZW1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

194 Irving K. Furst, "Survey: the Jewish Children's Home and Aid Society of Western Canada," May, 1939, JHCWC, JHC10, F7, 1.

The Furst report states that the Jewish community was considering closing the Orphanage and turning the buildings over to the Jewish Old Age Home. Furst recommended closing the Orphanage completely. He found several problems with the Orphanage, including: too many very young children under its care; irregularities in aspects of the financial accounting; too many children (42 out of 84, or a full 50% of residents) who had spent more than five years in the Orphanage; the practice of taking in children while their parent (usually the mother) recovered from a medical crisis was deemed as not beneficial to the children in question; the institution's lack of regular psychiatric testing that perhaps caused the 31% of the Orphanage children to be held back grades in school and may have meant that the children's psychological pain was being untreated; children were not being re-established in their familial homes quickly enough, even according to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors' own analysis; and the institution was also not pressing extended families to take in children when the parents were ill or in distress.

Furst found that the adoption process was ad-hoc, with little follow-up after the child had been moved to his or her new family. He believed that the children did not have enough of their own clothes or space for their own things, and that their days did not allow for enough free time. He was also alarmed that none of the staff had any kind of child welfare training and that half the staff were not Jewish and recommended that the Orphanage take advantage of a recently created vocational guidance program offered by the Winnipeg school system, as the process for finding alumni some kind of training or employment was also ad-hoc. He found the record system also to be ad-hoc, lacking a system for recording the family history and development of the child. He

also noted that the Orphanage was operating with a funding deficit and had done so for the previous five years. Furst provided one of the only contemporary descriptors of the child intake system as it had existed since 1925, describing the responsibilities and the operations of the Children's Bureau, which oversaw the intake process on behalf of the Orphanage, with only the Jewish social worker as the Orphanage representative at the decision-making table.<sup>195</sup> Furst found some positives in the Orphanage: the food was adequate, the building provided well for the children's physical care, the ratio of staff to children was high, and the Orphanage had encouraged both family visitors and community members to spend time with the children to counter institutionalization.<sup>196</sup>

In addition to all these observations, Furst noted that he believed that 50% of children admitted to the Jewish Orphanage could have been kept with their families. Furst wrote, "The Institution has run counter to all good social welfare thinking i.e., they have not promoted a program of seeking the adjustment of problems within the child's own family, and, in some respects, have actually encouraged the separation of children from their parents."<sup>197</sup> His conclusions were undoubtedly influenced by the context of his home city, Chicago. Although there was a Jewish Orphanage in Chicago established in 1894, it also had a rival organization, the Jewish Home Finding Society of Chicago, that was created in 1907 in order to help mothers keep their children at home or to find children adoptive or foster homes. He therefore was coming from a city where a well-established agency existed in order to prevent the institutionalization of Jewish children.<sup>198</sup> Furst was not

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195 Furst, 10-19.

196 Furst, 22-24.

197 Furst, 20.

198 Paula F. Pfeffer, "A Historical Comparison of Catholic and Jewish Adoption Practices in Chicago, 1833-1933, in *Adoption in America: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Wayne E. Carp (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 108-109.



alone in his preference for avoiding institutionalizing childcare; in her 1928 Royal Commission on Child Welfare in Manitoba, Charlotte Whitton wrote that the trend in modern social work was away from institutions, and she so no reason why Manitoba should do differently.<sup>199</sup>

Furst's report set the Orphanage Board on a course towards completely changing its child welfare structure. Part of the reason was practical, as the number of children in the Orphanage was steadily declining. While the building had been constructed for about 100 children, by 1939 Furst reported that only 86 children living there. Although little appears to have been done about the question of changing the structure of the organization for about six years, in April of 1945, a committee report was submitted to the Board that opened the discussion about closing the Orphanage. The committee included Mr. Wilder who by that time was no longer the Superintendent. The Children's Records show that by 1944, a Mr. Lipson was the Superintendent, and by 1946, Miss L. Wilson, previously a nurse, was the Matron of the Orphanage. Contemporary ideas about childcare also did not arise in the three-page report. The problem was one of a growing emptiness.

The Orphanage had gone from a population of 95 children in 1931 to a paltry 49 children in 1944. The Committee found that this declining population was true throughout North America. Jewish social service agencies were reporting declines over the 1930s from children being housed in Orphanages in percentages close to 100%, to a 1942 percentage of 32%, with 68% of Jewish children in care being housed in private homes. The committee also noted that even more

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<sup>199</sup> Charlotte Whitten, *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed by Order-in-Council Number 747/28 to inquire into the administration of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Health and Public Welfare, Report Number 4*, Winnipeg, Manitoba: Minister of Health and Public Welfare, 1928, 42.

children in Jewish North American communities were being subsidized to remain in their own homes and with their families by both government and private agencies. The dramatic decline in population in the Winnipeg Orphanage meant that the costs of caring for each child had gone up, from a \$1.09 per day in 1931 to \$1.63 in 1944. The percentage of children who were in the Orphanage as boarding school students had risen to 32%, or 13 boys out of the 41 total children. That left only 28 children in the Orphanage who were there due to a family crisis. Six children were due to be discharged by the end of the summer of 1945. Three of the 28 children in the Orphanage were there due to a housing crisis, and the municipality was helping their parents find a new home hopefully before the summer. Another child was in the process of being adopted, leaving only 18 or 20 children in the Orphanage building by the beginning of September 1945. The committee was concerned that having a fifth of the children in such a large building would make the place feel empty and cold. With further investigation, the Committee believed that many of the children due to remain in the Orphanage past the summer could be returned to their parents or other family members, in some cases with extra support. That left only seven children who would need around four or five foster homes. The Committee declined to recommend closing the Orphanage, instead asking if the question could be put to the Jewish community as a whole.<sup>200</sup>

The question of closing the Orphanage set off a community controversy. It is notable that one of the Committee members who examined this issue was Mr. David Spivak, a man who had been a part of the Orphanage Board since the 1910s, and whose first and second wife were likewise involved. The idea of closing the Orphanage, where Mr. Spivak and both his wives had become

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200 "Title obscured, (submitted to the Board of Directors on April 8, 1945)," JCHWC, JHC10, File 6, 1-2.

friends and surrogate grandparents to many children, broke his heart. As soon as the report of the committee was made public, Mr. Spivak published a Yiddish opinion piece in the *Israelite Press* condemning any possible closure of the Orphanage. In the editorial, Spivak argued that the reason why the number of children in the Orphanage was declining was because it had been making it more difficult for children to be admitted and it had been discharging children indiscriminately. In his opinion, a foster home was really a step-home, as heartless as a step-parent, and therefore unworthy of the Jewish tradition of mothers who struggled to avoid re-marrying and giving their children a step-father. He also noted that the Orphanage was not presently running a financial deficit, even if costs had increased. Mr. Spivak believed that it was important to keep offering the boarding services of the Orphanage to ensure that the children of rural Jewish families received a Jewish education. He was hopeful that at the conclusion of the war there would be a large number of refugee children who would need care. Spivak let bare the realities of the Committee on which he had served: he stated that he struggled with the project, and that the Committee was split on its final recommendations.<sup>201</sup>

It should be noted, however, that there was a vocal group within the Jewish community which raised objections to the very concept of foster homes. According to a letter that was found in one of the children's records, this objection presented difficulties to the Orphanage, even though it had been finding some children foster homes in the 1920s and 30s. According to a letter signed by Miss Anna Sacks, Executive Secretary of the United Hebrew Social Services Bureau (the successor to the United Hebrew Relief, which worked with the Orphanage closely to respond to

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201 David Spivak, "Der emet vogen der lage in beis-yetomim," *The Israelite Press*, Friday, May 4, 1945, JHWC, JHC10, File 6. Also consulted "Summary of article in *Israelite Press*, April 4, 1945, by Mr. D. Spivak, entitled 'The Truth about the Situation in the Orphanage,' JHCWC, JHC10, File 6.

families in crisis), to the Bellefair Cleveland Jewish Orphan Home, dated June 2, 1943, “Foster Home care in the Jewish Community has not been used to date and a strong anti-foster home attitude exists in the influential, orthodox group. Jewish childcare has been for the most part and institutional job, and it is only within the past three months that this Agency has been invited to present a case-work service to the local Home.”<sup>202</sup> There was also some resistance to foster homes within the Orphanage staff. For example, one child was being boarded with a local woman for a few weeks in early August of 1945 when Mr. Ostrow, the choir director, visited the foster mother in order to admonish her. How could she take in this child when there was such a controversy about foster homes in the community? He then spoke with the child about his siblings, making him extremely upset and unable to go to sleep. At 10 pm, he finally left the home. Mr. Wilder, by then retired as superintendent, felt compelled to become involved. He telephoned Ostrow to explain that the situation for this particular child had nothing to do with closing the Orphanage and to force him to apologize to the foster mother.<sup>203</sup>

Mr. Wilder must have felt that the community ferment was becoming too intense. He released an opinion piece in the August 30, 1945 edition of *The Jewish Post*, the Winnipeg Jewish community’s English language newspaper. In the article, he identified multiple reasons for closing the Orphanage, including the fact that of the four Canadian Jewish orphanages that had been running when he took over as Superintendent in 1934, the Winnipeg Orphanage was the only still open. Jewish orphanages were following the international example and closing or reforming. The new standard of practice was to only institutionalize those children who needed

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202 Record SZ1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

203 Record MM1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

an institution (meaning disabled children), extend more help to mothers and, if placement was necessary, to find children a foster home. He repeated the fact that the number of children in the Orphanage was dropping. Wilder also reminded his readers that there was no Jewish tradition of orphanages, and that orphanages are a Christian invention. He thought that institutional childcare was harmful to children, and that raising children in families was supported by both Jewish family values and child psychology. Other articles followed in the following months: George Ackerman, a rabbi in Memphis and alumnus of the Orphanage, wrote another English language article in *The Jewish Post*, listing the Jewish Orphanages that were still open in the United States and calling the move a betrayal.<sup>204</sup> A two-inch piece in the *Post* reported on a meeting of the Alumni group of the Orphanage, who actually were in favour of the foster home plan, although they noted that the community might always need an emergency children's shelter. The group endorsed their member Corporal I. Lecker, who was seeking election to the Board of Directors.<sup>205</sup>

No matter what the emotions were that people in the Jewish community felt about the closure, the decision makers for the Orphanage was ultimately the Board. The children's records show very few admissions after 1945. The Orphanage was technically closed by 1948, although community members who were brought to Winnipeg as Holocaust child refugees spent some time in the Orphanage while their foster homes were arranged. There was also one teen who was admitted from the community to live there for two months during a family emergency in 1950.<sup>206</sup> The United Hebrew Social Services Bureau, staffed by professional social workers such as Thelma Tessler became the primary social service organization for Jewish families in Winnipeg. That

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204 George Ackerman, "Sell-out or Betrayal?" *The Jewish Post*, Thursday, October 11, 1945, 3.

205 "Orphanage Alumni Favors Foster Homes," *The Jewish Post*, Thursday, November 15, 1945, 1.

206 Record JF, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

agency is now the Jewish Child and Family Service (JCFS) of Winnipeg, and it has assumed the two goals of the Orphanage, to prevent the Jewish community's members from having to lose connection to their community when they are in need of social services, and the organization remains embedded within the Winnipeg social service sector. The Orphanage building remained used as a community centre for years, and in 1952, the modern Rosh Pina synagogue was built next to it on the park-like grounds.<sup>207</sup> Now a senior's co-op apartment building sits on the spot where the Orphanage once stood. The JCFS established a temporary shelter for children with the proceeds of the sale and later it had some group homes for teens.<sup>208</sup> The Alumni group of the Orphanage was active for many years, holding reunions, distributing a newsletter, and raising money for Jewish charities; the Alumni group was testament to the fact that many of the children who lived in the Orphanage remained connected to the Jewish community, which was the first goal of the Orphanage founders. A few people who were children in the Orphanage are still alive, but the majority have passed away. They and their descendants are scattered all over the world.

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207 Levine, 175.

208 Levine, 432.

### **Chapter 3 – The Orphanage, the State, and Community Social Welfare Goals**

The financing and management of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was a complex affair that was balanced by both volunteers and staff. The Orphanage was supported by the efforts of municipal and provincial social service institutions, and often these outside entities had power over the operation of the Orphanage. Brokering between the Jewish community and the organs of the Canadian state required the staff of the Orphanage to cultivate relationships and to be willing to assume responsibility for the funding of some of their charges. The Jewish Orphanage had to accept that it would receive less funding per child than other institutions, as its mandate of accepting children from other provinces meant that many of its children were not eligible for funding from either the province or the city of Winnipeg. Financial shortfalls were covered by the Orphanage's own fundraising efforts, and working with donors creating new challenges. As time went on, bureaucratic layers grew around social services, both governmental and non-governmental. On a local level, it seems that judicial and municipal authorities were happy to work with the Orphanage on child welfare issues, possibly because the Jewish community was willing to manage its own families' care and fund so many children's care by itself. This complicated relationship between government officials and the social service sector workers allowed the Orphanage to manage how the families under its care would receive help from social services.

In this chapter, the internal funding and governance of the Orphanage will be examined, as will the relationship between the Orphanage and external authorities. The history of Manitoba child welfare legislation and governmental and charitable funding of the Winnipeg social service sector

will be explored. The relationships between the Jewish Orphanage staff, the families that were involved with the institution, and representatives of semi-governmental social service agencies will also be discussed, using the primary sources of the Orphanage's Children's Records. The ability of the Jewish Orphanage to broker between the state and the Jewish community lay at the heart of its mission to protect Jewish children from Christian institutions and to present a modern Jewish community to the world.

It is worth noting that in this chapter, there is no discussion of the Orphanage interacting in any way with an Indian Residential School. The Orphanage did interact with many other childcare institutions and staff from communities across Western Canada, as well as with provincial and municipal workers, including those in Catholic and Protestant missionizing institutions. Over the thirty five years of the existence of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage and its predecessors, there was no contact between it and the shadow network of schools that housed First Nation children. Indian Residential Schools were excluded and isolated from the networks of childcare institutions that were established and nurtured by the staff of these orphanages and correctional institutions. Staff and volunteers associated with the Jewish communities of Western Canada were able to redirect their children from Christian childcare institutions to its own Orphanage; First Nations communities, excluded from the network of social service staff and the greater polity, could not.

### **The History of Child Welfare Legislation and Services in Manitoba**

The Jewish Orphanage existed within a provincial and municipal social service sector that dated to the beginning of the twentieth century. With assistance from J. J. Kelso, the father of child



welfare in Ontario, Manitoba drafted its first child welfare legislation in 1898, which became the Children's Protection Act of Manitoba. This act was intended to protect abused children from their families by subjecting parents to fines and imprisonment, and allowing the state to remove children from their parents' home if they were abused according to the classifications of abuse in the Act. The Winnipeg Children's Aid Society was formed in response to this legislation, and the Provincial Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children was appointed. This legislation also built the funding structure that tied children to their municipality for funding.<sup>209</sup>

The development of this legislation and system is fully explored by Lorna Hurl's masters thesis on the Manitoba social service sector. Hurl describes how the First World War created a sense of optimism within Canadian Christian social reformers, which led to attempts to rationalize and improve the existing social welfare structures. The premier at the time, T. C. Norris, was a committed Methodist reformer. It was Norris' government that passed anti-alcohol legislation (intended to protect children from drunken fathers), granted the vote to women, enacted labour legislation, established compulsory school attendance for children, and created a provincial Mother's Allowance for widowed mothers.<sup>210</sup> Under this government, an amendment was passed to the Children's Protection Act, which allowed Juvenile Court judges to give children into the guardianship of a Children's Aid Society for a temporary period of time and gave the CAS monitoring powers over these families.<sup>211</sup> The Liberal government gave funding increases to the Jewish Orphanage, as well as the Winnipeg CAS, the Children's Home and the Knowles Home

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209 Lorna Faye Hurl, *An Analysis of Child Welfare Policy: a Case Study of the Development of Child Welfare Policies and Programmes in Manitoba in 1870-1924*. (Master's thesis, University of Manitoba, 1981), 48-53.

210 Hurl, 134-135.

211 Hurl, 164.

for Boys, although the amount of provincial funding for these institutions was small.<sup>212</sup> In 1917, the Norris government established a Public Welfare Commission to study charitable work in the province and the result was the Child Welfare Act, which was not passed until after the next government was elected into office, in 1922. The Act established a Welfare Supervision Board to oversee the activities of all the charitable welfare institutions, and a Child Welfare Bill was proposed.<sup>213</sup>

Although its inclusion in the Manitoba social service sector was accepted as a fact by the Norris government, some of the families involved with the Jewish Orphanage had difficulty accessing government services if they had moved across provincial boundaries. Each province and municipality appears to have developed different policies regarding children in need in response to either financial or moral considerations. A recurring problem for some families was the fact that Mothers Allowance, passed in Manitoba in 1916 for widows, was only available in the province in which the father had died and was tied to the municipality. Women who wished to move to Winnipeg for the greater availability of work and to be closer to their families were unable to collect this Allowance, and some admitted their children to the Orphanage while they searched for work. Agencies within Winnipeg, like the Social Welfare Council, would try to convince the mother to return on the train to the impoverished rural town from which she came, to wait out her children's youth on a dusty farm or in a failing store until they were age fifteen and the Allowance was withdrawn. According to Arthur Ross, Mother's Allowance was also meant to be applied only to women who had been legally married to naturalized male citizens,

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212 Hurl, 182.

213 Hurl, 186, 191.

and women who received this Allowance were to expect continuing inspections by “visitors;” later in the century it appears that separated mothers were also allowed the Allowance.<sup>214</sup> Thus the Orphanage sometimes facilitated mothers subverting the expectations of the state by allowing them to place their children in lieu of returning to their home municipalities.

Arthur Ross has detailed the fact that the Province of Manitoba was reluctant to provide funding to any social service provider. The province funded only the hospitals for the mentally ill, the home for incurables, the home for delinquent boys and the school for the deaf; every other social service organization was funded by the community. Even the General Hospital received only 4% of its 1913 annual revenue from Manitoba. However, provincial and federal politicians’ fear of budgetary deficits meant that municipalities and charities were sometimes the only provider of much-needed services for Canadians. Support for social services was legislated as a municipal responsibility, especially in the incorporation act for the City of Winnipeg.<sup>215</sup> Therefore, the Orphanage was left to work under the legislative authority of the Province but with the municipal staff.

In addition to social service infrastructure that was established to provide help to families, children and their families sometimes interacted with the Juvenile Court. The 1908 provincial Juvenile Delinquents Act mandated that children who broke the law had to be treated differently than adult offenders. Judges were given alternatives to imprisonment by being able to limit the extent of the hearings, assigning a probation officer to either directly care for the child or to

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214 Ross, 91.

215 Ross, 85-86.

monitor the child, committing the child to a CAS, or committing them to a child-centred reform institution like a detention centre or industrial school. According to Cassandra Woloschuk's essay on Juvenile justice in Winnipeg, laws against juvenile delinquency were enforced by a network of probation officers who patrolled areas of the city in order to find children who were skipping school or otherwise getting into trouble. These probation officers compiled detailed reports on each child brought before the court, including family history, religion and ethnicity, as well as the officer's own assessment. Woloschuk notes that children who were from Slavic and French Canadian families were much more likely to be brought in front of the Juvenile Court, despite being a smaller proportion of the city's population.<sup>216</sup> The Children's Aid Society involved was supposed to correlate to the child's religion, and CAS members were included in the Act to advise judges and probation officers.<sup>217</sup> Early annual reports from the Chief Probation Officer noted that the children who came before the court came from Winnipeg's North End and Point Douglas, with children who were foreign born more represented. Most of the crimes that brought children to court were related to children not attending school, and soon after its passing the Act became known as the "Truancy Act."<sup>218</sup> In order to properly care for the children sentenced under this new Act, the province built an Industrial School for Boys in Portage la Prairie (the town where every uncomfortable provincial institution was located) in 1910. The School had capacity for 150 boys but usually only held between 70 to 90.<sup>219</sup> The Chief Probation Officer of the Juvenile Court also acted as judge of the Court. These judges included F.J. Billlardé, D. S. Hamilton and D. B. Harkness. The relationship between the Jewish Orphanage staff and the Juvenile Court judges

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216 Cassandra Woloschuk, "Protecting and Policing Children: the Origins and Nature of Juvenile Justice in Winnipeg," in *Prairie Metropolis: New Essays on Winnipeg Social History*, ed. Esyllt W. Jones and Gerald Freisen (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2000), 70-71, 73-76.

217 Hurl, 81-84.

218 Hurl, 87-89.

219 Hurl, 121.

was often good; the judges listened to the Orphanage staff, and allowed Jewish children to be diverted from the Industrial School to the Orphanage staff. The Jewish Orphanage was able to redirect Jewish boys from this correctional institution into its less punitive Home by arguing that children had the right to correction in their own faith.

Two reports about the structure and funding of the Winnipeg and Manitoba social service sector were released in the 1920s, both conducted by outside experts. The first, written by in 1925 by Dr. Edward Devine, a social work expert from the United States, was commissioned by the Federated Budget Board, the FBB, a group of charities which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. It was intended to explore why the 1924 Charities Campaign had resulted in a lower level of donations from Winnipeggers, but Devine also examined the general state of social welfare in Winnipeg. Devine had a number of recommendations, a few of which directly applied to the Jewish Orphanage and to the United Hebrew Relief, a Jewish charity which provided cash or needed goods to many of the Orphanage children's families. His 20<sup>th</sup> recommendation noted that Winnipeg had a high number of "normal" (i.e. not disabled) children who were institutionalized. He advocated making a clearing-house for all institutions, to be run by the Children's Aid Society (and therefore not the orphanages themselves), and that provincial government and the child welfare organizations devote considerable funding and staff time towards developing a foster home system. Finally, he suggested discontinuing the FBB's contribution to the United Hebrew Relief (the UHR), as he believed that it helped very few families, and since it was only used by Jews, to the exclusion of Catholics and Protestants, and was not overseen by the Social Welfare Council, it did not qualify for help from the FBB.<sup>220</sup> This

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220 E. Devine, *Welfare Work in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: Federated Budget Board, 1925), 7-26.

reasoning actually removed any justification for state funding for Jewish charities: why should the state fund Jews at all when there were charities who would help them, and they didn't help anyone else – implying that Jews were different from other Winnipeggers. As a result, the UHR was dropped by the FBB, worsening its financial security. Jewish enthusiasm for the Federated Budget Board campaigns dropped, leading to fewer Jewish canvassers and a fear in the community that the Jewish Orphanage and Old Folks' Home would be dropped as well. Indeed, the next campaign in 1926 did result in a shortfall from the planned \$300,000, and the allocations to the Jewish Orphanage and Old Folks' Home dropped significantly; the Orphanage allocation dropped by \$2,592.<sup>221</sup> The Jewish community clearly could not completely fund their own institutions, and needed assistance from the Winnipeg Protestant elite to do so, but this led to their dependence on a group of businessmen and church leaders who Jews could not trust.

Another evaluation of the social service sector in Manitoba was released in the 1920s. Charlotte Whitton's 1928 Royal Commission investigating the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Public Health and Welfare was tasked with evaluating the provincial work in social services. Whitton found many problems with the Child Welfare Act and with the provincial and CAS interpretations of this Act. Most importantly for the Jewish Orphanage, Whitton found that there was far too much apprehension of children and commitment of these children to institutions. Whitton called for increased funding and oversight of the CAS organizations in Manitoba, under a comprehensive provincial department. Specifically regarding the Jewish Orphanage, Whitton advocated that the Orphanage limit its catchment area from the entirety of Western Canada to just Manitoba. She also recommended that the Jewish CAS become separate from the Orphanage, and

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221 Ross, 177-179.

that the field worker (social worker) position for the UHR and the Orphanage be merged.<sup>222</sup> The charitable, as opposed to government-run, nature of child welfare services in Manitoba was Whitton's largest concern. She viewed the state as having the ultimate responsibility to care for children. Within her conception of child welfare, there was a place for a Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid, but not in the way that the Jewish community itself wanted the Orphanage to function. For Jews across Western Canada, there were cultural, social and familial links over a wide territory. If funding was much less forthcoming due to the border-crossing nature of their child-saving activities, then they would make up the difference through donations. The Orphanage eventually responded to Whitton's report, by commissioning the Furst Report on their institution ten years later in 1938, which recommended the closing of the Jewish Orphanage. As it happened, the Jewish social service agencies which came after the Orphanage closed did limit their range to the City of Winnipeg, probably due to the decline of rural Jewish communities which occurred after World War II.

### **The Founding of the Orphanage and the Province of Manitoba**

When the Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage was incorporated under the Children Protection Act of 1902 in 1914, its documents were prepared by the Steinkopf and Lawrence Law Firm. According to the documents retained by the Archives of Manitoba, it appears that the filing of these articles of incorporation brought the attention of Provincial child welfare authorities to the efforts of the Jewish community. On September 15, 1914, W. A. Weston, the General Secretary of

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<sup>222</sup> Charlotte Whitton, "Report of the Royal Commission Appointed by Order-in-Council Number 747/28 to inquire into the administration of the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Health and Public Welfare, 1928," (Winnipeg, 1928), 38-43.

the Winnipeg Children's Aid Society, sent letters to J. J. Kelso, who was then working as the Ontario Superintendent for Neglected Children, S. Spencer Page, the Saskatchewan Superintendent of Neglected Children, R. B. Chadwick, Alberta Superintendent of Dependent and Delinquent Children, and C. J. South, Superintendent-Secretary of the Vancouver Children's Aid. Weston expressed alarm at the prospect of having more than one Children's Aid Society in Winnipeg – one technically non-denominational (but run by Protestants), and one Jewish. In these letters, Weston recorded the name of the Orphanage as the Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage and The Children's Aid Society of Winnipeg, but the January 1914 articles of incorporation for the Orphanage did not have the extra "the," so that the actual name was The Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid Society. He wanted to know if there were other Canadian cities that also had more than one Children's Aid Society, as he believed that more than one would lead to confusion and difficulties, especially, he wrote, "...as we have to depend so much on the public for support."<sup>223</sup>

S. Spencer Page in Saskatchewan recommended that the province learn to work with the Jewish Children's Aid, in the way that Dr. Bernardo and the Roman Catholic Bishop Manning were now working together in London in child protection. In a postscript Page wrote, "All over the world the Jews are endeavoring to take care of their own people. They do not interfere in general work."<sup>224</sup> R. B. Chadwick from Alberta explained that the Alberta child protection legislation required municipalities over a population of 10,000 to fund their own children's shelters and child

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223 "Letter to J.J. Kelso, S. Spencer Page, R. B. Chadwick, C. J. South, from W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, September 15, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 164.

224 "Letter to W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, from S. Spencer Page, September 18, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 165.



protection officers; by fully funding child protection Alberta was avoiding having denominational oversight of children, and was finding the costs not overly onerous.<sup>225</sup> C. J. South from Vancouver described how in British Columbia there were Children's Aid Societies in Vancouver and Victoria, religion not specified, and a Roman Catholic Society for the whole province. It was South's opinion that having a Catholic society was not useful, though he did not say why. South did note that they had two Jewish children currently in the Vancouver Children's Home and had had more in the past, and in his opinion, this was ideal both financially and for the children themselves, as they could benefit from his Society's education and training.<sup>226</sup> South may have been influenced by the attitudes in British Columbia social services at that time which were actively discriminatory. According to an article by Marilyn Callahan and Christopher Walmsley, the Victoria Protestant Orphans Home refused entry to Asian and non-Protestant children no matter what their needs were; for South, then, religious differences in social service provision could be used to exclude children.<sup>227</sup> Ontario's J. J. Kelso's assistant, J. A. Blakey, replied to the request from Weston, explaining that there were no religious Children's Aid Societies in Ontario, with the exception of a Catholic society, which was not legally recognized. He suggested that the non-denominational Children's Aid Society do as they did in Toronto and cooperate with Jewish charities when a Jewish child was in need.<sup>228</sup> Blakey appears to have not been aware that the Toronto Jewish community's Maternal Aid Society and other Jewish charities did a fair amount of social service work.

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225 "Letter to W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, from R. B. Chadwick, undated," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 166.

226 "Letter to W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, from C. J. South, September 21, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 167.

227 Marilyn Callahan and Christopher Walmsley, "Rethinking Child Welfare Reform in British Columbia, 1900-1960," in *People, Politics, and Child Welfare in British Columbia*, ed. Leslie T. Foster and Brian Warf (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007) 14.

228 "Letter to W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, from J. A. Blakey, September 21, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 168.

There was, therefore, a variety of different approaches that Manitoba could take as Canadian precedents towards a model of denominational institutional childcare. Saskatchewan's Page thought the idea of denominational childcare was fine, and even expressed admiration for Jewish efforts. Alberta's solution, to require municipalities to provide child protection as a social service, could lead to provincial funding being required, and Manitoba was unwilling to agree to that system. The response from the Ontario Children's Aid seemed similar to Manitoba's approach, which was not surprising considering how many elite Manitobans had Ontario roots, and how J. J. Kelso had been involved in drafting Manitoba legislation. The existence of a Catholic CAS in British Columbia confirmed that other provinces had found a way to allow religious social service agencies.

Undaunted, Weston also wrote to the Deputy Attorney-General of Manitoba, to inquire if it was legal for there to be more than one Children's Aid Society, again incorrectly writing The Esther Robinson Jewish Orphanage and The Children's Aid Society of Winnipeg. He stated that he believed that the existence of two Children's Aid Societies would confuse donors more than they already were between the Children's Home and the Children's Aid Society.<sup>229</sup> The response from the Deputy Attorney-General was that at the time of incorporation the name had been approved.<sup>230</sup> Weston then tried to arrange a meeting between the Children's Aid Society, the Esther Robinson and the Attorney General's office; it's not clear if this meeting happened.<sup>231</sup>

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229 "Letter to John Allen, Esq. from W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, September 15, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 170.

230 "Letter to W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, from John Allen, September 17, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 171.

231 "Letter to John Allen, Esq. from W. A. Weston, General Secretary, Province of Manitoba, September 28, 1914," Archives of Manitoba, Premier's Office Files Fonds, Accession Number GR1666, 172.

There was no political will to oppose the Orphanage or the development of a Jewish social service agency, and no political will to fund it either.

Weston clearly felt that something could go wrong by having a Jewish Children's Aid, and tried to stop its founding. Perhaps he was honestly worried that people would be confused by the situation and stop donating. Perhaps he felt, like South in British Columbia, that Jewish children would miss the education and training provided by Christian orphanages and services. I believe that government inertia on this issue was because the Jewish community was publicly fundraising to support their own social services, reassuring some officials, though not Weston, that these institutions would not cost the Province. The Orphanage wisely engaged Max Steinkopf's firm as their legal representation. Steinkopf was a very well established lawyer who was so entrenched within the upper class that in 1919 he would become a member of the Committee of 1000, the anti-strike group that actively worked against the Winnipeg General Strike.<sup>232</sup> Steinkopf had studied at the University of Manitoba and had articulated with Sir Hugh John Macdonald, Sir John A. Macdonald's son. According to the biography published in Hart's history of the Canadian Jewish community, Steinkopf was active in the Manitoba College Alma Mater Society, the Boy Scouts, the General and Children's Hospitals and in the Public School Board. He was also involved in many businesses, including securities and investment firms, and was a masonic lodge member in addition to the being a B'nai Brith member.<sup>233</sup> His network therefore reached into both the non-Jewish and Jewish charitable, business and fraternal worlds. Steinkopf's reputation would have ensured that the Orphanage also appeared kosher to the British-Protestant elites. But

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<sup>232</sup> Levine, 164.

<sup>233</sup> Hart, 389.

while Weston may have felt some disquiet at the creation and maintenance of a Jewish orphanage in Manitoba, the City of Winnipeg's policies show that municipal officials would eventually be pleased to have another charitable social service operating in the city.

### **Municipal Government and the Orphanage, Legislation and Funding**

The earliest mention of any Jewish orphanage in the City of Winnipeg archival records is 1915, and it indicates a hesitancy by the city to support it. A letter from P. Stephany from the Orphanage to the City Council, dated November 26, 1915, stated that the Orphanage would like to appear before City Council to discuss the refusal of the Civic Charities Bureau to endorse the institution.<sup>234</sup> The City Council must have reconsidered its objection, because in the Council minutes for December 13, 1915, it approved a \$500 grant to be sent to the Orphanage under the Charity Grants appropriation.<sup>235</sup> In 1916, the City granted the Esther Robinson Orphanage exemption from municipal taxes through a by-law, including a refund on taxes already paid, and when the two Jewish Orphanages amalgamated in 1917, a new by-law was drafted.<sup>236</sup> By 1920, the Jewish Orphanage was one of a number of childcare institutions that received annual grants from the City, including the Knowles Home and St. Joseph's Orphanage.<sup>237</sup> There seems to have been no further friction between City Council and the Orphanage aside from that first refusal in 1915.

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234 "Letter from P. Stephany, November 26, 1915," Correspondence, City of Winnipeg Archives.

235 City Council Minutes, December 13, 1915, Item N. 1145, City of Winnipeg Archives.

236 City Council Minutes, November 26, 1917, Item N. 925, City of Winnipeg Archives. *City Council Minutes*, March 4, 1918, Item N. 168, City of Winnipeg Archives.

237 City Council Minutes, December 20, 1920, Charity Grants, City of Winnipeg Archives.

Later records show that the relationship between the City and the Orphanage was good enough to allow for a certain amount of negotiations over funding. In 1928, the City of Winnipeg began providing some funding for Winnipeg children in childcare institutions. Called the Maintenance for Neglected Children, the City provided \$0.80 per day per child through the 1920s;<sup>238</sup> this payment dropped in 1934 to \$0.63 per day per child, apparently on the advice of Judge Hamilton, who served on the Juvenile Court. However, another institution fought this decrease in funding, and the Council agreed to reinstate the previous amount of \$0.80 for children admitted before June 6, 1934. The Superintendent of the Orphanage, H. E. Wilder, then brought forward five cases in the Jewish Orphanage that met this cut-off date. City Council then decided to drop the amount down to \$0.76 per day for those five children, even though they had met the criteria. It does not appear that the drop was due to any reduction in the cost of supporting children, but instead must have been linked to the ongoing economic Depression, but the ability of the Jewish orphanage and other organizations to influence the City Council indicates that the Council accepted its responsibility to care for its younger citizens. Unfortunately for the Jewish Orphanage, only children who originally came from the City of Winnipeg were eligible for this municipal funding in orphanages.<sup>239</sup>

City funding meant that receiving organizations had to fulfill some paperwork requirements in order to be reimbursed. The City Charities Bureau required detailed financial accounting every year, and these annual reports give the clearest picture of the functioning of the Orphanage available, as the City required very detailed information. In 1937 the Orphanage reported its

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238 City Council Minutes, January 9, 1928, Item N. 58, City of Winnipeg Archives.

239 City Council Minutes, February 24, 1936, Item N. 184, City of Winnipeg Archives.

income as follows: contributions \$7,850.17; allocation from the Winnipeg Community Chest \$7,490.00; inmates and other beneficiaries, including the City of Winnipeg's contributions \$6,641.47 (this included parental maintenance payments and all municipal per diem payments); Winnipeg Foundation Fund, \$1,200.00; the Province of Manitoba \$500.00; and investment earnings of \$73.65. This meant that the largest group of funders of the Orphanage were individual donors, and the second the Community Chest, which was run by the Federated Budget Board Charities Campaign. The City of Winnipeg's per diem Winnipeg child payments and the parental/familial maintenance was by this time augmented by the fees paid by the boarding children, whose parents paid full or at least half of the cost of their children's living expenses, as the families of children in need often only paid what they could afford or nothing. The Winnipeg Foundation Fund was a non-profit endowment foundation established in 1921, and by 1937 it was giving the Orphanage more financial support than the province. It's clear that the Province of Manitoba had no interest in funding or supporting the Orphanage in a meaningful way, but that the City of Winnipeg, the Federated Budget Board's Community Chest (overseen by the business elites of the City), and the Winnipeg Foundation were all contributing to the maintenance of the Jewish Orphanage.

### **Funding from Donors and Charitable Funds**

Funding was an ongoing challenge for the Orphanage, even though both pre-1917 orphanages were founded with the help of many donors. Both orphanages were begun as optimistic schemes for a complete suite of social services for the Winnipeg Jewish community. Governance was perhaps an easier job, although it was a class-driven endeavor, with very wealthy and influential

Jews sitting on the Board of Directors and other volunteer bodies like the Ladies Auxiliary, and poorer Jews using the Orphanage to house their children. Governance was also a gendered affair; after the merger of the two orphanages in 1917, there were male presidents and male treasurers. Although there were female officers of the Board listed, it seems that the most powerful positions were reserved for men. But the biggest challenge was how staff and volunteers were able to share the power between them. Volunteer-governed organizations have a difficult balance to maintain between the staff, who perform the day-to-day tasks of running the organization, and the Board of Directors, who are responsible for creating governing policies and making decisions. But above the Board of the Orphanage and the staff were government authorities such as the Winnipeg Children's Bureau and provincial departments. It was up to the staff, specifically the superintendent and the Jewish social worker, to broker between these competing authorities in order to ensure that Jewish children were cared for in the manner which the Jewish community expected.

### ***Funding from Individual Donors***

If the Orphanage wanted to keep Jewish children from five Western Canadian provinces within the care of the Jewish community, it was clear that it needed to generate funds from Jewish donors, as government funding was limited to geographic location. By donating to the Jewish Orphanage, the far-flung Jews of Western Canada received their own rewards that extended beyond religious duties to care for orphans. The religious obligation to support poor and needy members of the Jewish community is known as *tzedakah*, from the Hebrew word for justice. Charity was therefore not only considered a nice thing to do, but a commandment to commit

justice. Performing tzedakah would link far-flung Jews to larger communities across Canada, and reduced psychological isolation.

The annual report of the Orphanage from 1925-26 shows donations from some towns that had only between one and ten Jewish families. For example, the Jews of Drumheller, Alberta donated a total of \$69.00 to the Orphanage that year.<sup>240</sup> Rosenberg writes that in 1931, the Jewish population of Drumheller was only 44 individuals, out of a general population of 2,987.<sup>241</sup> The Drumheller donations were small, with the highest being \$12 and the lowest contribution at \$3, but the Jews of Drumheller were now able to see their name in the Orphanage's annual report. Isolated, possibly without any formal Jewish institutions save a small B'nai B'rith group or an occasional prayer quorum, the Jews of Drumheller were still able to fulfill the commandment of educating the community's children. And since the Orphanage was a new, modern institution, these far-flung Jews were able to connect themselves with the very best their ethnic community had to offer.<sup>242</sup> Even local Winnipeg Jews enjoyed the prestige associated with their donations being mentioned in the English and Yiddish newspapers. Across the prairies, Jews celebrated their life-cycle events by donating to the Jewish Orphanage and then including a mention of their donation in the newspaper notice of the event. For example, when Shimon Simovitch and Rosa Ordick were married in Vonda, Saskatchewan in 1917, they made sure to mention in the wedding notice in the *Israelite Press* that donations were made to a Winnipeg mutual aid society and to the Jewish Orphanage.<sup>243</sup>

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240 "Annual Report, Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada, 1925-26," 1926, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, JHC 10 F1, 29.

241 Rosenberg, 309.

242 "Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada Report for the Year 1923-1924," 1924, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, JHC10, F1, 9, 20, 23,30.

243 "Marriage June 24, Vonda, Saskatchewan," *Israelite Press*, June 28, 1917, 3.



But this financial support for the Jewish Orphanage sometimes led to a negative repercussion. During the lifetime of the Orphanage there seems to have been a reluctance on the part of rural Jews to take in foster children – after all, since the Orphanage existed, it could be used to save them the trouble of raising troubled children. The Children’s Records reveals one case where the attitudes of rural Jews were expressed. One uncle, writing from another province, was upset that the Orphanage had refused the admission of his sister’s children. Her children had already been admitted to the Orphanage for a five month period and were rejected the second time because the mother was eligible for Mother’s Allowance in her home province and because there were older teens in the family who could care for the children while the mother worked. This family could have returned to live with this uncle if they needed to or could attempt to support themselves with the older siblings providing a measure of childcare. The uncle, however, was incensed by the second admission rejection, writing, “So why call on [Name of Province] Jew to support the city and manitoba children are just because my neighbors stopt supporting the Home but them that did not stop suporting during all these years, like my supt [sic]. And where it came a time that I should get some benefit out of it and this what happens now [sic].”<sup>244</sup> Superintendent Wilder wrote back in anger:

You say you are a regular contributor to our institution. If our records are correct – your contribution amounts to \$5.00 annually. It would take 180 such contributions to maintain just Mrs. QP’s children. Do your realize our task now?

I have already explained in my previous letter that it cost us over 11 thousand dollars a year to maintain the children that are coming from the country (not counting those from

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244 Record QP1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Winnipeg) and in spite of all our efforts, time, energy we can hardly collect two-thirds that amount.<sup>245</sup>

Although the Orphanage relied on donations from all kinds of donors, the act of including the rural Jews meant that those donors felt an ownership over the institution. Instead of viewing the Orphanage as solely the instrument of tzedakah, some Western Canadian Jews began to see it as a social service to which they were entitled due to their financial contributions.

Rich donors also felt a strong connection to the Orphanage, often personalizing their relationships with children and adults who were poor. Not every adult who threw him or herself into the management of the Orphanage was rich, but they were all more comfortable than the families which turned to the Orphanage for help. The Spivaks, for example, clearly received much joy simply from spending time with the children. Maurice Gillman, a former orphanage boy, remembered these adults fondly, writing,

Mr. David Spivak, who was on the Board of directors, was very much involved in the Jewish Orphanage. He was our Uncle, Father, Grandfather, etc. We always looked up to him since he would speak in our defense – in the event of troubles. He, along with Hessay Levinson, Mr. Gray, Rabinovitch's, Weidman's etc. They all gave us the care we missed in a normal home setting. May they all rest in peace.<sup>246</sup>

The adults of the Board who were so kind to Maurice and his siblings were not actually giving him the love and care he missed from his parents. At best, they were offering similar care to the love and affection shown by extended family and friends to children, but this adult attention was clearly appreciated by the children. For the children, the presence of these men and women

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245 Record QP1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

246 Gillman, 10.

clearly saved them from being isolated. But in addition to helping children and having friendships with children, there was also a social significance to these donor's involvement in the Orphanage.

This social significance can be explored further by examining the involvement of Allan Bronfman, of the family who owned the Seagram liquor company. Bronfman was involved with the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage for years, continuing after he moved from Winnipeg to Montreal. His family had begun in Canada as hotel owners and after the prohibition of alcohol in Canada and the United States, they became alcohol producers and smugglers. Their trade was publicized by their willingness to engage in public lawsuits. According to Michael Marrus' biography of Sam Bronfman, in 1922 the Bronfmans took a barrel supplier to court in Saskatchewan for selling them contaminated barrels. The trial was covered extensively by the *Winnipeg Tribune* newspaper, which was anti-liquor and connected to a Canadian customs agent who had had conflicts with the Bronfman family. After this trial the family was featured in many negative stories in the press, especially in the *Tribune*, making a respectable reputation for Allan Bronfman difficult.<sup>247</sup>

Bronfman had married into the upper echelons of the Winnipeg Jewish community and had a charitable reputation. His older brother was Sam, the leader of the family, and according to Nicholas Faith's book on the Bronfmans, his personality was opposite to his brother's; where Sam strove to dominate, Allan was charming, university-educated and somewhat passive, and he saw himself not as a tough business man but as a humanitarian.<sup>248</sup> Though the Bronfmans came

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<sup>247</sup> Michael Robert Marrus, *Samuel Bronfman: the Life and Times of Seagram's Mr. Sam* (Hanover : Published by University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press, 1991), 80-87, 104.

<sup>248</sup> Nicholas Faith, *The Bronfmans: the Rise and Fall of the House of Seagram* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 48, 142-143.

from the rougher world of alcohol production, Allan Bronfman used his money for tzedakah, and built relationships with the staff of the charities with which he worked. He served as the President of the Orphanage in the early 1920s, and was willing to not only fundraise and attend Board meetings, but to meet with families, as is shown in some of the Children's Records. For example, in 1923 Bronfman asked a woman who was applying to admit her child to the Orphanage to meet with him at his office and discuss her request.<sup>249</sup> After he left Winnipeg, Osovsky would write to Bronfman when he needed some investigative work done in Montreal. In one case, while still living in Winnipeg, Bronfman became involved when the OC children were first being admitted, trying to mediate between the parents and relatives. Fifteen years later, Bronfman met with one of these children who had grown and moved to Montreal, reporting on her marital status, living situation and appearance.<sup>250</sup> He established the Bronfman Scholarship at the Orphanage to fund those boys who were chosen to attend rabbinical school in Chicago, which eventually funded Reuben Slonim's preliminary studies.<sup>251</sup> Allan Bronfman was therefore able to accrue not only social currency but also psychological purpose and connection with others through his work with the Orphanage and with the children. The Orphanage was not only a passive receptor of virtue, as its existence and operations gave emotional and social succor to the donors and governors.

### ***Funding from the Federated Budget Board and the Winnipeg Foundation***

The other major funders were two organizations that required the Jewish Orphanage to work with the non-Jewish charity elite: the Federated Budget Board Charities Campaign and the Winnipeg

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249 Record NH, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

250 Record OC1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

251 Reuben Slonim, *Grand to be an Orphan* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, Limited, 1983), 182.

Foundation. Ross describes how the Federated Budget Board was founded to solve the same problem that all charities found in the social service sector: there were too many charities in need of funding. In order to reduce the number of charity appeals middle and upper class Winnipeggers were receiving, the Board of Trade and a coalition of charities called the Central Council proposed in 1921 one centralized fundraising campaign for multiple organizations. There was some disquiet in the Jewish community about having the Orphanage, the Jewish Old Folks' Home and the United Hebrew Relief join the campaign, but Allan Bronfman and Max Steinkopf threw their support behind the initiative as they were members of the Federated Budget Board. The campaign consisted of newspaper appeals and door to door donation pleas. The Orphanage did not receive as large a proportion of funding from the campaign as other charities because it had other sources of revenue from the maintenance fees charged parents, and also because it took in children from outside Winnipeg. Once again, the municipal focus of social services had negative consequences for the Jewish Orphanage, which operated beyond the provincial boundaries.<sup>252</sup>

The Winnipeg Foundation, founded in 1921, was another local attempt to provide the money needed to help the charities that allowed poorer Winnipeggers survive - both of these initiatives occurred soon after the 1919 General Strike, and can be seen as the upper classes attempting to use charity to stave off working class misery, so as to relieve pressure on the government by the labour movement and in response to the post-war economic depression. According to Gordon Goldsborough's article on the history of the Winnipeg Foundation, this charity was begun by William F. Alloway, one of Winnipeg's earliest millionaires and bankers. Alloway was inspired

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252 Ross, 173-175.

by the Cleveland Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, and was structured as a method of donating to charities that eliminated the strange requirements that donations by bequest often inflicted. Distributing the annual payments to the charities was the job of the Advisory Board of five members, all of whom were male until 1943.<sup>253</sup> The large grant that the Orphanage received in 1937 is an indication of how well regarded the Jewish social service providers were in Winnipeg by the Winnipeg elites who ran the fund.

By the 1930s, the Jewish Orphanage was firmly ensconced in the Winnipeg social service sector, and was reaping the benefits of its hard work with both donors and with its families. But the institution served to help the children of the poor, not just to offer psychological comfort to donors. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the Jewish Orphanage often acted as a broker between government officials and programs and the poor families who needed their help. In many ways, the Jewish Orphanage was able to act as a bridge between the elites and the poor Jewish working classes, easing some of the effects of poverty and possibly class tensions.

### **Families, the Jewish Orphanage and Social Services**

The Orphanage's Children's Records contain detailed reports of the efforts made by the superintendents and the Jewish social workers to assist the families who needed help. The Children's Records show a mostly good working relationship between organizations like the Social Welfare Council and the Children's Bureau of Winnipeg. The Children's Files of the

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<sup>253</sup> Gordon Goldsborough, "A Remedy for Wooden Legs and Dead Hands: the Early Years of the Winnipeg Foundation," *Manitoba History* 66 (Spring, 2011): 40-43.

Orphanage revealed that the superintendents and the Jewish social workers most often worked with the Social Welfare Council, which provided relief (regular installments of cash and material assistance), and with the Children's Bureau, which oversaw the administration of child welfare services. The social workers associated with the hospitals, especially the General Hospital, referred cases of families who needed temporary childcare. The Orphanage staff also acted as a bridge between the non-Jewish world of social welfare and other, smaller Jewish charities such as the National Council of Jewish Women and the Knesset Israel Sisterhood (a synagogue women's group). Some conflicts did arise, and these are instructive in illuminating how the Orphanage's staff served as brokers between the Jewish community and the Anglo elite.

Outside experts, charitable leaders and provincial officials tolerated the Jewish Orphanage because the Orphanage was willing to shoulder the burden of costs that did not get covered by the provinces and municipalities. Day to day work with officials who worked in the Children's Bureau, the Juvenile Court, the hospitals and with other officials usually went well. I have not found any indication in the Children's Records that the recommendations of the Orphanage Superintendents or the Jewish CAS social worker were ever discounted due to their Jewishness. It appears that the underfunded, overwhelmed and untrained nature of social work in Winnipeg led to an acceptance of the help provided by the Jewish staff, especially since there was a cultural gap between Christian social workers and the Jewish community. For example, divorce was unremarkable to Jewish social workers, as religious divorce has always been a fact of life in Jewish communities, but its reality in a family confused a Christian social worker who was

temporarily assigned to a Jewish case.<sup>254</sup> Non-Jewish social workers were most likely happy to avoid the cultural gaps by having the Jewish social worker take on those families.

### ***Provincial Authorities and the Jewish Orphanage***

In the early decades of the Jewish Orphanage, provincial authorities oversaw the Mother's Allowance programs, although it was managed in Winnipeg by the city's Social Welfare Council. Mother's Allowance had a firm rule of providing funding within provincially enforced borders, and this rule took primary importance over serving the needs of families in distress. Many mothers refused to access this form of social assistance so that they could remain in Winnipeg with their extended family and greater employment opportunities. The case of one mother, Mrs. XS, was well-known in the Jewish community. Her husband had died in another province and the family subsequently moved back to Winnipeg. Mrs. XS tried to claim Mothers Allowance, but the Winnipeg Children's Bureau refused to grant it to her, as she had left the province where her husband had died. The case went up to the Manitoba Minister of Public Welfare, who also refused to grant Mrs. XS Mothers Allowance. It was recommended to Mrs. XS that she return to the province in which her husband died, but she refused and in despair took her own life. The Minister then planned to send the XS orphaned children back to their home province, which caused an uproar in the Jewish community. The Jewish Orphanage took the XS children in and covered their maintenance at its own expense.<sup>255</sup> In the Children's Records, the Orphanage staff were never able to work around the provincial limits on Mother's Allowance.

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254 Record JL1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

255 Record XS1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



Beyond the Mother's Allowance, provincial authorities held some amount of power over the children who came to the Jewish Orphanage. An early record shows that some provincial child welfare officials had their views on childcare coloured by ideas about female sexuality. A teenage girl, ZN, was reported to her city's officials as showing troubling behaviour (staying out late with strange men, who seemed to follow her from home to home) by her family doctor, after her parents and extended family had tried to keep her safe. After this report, she was first sent by her city to a Christian reform school for girls in Winnipeg, but a Manitoba child protection official found her and referred her to the Jewish Orphanage. Greenberg was Superintendent at that time, and his letters to her after she had been sent home show a non-judgmental and helpful adult trying to keep a troubled young person from harm. But the provincial official who handled her case in her home city refused to help fund her maintenance costs, even though Greenberg pointed out that legislation allowed for children to be cared for by their faith community. This same official managed to misspell all Jewish surnames, and his language was unkind about ZN, writing, "I looked through the file very carefully and find that so far as the evidence is concerned, it simply went to show that this girl is incorrigible." Greenberg was shocked at the official's language, and went so far as to recommend a book on child psychology to the official.<sup>256</sup> The official's refusal to pay for maintenance may have been bolstered by a standard provincial policy to avoid paying for out-of-province costs, but it may also have been influenced by antisemitism and misogynistic ideas about female sexuality. Once again, the Jewish Orphanage covered maintenance costs through its own fundraising in order to prevent a Jewish child being housed in a Christian environment.

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<sup>256</sup> Record ZN, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### *The Winnipeg Social Welfare Commission*

The Social Welfare Commission (the SWC) oversaw the disbursement of relief for families experiencing unemployment. In the 1930s, the SWC appears to have split into a few offices for unemployed families and single women's relief. From the Children's Records, it seems that the early SWC had home "visitors," and as time went on hired social workers. The Children's Records indicate that the staff of relief were usually helpful to their clients, although policy could limit how much help that the SWC was able to deliver. And it's important to remember that organizations are run by individuals, who may have held their own prejudices about particular clients, disregarding their clients' real needs.

Sometimes the relationship between the Orphanage and the SWC did not help families, despite the staff's best attempts. Mrs. TS was denied Mother's Allowance by the Social Welfare Council because they thought that her grocery bills showed that she was buying too much fruit, and they chose to send her food packages instead. The family had experienced many crises due to their extreme poverty and domestic violence perpetrated by Mr. TS, and the children had been admitted temporarily to the Orphanage in order to get them away from the abuse. After discharge, the Jewish social workers, Bertha Koyle and her successor Pearl Finkelstein, were so concerned about the family that they kept in communication with the mother. Mrs. TS rejected relief's food packages because she said they contained too many non-food items like tea and baking soda, and she contacted Pearl Finkelstein, who, with the help of Mr. Wilder, checked to see if the mother's report was true. They found that she was correct, and pressured the SWC to reinstate Mrs. TS

with a deposit account instead of the packages. In fact, one of the mother's neighbours told the Jewish workers that the SWC worker had been nasty in her treatment of the mother, telling her that her husband had left her because she was a spendthrift; this was untrue, as the mother and her relatives had had to pressure the father to leave for the safety of the family. In this case, even though Mr. Wilder and Pearl Finkelstein were experienced social workers with good reputations, the mother's request for monetary relief was denied because she had rejected the food hampers and was divorced.<sup>257</sup> If this mother had not had the Jewish Orphanage staff to help her, it is unlikely her struggle with the SWC would have been recorded at all. This woman was struggling with four children in abject poverty, but in the face of resistance from the SWC, the Jewish Orphanage staff could not help her.

The earliest case which was referred to Social Welfare Commission that exist in the Children's Records was in 1918. In this case the RW family was referred to the Orphanage by a SWC visitor, Miss Romanovsky, who, in turn, had received the case from Mr. Hart Green of the United Hebrew Relief. Therefore, this case went from a Jewish charity to a quasi-state organization and then to a different Jewish charity. The widowed mother, Mrs. RW, needed some financial help because she had been working as a small shopkeeper or peddler when the large department stores had stopped selling to re-sellers. The family had turned to the SWC after the father's death, but unfortunately, someone in the SWC had reported the woman to the Immigration Department. Deportation was forestalled by Mrs. RW's extended family cobbling together a surety payment to the Canadian government, using their own savings along with what remained from the father's

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<sup>257</sup> Record TS1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

insurance policy. In order to help Mrs. RW get some time to reestablish her household, it seems the children were admitted to the Orphanage, although the file does not indicate how long.<sup>258</sup> Deporting immigrants who had become a “public charge” was official Canadian state policy, no matter how these immigrants came to be impoverished.<sup>259</sup> The placement of the children in the Jewish Orphanage allowed Mrs. RW to stay in Canada and to re-establish her household.

In the 1920s and 30s, the number of state and charitable organizations in Winnipeg which interacted with poor families increased. The QA family’s children were first admitted in 1929, but their problems had begun a few years before. This family worked with the following organizations: the Jewish social worker; the Robertson Fresh Air Camp; the SWC; the Worker’s Compensation Board; the United Hebrew Relief; the Knesset Israel Sisterhood; the Tuberculosis Department at City Hall; the King Edward Hospital; the Children’s Bureau; and the B’nai Brith Fresh Air Camp. This was a family suffering from the father’s work injury and the mother’s illnesses, as well as what seems to have been abject poverty. In this case there were two temporary admissions of the QA children, the second being forced by Dr. Victor, the mother’s physician. Despite the fact that the extended family was also infirm and the home was infested with scabies, the children were discharged to Mrs. QA against her wishes, because it was thought that with the help scraped together by relief, United Hebrew Relief, the KI Sisterhood and the fact that the father had regained employment, there would be enough support for the family to function.<sup>260</sup> Here the Jewish Orphanage acted as an intermediary, working with all the organizations focusing on the activities of just one family, in order to force them to reunite.

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258 Record RW1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

259 Ross, 81-82.

260 Record QA1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### *The Jewish Orphanage and the Children's Bureau*

The Children's Bureau was another quasi-governmental agency that worked very closely with the Jewish Orphanage, overseeing all child welfare social service cases in Winnipeg. It appears that the first Jewish social worker was hired under the auspices of both the Children's Bureau and the Jewish Orphanage. The earliest reference in the Children's Records to the first Jewish social worker, Bertha Koyle, was in 1923, although there are no other 1923 cases and no 1924 cases; perhaps she was involved in this case while she was still working as a nurse with the Orphanage.<sup>261</sup> In 1925 her initials became more prevalent in the files, indicating that she was authoring the notes. In the Children's Records, the investigation was chronicled with dated entries, typewritten and initialed. Pasted into the files were slips of paper, carbon copies of the decisions made by the Children's Bureau regarding the families under their care. Usually the Children's Bureau merely adopted the recommendation of the Jewish social worker or the Orphanage Superintendent without question. If the family could afford maintenance payments, the CB would set the level of payment, or, if the family was very poor, they would be classed as a "charity case," and therefore allowed not to pay anything at all.<sup>262</sup> Therefore the CB made financial decisions for the Orphanage without being responsible for making up the financial shortfall, a situation that the Orphanage did not appear to question or protest. Occasionally, the CB would find itself stymied by a family's situation and would leave it at the discretion of the Orphanage to decide what to do with the child or children.

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261 Record RQ1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.  
262 Records RM1 and 2; QV; PU, PD1, 2 and 3; NZ1 and 2; NT; NO1, 2 and 3; and more, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

The Children's Bureau was often sympathetic to the plight of families, but when it came to some issues, the Orphanage found it best to ignore their recommendations. When a child, LH, was admitted to the Orphanage after the death of his father in Winnipeg, the Children's Bureau recommended by letter that because he was undersized and underdeveloped, he be referred to the Immigration authorities for deportation. The Orphanage had been hoping to get wardship of this boy in order to offset the financial costs of his maintenance. The Orphanage wrote back a short reply that they were meeting to discuss the case, and then did not communicate with the CB further about LH. After the boy had technically lived in Winnipeg long enough to fulfill the city's residency requirements the CB wrote back to the Orphanage that they could now apply for wardship. But the Orphanage was wary of the threat of deportation, and did not reply to this letter until a follow up letter came, asking for their reply. Luckily, LH was now 16 and too old for wardship, as he was expected to leave care at that age. Superintendent Osovsky's delay tactics had worked.<sup>263</sup> The Jewish community knew what the situation was like for Jews in their home countries, with famine, antisemitic oppression, violence, and poverty. Silence seemed to be a good choice for protecting this boy from deportation, rather than outright defiance of state authorities. By operating quietly and assuming all financial costs for LH, the Orphanage prevented his deportation.

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<sup>263</sup> Record LH, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### ***Juvenile Court, the Jewish Orphanage and Jewish Children***

The Justice system was also a key state apparatus that worked with the Jewish Orphanage. The Juvenile Court was the main court system that interacted with the Orphanage. By the time the Orphanage began keeping extensive records, the Juvenile Court was functioning as a facilitator for social welfare interventions. The Juvenile Court judges seemed to welcome having a place to send Jewish children. The Orphanage came in front of the court to assume guardianship of abandoned children, in order to get both authority over those children and funding for them from the City of Winnipeg. Adoption cases also went through the Juvenile Court. The other kind of Juvenile Court case that involved the Jewish Orphanage was a “delinquency” case, usually concerning children who were skipping school, wandering the streets, or getting into petty mischief. There were distinctions made between temporary guardianship and permanent guardianship, which Whitton had criticized in her report as an unnecessary development. After 1928, the distinction appears to have dropped, guardianship being assigned for a short period of time such as a year or six months and then being renewed.

A typical guardianship case for non-orphans tended to involve parents who could not be expected to take their children back, usually because they were too ill or disabled, or because they had disappeared. One father, after his wife died, placed his children in the Orphanage, stating that he had to care for a relative temporarily in an American city, but then he never returned.

Occasionally, he would contact the Orphanage with some money or through a lawyer. Relatives of the father stated that they couldn't find him. Later, the father wrote to the Orphanage and stated that since he had married a gentile wife he did not feel he could take the children back. It is

true that the Orphanage would be hesitant to send the children back to a non-Jewish step-parent, although there were cases where it did so. As the father was living out of Winnipeg, it might have been impossible to send the children to him without his support, or perhaps the Orphanage staff didn't trust the father to care for the children as his contact had been so sporadic. However, if the Orphanage wanted any consistent funding to support these children, it needed to seek guardianship from the Juvenile Court. The children were made temporary wards of the Orphanage for two years.<sup>264</sup> The Orphanage had many cases of abandonment, and were able to arrange for guardianship through the Juvenile Court easily, allowing the Home to get municipal funding for these children. Abandonment happened to a number of Orphanage children, but most of those who were made wards of the institution were not adopted by other families. Instead, they remained within the Jewish Orphanage, which became their home.

In most of the adoption cases in the Children's Files, adoption occurred at the behest of the mother, with the biological father being not part of the case. I did not find any cases of parents contesting Orphanage guardianship during the formal process, which included alerts placed in local newspapers, although it is important to remember that the Children's Files collection is incomplete due to a fire. In one case, Osovsky tried to pressure a single mother to give up her baby for adoption. She refused, telling the social worker that another one of her children was adopted away from her and that she had been misled about the situation by Osovsky. Now it was too late; her child was gone.<sup>265</sup> This was the only case in the Children's Records of a child being adopted out when the parent objected. In another case the mother did not give her consent to

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264 Record ZK1 and ZK2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

265 Record YB1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



adopt baby YD out, but had also disappeared from the city, asking the woman in whose care she left the infant to make sure it didn't go to an institution; the Orphanage interpreted that as consent to place YD for adoption, especially after newspaper notices of the intent to apply for guardianship were placed in newspapers with no response from her mother.<sup>266</sup> In all other adoption cases, the mother relinquished her rights to the child knowingly and the child was given to a Jewish foster family who then applied for adoption after the Jewish social worker had had some time to evaluate the situation. The Orphanage then reported on the case to the Department of Child Welfare. Orphanage staff never consider adopting children out to non-Jewish families.

For one adoption, the mother was a teenager, who with the help of her family applied for financial support from the baby's father in the Juvenile Court. The Court rejected her request when the father denied paternity, as the Children's Records show that the Court tended to believe men's innocence even in egregious cases of rape or of false promises made to vulnerable women. Having lost that case in court, the mother gave up her parental rights and the child was processed through adoption proceedings. Years afterward it became clear that the adoption paperwork was not completed adequately, and it took the Orphanage and the adoptive family's lawyers some time to work out the bureaucratic difficulties.<sup>267</sup> In this case, the Juvenile Court failed the child twice: it failed the child in the paternity case, and it failed the child due to a clerical error in its adoption. Luckily it appears that the child remained with his adoptive parents undisturbed while the legal questions were resolved, and his life did not need to be upset once more. But the Orphanage appears to have had little influence over the outcome of paternity trials, choosing not

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<sup>266</sup> Record YD, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.  
<sup>267</sup> Record ZT, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

to help unmarried women who tried to gain some measure of support for their children. As long as those children went to Jewish parents or stayed in the Jewish Orphanage, the institution had fulfilled its goal of retaining Jewish children.

Fear of the Orphanage acquiring guardianship through the judicial system was sometimes used by the Orphanage to manipulate families. One uncle of children in the care of the institution agreed to pay maintenance fees as long as the children were not made wards of the Orphanage and were never adopted out. The Orphanage kept silent, not letting the uncle know that wardship, unless done with the specific intention of adoption, never resulted in parents losing access or authority over their children. However, the threat of wardship in this case resulted in the parents' maintenance arrears being covered by the uncle and the ongoing costs of raising children.<sup>268</sup> The Orphanage, at least according to the Children's Records, never adopted out children older than toddlers and the practice of moving groups of children from urban centres to rural farm families for a more "wholesome" upbringing away from bad influences, as had been done by some Christian orphanages, was not practiced by the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage. Families, however, were not aware of these facts. In one case, Superintendent Osovsky was not above using adoption as a threat to get a parent to take his children out of the Orphanage, or at least pay maintenance, stating that his toddler was so lovable one of the nurses looked like she would adopt him. The father and his family were so poor that threats did nothing - the child was not adopted away from his family and the father continued to ignore pleas for maintenance payments.<sup>269</sup> Manipulating parents' ignorance of the Juvenile Court system was practiced by the Orphanage staff, all toward

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268 Record KI1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

269 Record WA, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

the goal of trying to recoup some of the maintenance costs that often were not covered by the municipality.

Child delinquency and child abuse were areas where the Orphanage tried to work as efficiently as it could with Juvenile Court authorities. SU, a boy who had been caught breaking into a home and stealing was sent, at the superintendent's request, to the Jewish Orphanage instead of to the Industrial Home for Boys, and from there to a foster family. Osovsky knew the child's family and was able to plead that the boy's behaviour was due to extreme poverty.<sup>270</sup> Sometimes the Orphanage would interfere in a Juvenile Court case on the behest of the family. In one custody dispute, Osovsky believed that the father was the best parent for the MV children, and submitted supporting documents to that end. As it happened, the children remained in the Orphanage for quite some time, as both parents were unstable.<sup>271</sup> In another case, KJ, a child who was being abused, was brought to the Orphanage by the local child probation officer. It was not clear when the girl was discharged as the file appears fire damaged and therefore incomplete, although KJ wrote to the Orphanage as an adult to thank Osovsky for all he had done for her. Osovsky also wrote to D. S. Hamilton, then acting not only as the Juvenile Court judge but also as the Children's Act Superintendent, to report that he had heard from Jewish visitors to the family that KJ's brother was also being beaten. The files are not clear if this brother was helped to safety.<sup>272</sup> In their position between the Jewish community and the Court, the Superintendent and other staff could attempt to make the lives of children better, although different strategies had to be used. It should be noted, however, that in the Children' Records, only the most obvious forms of child

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270 Record SU, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

271 Record MV1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

272 Record KJ, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

abuse were brought to the attention of Juvenile Court authorities. KJ had bruises on her body, was starving and had been locked out of her rural home in the frigid early spring, bringing her abuse to the attention of her neighbours; other children who were abused more privately were not found in the Children's Records. Child abuse was considered to be rare, and preventing it was not the goal of the Jewish Orphanage.

## **Conclusion**

Standing between the individuals who ran the provincial and civic organs of the state could be a tricky balancing act. The goals of the Jewish community were sometimes different from the demands of the state, which often tried to exclude poor people and children from social welfare aid in order to save money. Jewish culture concerning divorce, immigration and child “delinquents” was somewhat different than Protestant Canadian culture at the time: divorce was seen as not uncommon, deportation was viewed with alarm, and children were seen as needing a Jewish educational environment rather than retraining through an industrial education. In many cases, Jewish Orphanage staff could intervene and offer their institution as a place that would house children. Enlisting Jewish elites who had strong links to the British elite helped the Jewish Orphanage acquire some of its social currency, and in return men like Allan Bronfman polished their reputations as men of philanthropy and communal *tzedakah*. Although there were conflicts within the Jewish community about raising these funds and spending them, the community managed to stand together in the face of censure for extending their catchment area over provincial boundaries. The Jewish Orphanage was willing to ignore experts, bureaucrats and social welfare organizations in order to give many Jewish children a spot in their Home.

The creation of the social service sector in Manitoba was a structure that had been carefully constructed by legislation and the establishment of organizations and a Juvenile Court system. The Jewish Orphanage attempted to work within the provincial and municipal systems, usually cooperating with officials, but sometimes choosing to subvert state policies in order to protect its children from deportation or its families from deprivation. Although the Orphanage staff were well-respected within the social service sector, not all interventions on their families' behalf worked. However, by creating and maintaining their own institution, the Jewish community was able to prevent many of its children from going to a non-Jewish or Christian institution. The Jewish social worker worked with the SWC and the CB to try to ensure that Jewish families received a good standard of government-provided help, and, when relief and Mother's Allowance wasn't provided, would find the family help from Jewish charities. All of the work done by the Jewish Orphanage was meant to protect families both from penury and also from being exposed to Christian organizations. Jewish Canadians could be counted on to take care of their own.

## **Chapter 4 – Orphanage Refuge for Families and Children**

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was a tool used by the Jewish community in order to meet a number of different communal needs, including redirecting Jewish children away from non-Jewish institutions, and presenting the Jewish community as modern and integrated within the Canadian state. But in addition to these needs, the Orphanage met the physical needs of poor families and children in its community. This chapter will explore the reasons why children came to the Orphanage, and argue that the structure of both the Canadian state and the Jewish community pushed these children into Orphanage care. The material poverty of Jewish families was a strong driver for communal intervention, as the Jewish community was well aware that it had been invited to Canada under the expectation that it would care for its own. Life in the prairies and in Winnipeg never lived up to the ideal envisioned by the Ontario-centred architects of Canada, that of a country populated by prosperous yeoman farmers. Instead, the working class families who were connected with the Jewish Orphanage experienced crippling medical problems, uncertain employment and terrible housing. The families whose children spent time in the Jewish Orphanage were suffering from a structurally enabled poverty that they could not overcome through their own efforts. The help provided by the Orphanage did not alter these structural inequalities, but it did help some families from falling to an even lower standard of living and it did keep some children from being admitted to non-Jewish institutions, when using the Jewish Orphanage's childcare was the only option for parents. However, children who aged out of the Orphanage found themselves back in the world of poor housing, ill health and unemployment.

In this chapter, I will examine the lives of children and families outside of the Orphanage in their home towns and neighbourhood, during the children's stay in the institution, and once they had left. The early history of the city of Winnipeg is explored as a way of understanding the lack of good housing for Orphanage families. Primary sources for this chapter are the Children's Records, which contain ample description by the Jewish social workers of the families' lives, the two memoirs of life in the Orphanage by Reuben Slonim and Maurice Gillman, and an Orphanage annual report which described the daily schedule of the Orphanage. Although I put out a call to conduct interviews with Orphanage alumni in the Winnipeg Jewish newspapers, none came forward. I can only surmise that the remaining alumni of the Orphanage find the prospect of examining the crises that brought them to the Orphanage, and their time in the institution uncomfortable. From what I have observed in the Children's Records, most families involved in the Orphanage experienced illness, poverty and familial chaos.

This chapter draws on the Children's Records, which were compiled by both the superintendents and the Jewish social workers, who held power over the parents and children that they were charged with helping. The power imbalance within the records cannot be overstated. Similarly to what Carolyn Strange writes in her essay on studying capital case files, the Children's Records create a textual narrative that was authored not by the subjects of the Records, namely the children and their families, but by bureaucrats, usually the Jewish social worker and the Orphanage superintendent.<sup>273</sup> Balancing the dry narrative of the Records with the first-person memoirs that are discussed in the section about life in the Orphanage is important; even when the

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<sup>273</sup> Carolyn Strange, "Stories of their lives: Historians and the Capital Case," in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 33.

events recorded by the Orphanage staff may have been factual, the emotions were experienced by the children is lost. This loss of the children's experience mirrors how the Orphanage, which was ostensibly established solely to ensure that Jewish children were raised within their own culture, actually served the needs of many adults, such as the staff, state child welfare authorities, and the parents. And it should be noted that even though this chapter presents how bleak life could be in Winnipeg, it was also a place of possibilities. As Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen note in their study of Canadian prairie cities, Winnipeg, like other isolated Western Canadian metropolises, acted as a third space, where host societies and immigrants could mix and create new identities and social movements.<sup>274</sup> It was in this space that the Jewish Orphanage was able to broker between its families, the Jewish community and the bureaucratic goals of the state.

### **Life in Winnipeg – Housing and the City Grid**

Winnipeg was forcibly created on top of the geography of the Metis Red River colony, and was intended to be an Ontario colony by its Canadian conquerors. According to Mary Jane McCallum and Adele Perry's book *Structures of Indifference*, the space that is now Winnipeg was once a thriving region settled by Metis, Indigenous peoples and Europeans. It was cleared of this mixed culture through the use of Canadian state military violence from 1870 until 1872. The 1870 Manitoba Act had promised extensive land exchanges to the Metis through the use of scrip, which was intended to allow them to claim land outside of the colony, but instead they were dispossessed and often cheated out of their due.<sup>275</sup> Indigenous people were also moved out of the

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274 Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5.

275 Mary Jane McCallum and Adele Perry, *Structures of Indifference: an Indigenous Life and Death in a Canadian City* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2018), 36-39.



territory through the signing of the numbered treaties in Manitoba and other Western provinces, eventually locked into their reserves through the pass system. At the same time, the Canadian government opened up Manitoba to European settlers, giving block grants to Northern European ethnicities, especially Icelanders and Mennonites.<sup>276</sup> That being said, Winnipeg was not the settler-only space that was imagined by colonial authorities. Some Metis people moved to the periphery of the city in a southern neighbourhood that became known as Rooster Town, out of sight but not gone, and there was a small but distinct population of Metis families located throughout the city.<sup>277</sup> And although they were prevented from living in Winnipeg, Indigenous women came to Winnipeg to sell goods door to door, indicating to settlers that while First Nations people may have been removed from the city, they continued to exist.<sup>278</sup> The process of moving some populations out of the city and moving other populations in took approximately twenty years to complete, but by the time the majority of Winnipeg's Jews had arrived in the early twentieth century, it may have seemed to immigrants that the city had been constructed fresh from the prairie. Jewish immigrants who were fleeing from state violence in the Russian empire or Romania would have not viewed the violence that was at the heart of their new home as being remarkable or strange.

Winnipeg in the 1910s until the 1940s was a city of homes filled with more than one family, breadwinners who experienced cyclical unemployment, and people suffering from multiple illnesses. Of the 780 children whose files indicate that they had or may have been in the Orphanage, 534 children, or 68%, were from the city of Winnipeg (although it should be

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<sup>276</sup> McCallum and Perry, 40-44.

<sup>277</sup> Evelyn Peters, *Rooster Town: the History of an Urban Métis Community, 1901-1961*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018), 24.

<sup>278</sup> Blanchard, 155.

remembered that due to the JCFS office fire, this data set is not complete). Many of those who were discharged or who aged out of the institution remained in the city, unless they were sent to live with parents or employers on farms or in prairie towns. In this section, the structural reasons for Winnipeg's stock of inadequate and unsafe housing will be explored, as will the housing difficulties faced by the Orphanage families. Unsanitary and unsafe housing plagued these poor families who were mostly living and working in Winnipeg's North End neighbourhood. The existence of poor housing was not an accident but actually due to City negligence, which was resolved not by efforts to fix the housing but instead the construction of a social service sector.

As Alan Artibise noted in his seminal work on the social history of the city, Winnipeg was run for the first decades of its existence by a group of Ontario business men who sought to create a city that was run as efficiently as a business, with its only concern being commercial growth. To do so, they actively shut labouring men (and women) out of local politics with property requirements for voters that exceeded most Winnipeggers' means.<sup>279</sup> The result was a city that gave little thought to civic planning for immigrant working class populations, and a great deal of time and treasure was instead spent on securing the presence of the railways in the centre of the city. These rail lines cut neighbourhoods into self-contained and geographically isolated poor sectors.<sup>280</sup> Jews, other Eastern Europeans, and Scandinavians tended to live by the 1910s in the North End of Winnipeg, which was nicknamed the "Foreign Quarter," "New Jerusalem," and "CPR Town."<sup>281</sup> By 1910 this third of the city's area was housing 43% of its population.<sup>282</sup> Not everyone

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279 Alan F. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: a Social History of Urban Growth, 1871-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975), 36-38.

280 Artibise, 76.

281 Artibise, 158.

282 Artibise, 158.

in this district worked for the railroad but its presence brought manufacturers and other employers. Even though Winnipeg had plenty of land at its disposal, the North End had few parks and featured frame houses built right to the street with small or non-existent yards. But the cheap rents of the area gave immigrants a place to live – 80% of Winnipeg’s Jews lived in this area in 1916.<sup>283</sup> The more Jewish immigrants moved to the North End, the more their shops and institutions attracted more immigrants.<sup>284</sup> As the Jewish community was primarily suffering in the North End, they were in need of as many social services that they could access. The Orphanage was one of those services which allowed poor and working-class Jews to survive, without having to access Christian charity.

In its early history the City Council ignored this district, resulting in a neighbourhood without adequate lighting, sewage or schools.<sup>285</sup> In 1909, after having suffered numerous communicable diseases, the City gave itself the power to regulate homes, and a tenement inspector began to levy fines against landlords.<sup>286</sup> However, as the City had not required developers to leave enough frontage for each property, the North End was difficult to modernize and update. The North End was considered to be “dirty, dark and dangerous,” all due to the unseen class biases and policy decisions of City Council, which was dominated by capitalist interests. But while the North End’s bustling intimacy and the plethora of synagogues, schools, communal buildings, mutual aid societies, factories, markets and shops did not impress outsiders, the local inhabitants enjoyed its communalism and convenience. The children of the Orphanage often experienced squalor which had been encouraged by class tensions. Staff at the Orphanage used their position as authority

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283 Artibise, 161.

284 Artibise, 162.

285 Artibise, 165.

286 Blanchard, 200.

figures within the social service sector in order to secure families housing, thus acting as brokers for the Jewish community.

Another factor that impacted the housing experienced by the Orphanage families was the ethnic and class distribution of people throughout the city. As Daniel Hiebert's article on the social geography of Winnipeg explains, in the city ethnic affiliation tended to supersede class ties when it came to housing, so that even non-working class Jews often chose to live in the North End. Ethnic groups in Winnipeg, aside from British Protestant Canadians and German and Scandinavian Canadians, clustered in distinct neighbourhoods no matter what their profession or class status.<sup>287</sup> Many Jews lived in the North End because it featured Immigrant aid societies and other communal institutions that could help new arrivals find work and housing quickly. The resulting inter-ethnic solidarity was necessary because some groups, such as Jews, were barred from certain professions or jobs due to bigotry and social exclusion.<sup>288</sup> Hiebert believes that the ethnic links between individuals were important, but so were the labour traditions and organizations that were brought over from Europe by these immigrants groups. The strength of both immigrant self-help societies and socialist parties and groups allowed some degree of success of settlement for immigrants and their involvement within the political sphere. This created a social culture within the city of separated ethnic communities that were occasionally united by class concerns.<sup>289</sup>

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287 Daniel Hiebert, "Class, ethnicity and residential structure: the social geography of Winnipeg, 1901-1921," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 1 (1991): 73-74.

288 Hiebert, 78.

289 Hiebert, 79-80.

One of the most time consuming tasks undertaken by the Jewish social worker who worked with the Orphanage was traveling through the city with her clients, trying to find housing so that children could be reunited with their parents. Only large families searched for a full apartment. Singles, couples and families with only one or two children would set their housing sights on occupying a few rooms within another family's home or in a crowded apartment block, often receiving some access to the shared kitchen, but sometimes having to rely on the other family for their meals, or being forced to purchase meals at restaurants. Some families moved in with extended family, sharing children and grandparents between different homes, as parents became injured or ill and extra room was needed, as new babies were born or as more relatives arrived in town. It is tempting to view these movements of extended family living together through a nostalgic lens, but usually this situation led to familial conflict. The social workers' notes in the Children's Records contain rich detail about people's home lives, and show exactly what kind of suffering the Jewish Orphanage was trying to mitigate in order to prevent Jewish families from receiving help from Christian institutions.

Families for example, could lose their home due to illness and other calamities. In the 1930s, one mother was found to be suffering with cancer. Mrs. ZX had been alone for many years; her husband was tracked down to the provincial gaol. As soon as she was diagnosed and had to be admitted to hospital for treatment she lost her apartment, possibly because her relief payments stopped. The younger children were placed in the Orphanage, as charity cases, while her teenage son was forced to stay in the home of friends, relying on another family's good will. Eventually the teen was kicked out of the friends' home because his presence affected their relief status (theoretically he was employable and could have been contributing the household, even though

he was jobless like most of his peers) and no one was willing to fund his food costs. Anticipating Mrs. ZX's release from the hospital, the Jewish social worker, in this case Pearl Finkelstein, and an unnamed Social Welfare Council social worker found Mrs. ZX another apartment and then negotiated with the landlord to clean the suite. In a fit of benevolence, the rental agency which owned the apartment agreed to cover the costs of washing the walls of the suite, but after the walls were cleaned it apparently forgot that it had agreed to pay for it, and the SWC worker had to call the owners of the rental company to shame them into paying the bill.<sup>290</sup> Without the assistance of the social workers, this family had no way of finding housing. The rental agency was reluctant to take them in and balked at cleaning the suite. Their previous landlord had felt justified in throwing the family out. It seems that landlords had the power in the City of Winnipeg to make sick people homeless, and only the intervention of social workers could force them to clean their property.

In another case from the 1930s, Mrs. ZB was suffering from acute mental illness after the birth of her daughter. In this case, it was Rabbi Israel Kahanovitch, considered by many to be the Chief Rabbi of Western Canada, who contacted the Jewish Orphanage hoping to get the baby admitted so that Mrs. ZB could have time to recover. Finkelstein, the Jewish social worker, noted that the family's housing was a problem. Located in the interior of the Beveridge Block (802 Main Street), these rooms had no outside windows, and the lights had to be kept on at all times. Living in such a nightmarish situation probably contributed to Mrs. ZB's self-diagnosis of postpartum depression (in the file, the social worker recorded the mother as saying that she was "baby

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290 Record ZX1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

crazy”), and she had attempted suicide. Baby ZB was first sent to the Children’s Hospital for care, but the mother requested that she go to the Jewish Orphanage. Then Finkelstein set out to help find this family a better place to live. The parents found an unheated suite that consisted of two rooms on different floors. This situation was unlivable, and Finkelstein refused to help them secure this apartment. Finkelstein was then concerned about the next suite the ZBs found, as it had been condemned by the city Health Department, but they had many friends living in that apartment block, so she called the Health Department to allow them to live there in spite of its poor condition. The baby was then discharged back to her parents.<sup>291</sup> This case shows how non-existent zoning rules, allowing an apartment block to be built without requiring that all suites had windows, and flexible health rules, allowing a social worker to pressure the health department to de-condemn an apartment, created a stock of horrible living spaces in Winnipeg. Nowhere in this case was a landlord held accountable for renting spaces that were inhumane or for failing to maintain their property.

Living with extended family could save children and their parents from homelessness, but it also led to conflict as a growing number of people squeezed into small spaces. The OQ family had a particularly rough time. Having immigrated to Canada in the 1920s, this mother, grandmother and two children left the Soviet Union to join the grandmother’s other two children, who each owned one half of a house that had been divided into two units. The children and their mother and grandmother were living split up between the two halves of their families, but all the adults were struggling to find work. The OQ children were admitted to the Orphanage to give the mother a chance to find a job. Eventually one of the mother’s siblings moved out of the shared

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291 Record ZB, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

house due to conflicts with the grandmother over religious observance, and the mother moved with this branch. A lack of satisfactory housing in the city meant that this branch of the family had to return to the shared house, and they were all soon back under the same roof. To get a break from the overcrowded house, sometimes the mother would take work as a live-in maid, nurse or housekeeper, even though she was trained as a seamstress who preferred to work in the garment industry. The two OQ children spent six years in and out of the Orphanage due to housing shortages in their family. In fact the family otherwise doted on the OQ children, visiting them often and having them home on the weekends. In order to reunite the family, the mother finally agreed to go on relief and give up working so that she and her children could live together. The search for a home took Mrs. OQ, Finkelstein and Miss Petit of the SWC six months, but eventually the children were released from the Orphanage. At one point the grandmother cried to Pearl Finkelstein that the familial separation so distressing that she regretted urging the mother to move them to Canada.<sup>292</sup> This complaint was made in the midst of the Depression, when Soviet Ukraine may have seemed more stable to this grandmother than finding housing in Winnipeg. But the grandmother made the right decision to push for immigration, although she could not know it then. The family's home town's Jewish population was murdered by the Nazi Einsatzgruppe C and D after the Nazi invasion of western Soviet-occupied territories in 1941. Jewish immigrant families were accustomed to deprivation and oppression, but this did not lessen their experiences of suffering in poverty in Winnipeg.

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292 Record OQ1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



## **Working in Winnipeg and its hinterlands**

Even those parents who had a trade, like Mrs. OQ, found it very difficult to make enough income to provide for a family, and the need for employment often led to the children of a single parent or a child with a sick parent being admitted. If a mother was ill or needed to recover from pregnancy, a temporary stay for the children would be sought in order to help the mother recover and so that the father could continue working outside the home. Many of the families involved in the Orphanage had parents who were garment workers or other kinds of labourers. Those Jewish parents who tried to run their own businesses were poor and sometimes needed to use the Orphanage. Some of the parents who placed their children in the Orphanage were scraping together income through a variety of money making activities, like renting out rooms in the home, working in a factory and running a grocery store. Other parents were peddling around the city, or leaving the city to peddle to country homes or to deal in livestock. A surprising number were Jewish religious teachers who wandered around the city or the prairies, looking for work and often not finding it. At least five women in the Children's Records were accused of being prostitutes. Women had the most difficult time balancing work and childcare, and the SWC and the Jewish social worker would pressure them to quit working in order to collect relief. Day care for working parents seemed to have been close to non-existent, with only one day facility, the Stella Avenue Day Nursery, being available for North End parents. The structure of social welfare in Winnipeg was therefore focused more on women conducting childcare and did not adequately fund day institutional care, forcing some families to break up their homes and live apart from their children in the Orphanage. Although reinforcing this gender ideal of the woman who did not

work outside the home was important to the SWC, many mothers in the Orphanage Records preferred to work for pay than to take relief.

### ***Factory work***

Factory work was insecure as workers were laid off due to seasonal demand fluctuations. Jewish workers in the Children's Records were often involved in labour movements and could experience retaliatory lay-offs from angry employers after labour actions such as strikes. Parents who worked in factories usually worked in the garment industry. These workers, often in possession of training in garment manufacture and desiring to work, suffered from the lack of employment protections. In theory, the fact that many Winnipeg garment factory owners were Jewish could have provided Jewish workers with some protection due to ethnic solidarity, but that was not always the case. According to Ruth Frager's history of the Toronto Jewish garment industry, *Sweatshop Strife*, some factory owners had been union members themselves until they established a shop of their own and were therefore committed to worker solidarity. In other cases, close social and familial ties with employers could lead to workers' reluctance to object to exploitative working conditions.<sup>293</sup> Low wages, too low to live on, would steadily erode the gratitude held by workers for their bosses, and in Toronto, strikes could ensue between family members.<sup>294</sup> This was also true of the relationships between the Winnipeg garment manufacturers and their employees; some owners would lavish gifts for workers' children's education, but

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293 Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 60-61.

294 Frager, 67.

others would urge high-interest loans to their workers in order to ensnare them in debt.<sup>295</sup> The result was that many trained workers who were willing to work suffered from low pay and insecure employment and therefore were not able to afford proper housing, fuel or food. When Jewish families needed help meeting the basics of life or for emergency care, they turned to a number of organizations, including the Jewish Orphanage, to arrange for childcare. But the Orphanage was dependent on the garment manufacturers as donors, volunteers, and as potential employers for graduating alumni. One of the social workers who helped place these teens in garment jobs, Pearl Finkelstein, eventually married the owner of the Western Glove factory. The ties between the Orphanage and the elites of the garment industry were therefore strong, and did not encourage the Orphanage staff or volunteers to criticize this industry's employment practices. By caring for the children of underpaid and laid-off garment workers, the Jewish Orphanage may have alleviated worker pressure on employers.

I have never found a labour or leftist critique of the Orphanage's ties to the garment industry or a critique of the Orphanage's existence. According to Roz Usiskin's research into the establishment of Winnipeg's Jewish radicals, even the Jewish Marxists who formed the city's *Arbeiter Ring* social club believed in the growth of working class Jewish culture and fought against cultural assimilation. This group of Revolutionary Marxists even participated in the founding of the elite-run Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919 due to their belief in Jewish cultural autonomy. This acceptance of the need to sometimes work with the traditional Jewish leadership in order to

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295 Gerry Berkowski, "Economic History Theme Study: The Winnipeg Garment Industry 1900-1955," ed. by Henry Trachtenberg (Winnipeg: Manitoba Historic Resources Branch, 1989), 45-46, accessed November 24, 2019, [https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/hrb/internal\\_reports/pdfs/Winnipeg\\_Garment\\_Industry.pdf](https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/hrb/internal_reports/pdfs/Winnipeg_Garment_Industry.pdf)

prevent the loss of Jewish culture may have predisposed even radical members of the community to support the existence of the Orphanage, even though it had close ties to the garment industry.<sup>296</sup>

The suffering of a garment worker's family can be seen in the case of Mr. TQ, who had worked steadily with the Canadian Glove Works and with Jacob Crowley Manufacturing until he participated in a strike in 1928 and was laid off for the first time in retaliation. When Mr. TQ interacted with the Orphanage in 1931, the family was being supported by relief after he had not found work again for six months. The baby of the family was admitted while Mrs. TQ recovered from surgery, even though her husband was out of work and therefore able to care for her. Since their home was so cold, the adults all thought it would be better for little TQ in the Orphanage. The Jewish social worker could have worked with the SWC, the United Hebrew Relief, the Knesset Israel Sisterhood or the National Council of Jewish Women to fund the TQ's coal supply, so perhaps the problem was with the poor construction of their apartment. The parents asked that little TQ not be discharged until the spring, so that she wouldn't have to crawl on cold floors. Baby TQ was already showing signs of illness and weakness when she was admitted to the Orphanage, and died of meningitis despite the Orphanage rushing her to the hospital as soon as her fever climbed. The parents consoled themselves by saying that at least little TQ did not die under their care, so that they couldn't blame themselves.<sup>297</sup> Those who laboured could suffer at the hands of two privileged groups of decision makers: the factory owners could choose not to hire those who struck, and poor housing was a social reality engineered by the city council. The Jewish Orphanage may have extended little TQ's life as long as possible, but her earliest

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296 Roz Usiskin, "The Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community: Its Early Formation 1905-1918," in *Jewish Life and Times: a Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg: Jewish Historical Society, 1983), 161.

297 Record TQ, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

moments had been in a cold home with a family under stress, with much of her family's stress caused by the punitive actions of employers.

Striking and participating in labour action resulted in unemployment for other Orphanage families. One mother, Mrs. SD, had placed her younger son in the Orphanage. Her older son was also trained in garment work, and they should have been in good financial shape. But between seasonal lay-offs, strikes and lockouts, and their own illnesses, these two adults had a difficult time feeding themselves. When Mrs. SD did have work she would take as many shifts as she could to make money and therefore resisted having her younger child return home. Mrs. SD also refused to go on relief or to accept housekeeping help so that she could bring her child home, because as a skilled worker, she resented the concept of accepting charity. Her older son agreed to keeping his brother in the Orphanage, as he remembered his own childhood as one of a cold home and time spent on the street, waiting for his mother to come home from work.<sup>298</sup> It was difficult for this family to balance the dignity of work with the needs of their youngest child, and the constant instability of their employment meant that they always prioritized taking extra shifts over their own and their youngest child's happiness. In fact, SD was very unhappy in the Orphanage and the staff thought he would do better living with his family, but they needed the freedom to work unpredictable hours. In this case, legislation that could compel factories to have shorter shifts, a livable wage, and protections for union members, as well as municipally-funded day childcare, would have let young SD live at home with his mother and brother. The Orphanage was able to prevent SD from living within non-Jewish institutions, but it also allowed his family and their employers to put his needs last.

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<sup>298</sup> Record SD, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### ***Juggling multiple forms of income generating-activities***

Having more than one source of income was a strategy that helped families earn enough to provide the basics. Wages were low for many of these families, and although relief existed, it meant the intrusion of social workers into homes and neighbourhoods as well as a low amount of income for living. Before using the Orphanage, many families tried to earn money from a number of different sources. If a family had managed to buy a house before their economic or health crisis, they could rent out rooms to help pay off the mortgage and, depending on the services they could offer boarders, maybe bring in some extra funds. However, a house could not support a family completely. Some mothers ran a neighbourhood shop while the father worked outside the home, and if they owned the store building they could live in it, rent out rooms, and garner income from the store. These families found that the only way to survive was to work for money in many different ways.

In the case of the OK family, they had a home with a store attached and the father worked at the Fort Garry Dye Works. But once Mrs. OK died, the family could not run the store without her and the father had to sell it in order to clear the debts incurred by her illness. As this family had a teenage son who would not adjust easily to living in the Orphanage, the social worker Bertha Koyle first tried to find a temporary housekeeper for the family, but she was not able to do so. Extended family was unable to help take care of the children, as the siblings of Mr. OK were all struggling themselves, and the grandparents had recently taken up farming and were too busy. Mr. OK lost his job around this time and the children were admitted. Once he found another job,

the Children's Bureau decided to charge the father \$15 a month per child for their care. He took the children out of the Orphanage soon after receiving that letter.<sup>299</sup> What was it about this family that urged such haste, considering how many parents left their kids in the Orphanage for years? Perhaps it was the fact that the OK family had once been middle class and the father looked like he was on his way back to that status. But the middle class status that had been enjoyed by this family was due to having two streams of income, the store and the job. Now that Mrs. OK was dead, it was unlikely that this family would be able to run a store again. Their comfortable life had been built on a precarious foundation. Even middle class families in Winnipeg could find that their economic strategies were dependent on institutional childcare so that parents could work long hours. These institutions reinforced the existing economic system, a choice that the Jewish Orphanage made in order to ensure that Jewish children received the education that the community leadership had created.

### ***Peddlers and traveling salesmen***

Traveling through the country peddling to rural homes, selling to rural stores or buying and selling livestock was a traditional Jewish occupation, as was peddling within the city. Indeed, it was this reputation for Jewish small-scale merchandising that had convinced Prime Minister Macdonald to allow for the arrival of the 1880s refugees in Western Canada (see chapter 1). But peddling and country sales required extended periods away from home. This absence from home meant that having more than one adult in a family was crucial – there was no way to make a

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299 Record OK1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

living from this occupation as well as caring for children who lived in the city. Single parents who worked in the city could care for their children if they were provided with day childcare, but the only childcare available for single parents who traveled for work was a live-in housekeeper, which was very expensive. But it is important to note that in the Children's Records, the Jewish social worker and Social Welfare Council never suggested that a father who traveled for work should quit in order to accept relief and care for the children himself.

Examples of parents who traveled for work exist in the Children's Records. There are seven families with parents who worked by traveling and selling throughout the province or the prairie region, and at least three of these cases concerned mothers who needed to recover from health problems while the father traveled through the country or peddled in the city. In one case, a grandmother was on hand to help with the care of a newborn boy once it was clear that his mother, Mrs. NI, was suffering from some kind of mental distress. The mother's depression was so acute she needed to go to the Psychopathic Hospital for observation. At first Mr. NI hired private nurses to help care for his wife, and then tried sending her to a nursing home, but her distress only worsened. The grandmother became worn out caring for the baby and worrying about her own daughter, and could not care for little NI once his mother was hospitalized. The infant was sent to the Orphanage for two months while Mrs. NI was treated in the Psychopathic Hospital. Mr. NI had to continue working as a traveling salesman and could only pay \$10 a month for the baby's care because he had so many debts related to the mother's illness.<sup>300</sup> The idea of Mr. NI going on relief instead of traveling for work was never mentioned by the social workers. Without the Orphanage, this father could not have supported his family in any way,

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300 Record NI, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



including paying for his wife's nursing home costs. But even though the Orphanage existed and helped this family, a foster home, a live-in baby nurse or housekeeper or even day care could have provided the same care without having to institutionalize baby NI.

Another postpartum mother, Mrs. MW, was recovering in hospital from a cesarean section. The father was peddling all day in the city, and sometimes when the children came home, their door was still locked and they would have to go to the neighbours to get out of the cold. At first Mr. MW resisted admitting the children to the Orphanage, but eventually he relented, as he was struggling to make any money peddling and he was starving himself. The family took the children out as soon as Mrs. MW had left the hospital.<sup>301</sup> These cases illustrate how precarious working in traveling sales were for families in Winnipeg in the 1920s and 30s. On the one hand, it must have been somewhat lucrative work if these parents felt that they had to keep traveling for the income, but it seems that even Mr. MW who worked by peddling in the city found the hours too long. The isolation of having a partner who traveled long hours or even days out of the city may have worsened mothers' health, and often left families without many resources when she did get sick enough to need hospitalization. The intervention of the Jewish Orphanage staff helped to get families relief when it was sorely needed. The presence of Jewish social workers took the pressure off the non-Jewish social workers with regard to interacting with families whose culture they did not understand, and thus made the Orphanage integral to the social service sector.

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301 Record MW1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### ***Entertainers and Prostitutes***

Other notable parental occupations that I found in the children's records were entertainers and prostitutes, both reviled by society at large, although prostitutes usually fared worse judgment. These parents were not working in fields that were considered respectable or safe for their children, although in the Children's Records it does not seem that the Jewish social workers were particularly concerned with the morality of these parents' occupation. In fact, in this case the staff of the Orphanage subverted societal expectations by helping these parents. They did so in order to ensure that all Jewish children remained within the community, even those whose parents were less "respectable."

At least four parents in the Records were musicians or performers, and although they had skilled work, their livelihoods were very precarious. One father, Mr. UA, could care for two of his children, but not the toddler, who was ill with rickets. Mr. UA threatened to take his daughter with him to the theatre where he worked if she was not admitted, a threat that was taken seriously. The social worker considered the theatre dangerous to the child. After being asked what Mr. UA could contribute to the child's maintenance, the father showed the social worker his impressive debts. Mr. UA was not only a musician, but had also had a business failure.<sup>302</sup> A family could not rely on one business effort or one skill in order to survive. Although the Orphanage social worker knew that Mr. UA would not pay maintenance fees, she still admitted little UA to the Orphanage, fulfilling its role in diverting children from Christian institutions.

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302 Record UA, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Perhaps most unusually, the Orphanage took in RF, a child whose parents were traveling circus performers for the full two months of the summer. This child was the provincial and municipal bureaucrats' jurisdictional nightmare, as he was born in the United States and his parents were based in another Canadian city.<sup>303</sup> If the child welfare authorities wanted to limit the children who were admitted to those children who lived within provincial or city boundaries, they were stymied by the Jewish Orphanage's willingness to look beyond borders. There is probably no other kind of family that could confuse jurisdictional-focused bureaucrats more than a continent-ranging group of circus performers.

There are cases of mothers who were accused of prostitution to the Jewish social worker, but in each case the social workers found that the accusations did not mean that the children in question were being abused or neglected. Some factors would cause the social worker to take the accusations more seriously than other cases. For example, in one case the mother accused, Mrs. YU, was not Jewish, while the father was. The complaint was made years after the YU children had been admitted for two short periods while the mother was hospitalized. The social worker, probably Pearl Finkelstein, asked the principal of the children's school and the other social workers at the Children's Bureau what they thought of the mother. She also visited the home to inspect the children. It's important to note that the accusation was that the mother was acting "immorally with men and was neglecting the children." Both the Jewish social worker and the school principal found the children well cared for, and the complaint was judged to be malicious.<sup>304</sup> With this focus on the relationship between the mother and children instead of on

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303 Record RF, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

304 Record YU1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

this mother's sexual behaviour, Mrs. YU was able to avoid having her family separated by an agent of both the state and the Jewish community. But was this complaint motivated by prejudice against the non-Jewish mother from within the Jewish community?

In another case, Mrs. QS's mother complained to Mr. Wilder and later to the Manitoba Department of Health and Public Welfare's Office of Disease Prevention that her daughter was a prostitute and that her granddaughter should be admitted to the Orphanage because she was being neglected. Mrs. and Mr. QS (who later divorced) had both come in contact with the Jewish social worker earlier than the complaint, when their family doctor informed the Children's Bureau about their sexually transmitted infection. The Jewish social worker then contacted the family and told them how to access the clinic which treated these infections. The grandmother appeared to have had racist motivations: she stated that her separated daughter, Mrs. QS was, "a common prostitute among the Chinese and Negroes in the district."<sup>305</sup> Despite her pleas, two different Jewish social workers, one whose identity I couldn't verify, and the second Bess Lander, in consultation with the child's school principal and the SWC social worker, examined the home and found that Mr. and Mrs. QS were very attentive parents. Eventually, perhaps to escape her mother's obsession with her private life, Mrs. QS admitted her child to the Orphanage for a short time while she relocated to a city in Eastern Canada. Once she had a job, the Orphanage asked the Baron de Hirsch Society in Montreal to investigate her living situation, which they found to be unobjectionable.<sup>306</sup> In this case, despite the grandmother's attempt to stigmatize her daughter's behaviour, the social workers examined the actual conditions of the grandchild's life and found

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305 Record QS, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

306 Record QS, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

them to be nurturing. Mrs. QS was able to access the services of the Orphanage without any negative repercussions; in fact, they protected her from her mother's accusations, despite her report to the provincial health authorities.

These cases of prostitution illustrate that both Superintendents and Jewish social workers were not focused on mothers' sexual morality. It appears that the condition of the children was of a greater concern to them. Was this because they knew of the economic necessity that would push a woman into selling sex acts? Or was it an expression of Jewish tact, not asking questions to answers that you don't want to know? In any case, this tactfulness was dependent on the personalities of the Jewish social workers, who usually seemed unconcerned with mother's sexual behaviour. Official policies regarding the decisions made by Orphanage staff were not archived. The people who worked as entertainers and prostitutes may have benefited from having relationships with social workers who felt linked to them through the bonds of the Jewish community.

### ***Jewish Community Workers***

The most woebegone parents who suffered unemployment and family breakdown were the men who tried to make a living working as Hebrew tutors or as small town religious clergy. Prairie towns and even Winnipeg did not have a large enough Jewish population to support many teachers and clergy. Although small towns wanted a person who could fill the role of ritual meat slaughterer/circumciser/cantor/Hebrew teacher, these communities often couldn't afford to pay such an extensively trained person a living wage that could overcome the isolation of living far

away from a Jewish centre. Once a teacher began his tenure, he had to instruct bored and tired children in a foreign language after they had finished their public school day; good student behaviour was not to be expected. This caused significant mental and psychological distress in these families, which was unlikely to be understood by a non-Jewish social worker. In addition, these families were very concerned with having kosher food provided for their children and a Jewish education provided to them. The Jewish Orphanage was in a unique position to help these families, as having their children live in a Christian orphanage would have been traumatic for both parents and children.

For example, Mr. UV, a Hebrew teacher, admitted his children after the death of his wife. His only communications with the Orphanage were long, angry letters whenever maintenance fees were requested. His oldest daughter lived with family members, as she was too old to be admitted, and it was this sister who took in the UV siblings once they aged out of the Home. This was in spite of both Osovsky and Wilder trying to help Mr. UV to find work in Jewish communities by writing to different community leaders in small towns.<sup>307</sup> The superintendents of the Orphanage, even with their extensive contacts forged throughout the prairies by their summer fund-raising trips, couldn't help this man. His children's maintenance fees were covered by the funds that were raised by the Orphanage in the Jewish community, as Mr. UV's wanderings through the Western Canadian provinces excluded his children from financial support from the City of Winnipeg.

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<sup>307</sup> Record UV1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Although theoretically the Jewish community needed religious functionaries such as these Hebrew teachers, there was actually very little work for them on the prairies, and their lack of employment stability may have contributed to these families' crises. Mr. NS was another Hebrew teacher unable to find any work and Mrs. NS was the family breadwinner. When she became pregnant again, he pressured her to get an abortion, which she refused. He then accused her of having an affair and said that the child wasn't his, but all the other people involved in this case, including his family and the Jewish social worker, denied this lie. The couple would have divorced through the civil courts if the mother could have given evidence that her husband had committed adultery in court, but he hadn't and so she wouldn't. To accuse a woman of adultery would render the child a religious bastard, with some limits on his status in the Jewish community, a fact that this Hebrew teacher no doubt knew. The Jewish social workers, Bess Lander, and later a Miss Levin, tried to help Mrs. NS get a maintenance settlement through the Juvenile Court from the father, and Levin even met with the father's lawyer to negotiate the settlement. Young NS was admitted to the Orphanage for about nine months while his mother found a smaller place to live and got her life back in order. One of the social workers did discuss a marital reconciliation with the mother, but when she refused, the social worker didn't press the issue, and instead worked with Judge Hamilton to help her.<sup>308</sup> The Jewish social workers took sides in this case, working with state authorities to make the mother's lot in life a little easier.

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308 Record NS, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### ***Attitudes about Women and Work***

The families who came into the Orphanage were poor, and could not afford to dismiss women's earning potential. In addition, there was a historic acceptance of Ashkenazi Jewish women working within family businesses or as peddlers in Eastern European Jewish towns. The officials of the Jewish Orphanage often wanted women to go on relief in order to care for their children, but when they refused, the Orphanage was able to help care for their children. Women who worked outside the home often worked in the garment factories or as independent dressmakers. Some of the mothers in the files worked as cooks in restaurants, institutions or work camps. Sometimes the Orphanage would hire one of the mothers in order to give them access to their children and help them get reestablished, usually as a cook or a laundress. The Orphanage had been created in reaction to the existence of Christian orphanages, but a more effective social service response to children in need would have been to direct help to children's mothers, as it often worked in these cases.

One mother's case in particular exemplifies many similarities with other mothers. Mrs. TU was widowed and had been left a \$1,000 dollar insurance policy, which she used to buy a house. After its purchase, it became clear that she needed to work, as there was nothing left of the bequest and its existence had excluded her from being eligible for a Mother's Allowance. Her new home was rented out to tenants. She was hired by the Orphanage as a cook, and later left that job to work as a cook in a restaurant. When the Children's Bureau was formed in 1926, her case was singled out as being likely for a successful reunification. Bertha Koyle helped the mother apply and receive a Mother's Allowance, and negotiated with the woman's tenants to get them to leave their lease



early to make room for the family with three children. But it was not enough to reunite this family: Koyle noted in the file that she reminded Mrs. TU to keep a Jewish home – there was some concern about her connection to the Jewish community as the children’s father had been a non-Jew. Once established in their own home, Osovsky became concerned that the TU children would be removed from religious school and music lessons by their mother in order to get them after-school jobs and contribute to the expenses. He asked the Orphanage Ladies’ Auxiliary to contribute \$10 a month to this family in order to prevent the children from losing their Jewish and music educations.<sup>309</sup> This case shows the complex relationship between parents and the decision makers of the Jewish Orphanage – this mother needed help, and received it in the form of a job and help establishing a home for her children. The assistance of Bertha Koyle was helpful to the family, as she assisted them in getting their own home again. But in order to get this financial and social assistance, Mrs. TU had to accept a certain amount of religious judgment, admonishment and interference. Here the Orphanage extended its influence into the home of a family whose children had left its building.

For another family, there was pressure put not on the mother, but one of her sisters, who was single and working. The social worker was an E. J. Davis, who wrote about the aunt of a child who was eventually admitted to the Orphanage while his mother was hospitalized, “Another sister of Mrs. LZ, a Mrs. (Name Withheld), employed in a lawyer's office, did not wish to leave her job to care for the children, although childless herself. Mrs. (Name Withheld) has been a trouble maker, and for all her fine talking would not be a responsible person to care for the

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309 Record TU1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

children.” Actually, another sister of the ill mother was caring for the admitted child’s older sibling, and the extended family was doing its best. The employment situation of the father was not as extensively discussed as this aunt’s.<sup>310</sup> LZ’s aunt had a good job that she enjoyed, and since the child was eventually only admitted for about a week, it would seem unreasonable for her to quit to care for it. Such a request was never made to uncles. In this case, cultural ideas about gender were not questioned, and the social worker was willing to waste time and energy pursuing an unnecessary solution.

### **Illness, Disability and Orphanage Families**

As many of these cases have shown, the most common reason for children being admitted to the Jewish Orphanage was parental illness as opposed to parental death. Parents who became ill often needed hospitalization for an extended period of time, and it was the Jewish Orphanage which cared for their children. In the LZ case, LZ was admitted temporarily while his mother was in hospital, a common scenario in the Children’s Records. Children in LZ’s situation were not orphans, and the Jewish Orphanage had not been established for temporary care, but the community didn’t make enough parentless and abandoned children to fill the institution. But closing the Orphanage, despite the dropping numbers of children being admitted, caused a controversy in the Jewish community, precisely because its existence was so necessary to the identity of the Western Canadian Jews.

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310 Record LZ, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Out of the 780 children who were or who may have been admitted to the Jewish Orphanage, only 271, or 34% had lost both or one of their parents to death or to disappearance, and could thus be considered orphans. Parents died due to industrial accidents, cancer, tuberculosis, influenza, pogroms in Eastern Europe, fighting in World War I, in childbirth or due to a miscarriage, kidney disease, alcoholism, strokes, starvation in Eastern Europe, typhus in Eastern Europe, suicide, heart failure, pneumonia, meningitis, murder (in one case by the other parent), Soviet oppression in Eastern Europe, and rheumatoid arthritis. Most parents who became ill received treatment in hospital or in sanatoria, and time spent in these institutions was long. Some of the children also spent time in hospital with communicable diseases such as the measles, polio, scarlet fever (strep infection) and other illnesses. Parents and children were under the watchful eyes of doctors and social workers, who sometimes worked together to make decisions about the care of both adults and children, without the input of the patient or family themselves.

In the following section, I will describe some of the illnesses that parents suffered, and how poverty and parental ill health affected children. In the previous section, I described Orphanage families' lives in detail, often describing how families' health were influenced by poverty and poor housing. In this section, I will include fewer personal details so that I can give a broader view of Orphanage families' experiences of illness. Ten families in the records had to admit their children due to the loss of a parent in the 1918-19 influenza epidemic.<sup>311</sup> This epidemic was one of the events which spurred the newly-amalgamated Board of the Orphanage to build its own facility, as having a number of parents die quickly from the same cause over such a short period

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<sup>311</sup> Record YQ1, 2, and 3; Record WT1 and 2; Record RU1, 2, 3 and 4; Record RQ1 and 2; Record QX1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; Record PO1, 2 and 3; Record OC1, 2 and 3; Record KL1 and 2; Record KB1, 2 and 3; Record JT1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

of time caused a space shortage in the Orphanage. Over the course of the life of the Orphanage, other illnesses and misfortunes caused greater numbers of deaths but over a longer stretch of time. However, the influenza epidemic made the need for a custom-built Jewish Orphanage, with space for 100 children, seem like an institutional necessity for the Western Canadian Jewish community.

Tuberculosis affected the lives of 31 families, either because some of the nuclear or extended family was ill with it, or because the family was worried that one of its members was ill with the disease. In 7 of these cases one of the parents died of TB.<sup>312</sup> Some parents were forced to go to the Sanitarium for an extended period of time, and when their symptoms improved their children were released back to them.<sup>313</sup> In a few cases, the family and the Jewish social workers were concerned about the presence of extended family, such as grandparents, uncles or aunts, or cousins who had TB within the family home or were even sleeping with the children.<sup>314</sup> One child who was being sent to the Orphanage to board came from a northern town close to a First Nations reserve. Both the parents and the admitting Orphanage physician were concerned that the child had contracted TB, even though two sets of x-rays showed its lungs were clear.<sup>315</sup> Here the continuing association of First Nations people with diseases, especially TB, can be shown in Canadian culture. The Jewish community apparently did not question these stereotypes of First Nations people. Preventing children from contracting TB by institutionalizing them was a method

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312 Record XV; VC1 and 2; NM; MS; ML; MJ1, 2, and 3; MF, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

313 Record VK1, 2, 3 and 4; UM1 and 2; SO; QL1, 2 and 3; LK1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

314 Record ZM1 and 2; XE; QC1 and 2; LK1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

315 Record UD, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

of social control that allowed the problems of poor housing and poverty in Manitoba to go ignored, for both Winnipeggers and those who lived in reserves.

Mental illness was even more devastating to these families. Parents suffering from some kind of mental illness occurred in 43 of the Orphanage cases, and mental illness makes up the largest category of illness that afflicted these families. Treatment was usually just rest, either in hospital, a psychiatric facility, nursing home or at home. Although rest wasn't much of a cure for mental illness, it did help those mothers and fathers whose mental distress was caused by exhaustion. Some of the Records refer to other treatments for mental illness, included injections of unnamed drugs, but the names of the drugs that were used are not in the records. The difficulty that doctors had in treating mental illness effectively can be clearly seen in the case of Mrs. JO, whose behaviour had become aggressive and erratic. In this family, the couple's child was admitted to the Orphanage on an emergency basis in order to get him out of the home. Mrs. JO was so ill that the neighbours had begun to care for her during the day while the husband was at work. Even though she was so aggressive that she struck a neighbour's child, Mrs. JO could not be admitted to the Psychopathic Hospital as there was a waiting list. The Jewish social worker arranged, with the help of the staff at the Mount Carmel Clinic, for a nurse to care for Mrs. JO during the day at home. In this case the husband believed that the mother's mental distress was due to her intense loneliness for her parents in Poland. They had hoped she could visit them but they just could not scrape together the funds. Mrs. JO was eventually transferred from Winnipeg to the Selkirk Mental Hospital, and in six months the child was able to return home.<sup>316</sup> This family was able to access significant help from the Jewish social worker and the Mount Carmel Clinic, but the lack

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316 Record JO, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

of government support for the Pyschopathic Hospital is shown by the waiting list that existed for very ill Winnipeggers.

There are many similarities between the case of Mrs. JO, who experienced mental illness, and other suffering parents. Her illness was acute and in crisis, but her neighbours tried their best to help the family. Their poverty meant that they couldn't travel to visit the mother's parents and alleviate her distress, and poverty often limited the cures that parents could afford. For example, Winnipeggers who had serious asthma were sometimes told to relocate to Denver, where the air is very dry, but that was an expensive proposition. Although home care was made available to Mrs. JO, it was only intended as a stop-gap measure, as it was hospitalization that was thought to cure her illness. The family needed the help of a number of intermediaries, including the Orphanage superintendent, the Jewish social worker, an individual doctor, the staff at the Mount Carmel Clinic and the staff at two hospitals. The involvement of these individuals and organizations, including neighbours and kin support, the exacerbation illness due to the family's poverty and the need for structural help, were common to the experiences of disease for the parents of the Orphanage children.

And what was common to the experiences of the children? In this case, JO probably felt intense fear as his mother's behaviour changed and she became aggressive. Then he was admitted to the Orphanage and stayed there until the school year ended, as the child's father didn't want to uproot him in the middle of the term - a small comfort to a child missing his own bed, kitchen, and neighbours, but a choice that probably felt sensible to the adults. In this case, JO's father visited

often, but a visit is far from being home with one's parents. JO was physically cared for by the Orphanage but his emotional needs were not necessarily met.

### **Life in the Orphanage and the Country– Maurice Gillman's Story, with help from Reuben Slonim**

First-hand accounts of life in the Orphanage and afterward illuminate the children's experiences. The children who lived in the Orphanage were often a secondary consideration to the Jewish social workers, parents, doctors and the workers at the SWC and the CB. If children came to the Jewish Orphanage from a small town or a Jewish farming colony in Western Canada, they did so on behest of their parents or at the instigation of the leaders of the local B'nai Brith society. There are few descriptions of the lives of Jewish families who lived in small towns or in farm colonies that come from the Children's Records, as the locals who got in touch with the Orphanage were not charged with performing detailed observations of their neighbour's lives. There are first-hand accounts of Jewish life on the prairies, but they do not involve the Orphanage. The best account of both farming and Orphanage life was written by Maurice Gillman, an Orphanage alum who left his unpublished memoir to his family; his daughter-in-law, Heather Gillman, shared it with me. Gillman was the son of a Jewish farm colony homesteader father, who came to Saskatchewan after wandering from Odessa to London to Montreal and settled eventually south of Weyburn. His mother had immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe. She then decided to join another brother in a farm colony in Saskatchewan, where she married Gillman's father.<sup>317</sup>

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317 Maurice Herbert Gillman, "Along Life's Way: Some Reminiscences by Maurice Herbert Gillman, Volume I, Winnipeg, 1998," 2-5.

When Gillman was 8, his mother became mentally ill (later it was discovered that her symptoms were actually due to advanced tuberculosis), and he and three of his siblings were sent by rail to Winnipeg with an RCMP officer to live in the Jewish Orphanage in Winnipeg. His youngest sister was adopted by relatives. Gillman's mother died of TB in the hospital in North Battleford at age 32 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Without his wife and children, Gillman's father lost his passion for homesteading and worked as a farm labourer. Later Gillman's father rented and then bought land from the Jewish Colonization Association (founded by Baron de Hirsch) around Frobisher. When the farm was sold by Gillman's father, its price only covered the cost of the back taxes.<sup>318</sup>

Gillman's memories of the Orphanage mark the beginning of his personal life story. He remembered the 1919 flu epidemic and being quarantined in the Orphanage. He states that he remembers moving into the new Orphanage in 1923, but actually the move occurred in 1920. Gillman also remembers walking to public school in the winter wearing snow shoes and being well-clothed in the winter. He viewed public school positively, but he recalls that the Orphanage children were not accepted by the non-Orphanage children, and that they sometimes spoke with each other in Hebrew for privacy. Gillman recalled that the religious school for the Orphanage operated from 5:30 pm until 7 pm, every day except for Friday night and Saturday, and they were taught in Hebrew. This conflicts somewhat with an official schedule, but he is correct about religious school being taught every weekday. The children were taught band and choir, and Gillman himself enjoyed playing the coronet and the trumpet. Although the Orphanage housed many children when he lived there, Gillman and his siblings remained close and spent time

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318 Gillman, 6-8.



together. He recalled that the library was used for homework, and the basement playroom was used for lacing up one's skates. The ice rink on the grounds was especially popular. Gillman and his siblings had very few visitors and envied those children who did. Gillman enjoyed the food at the Orphanage and noted that he never had to worry about his clothes.<sup>319</sup>

Gillman learned how to lead the Sabbath prayers in the Orphanage synagogue, and when he was fourteen, was sent by Osovsky to lead prayers for a small group of worshipers in Selkirk, Manitoba. Gillman had special tutoring from one of the Hebrew teachers in the long services for Rosh Hashana, and was billeted with a relative of Osovsky. He traveled to Selkirk via a streetcar, and when he had finished the services, the congregation presented him with a new winter coat.<sup>320</sup>

Although this description of the Orphanage shows a place that was mostly cheerful and well-equipped, Gillman also recounts an incident of physical abuse from the Superintendent, which I will discuss in more depth in a later chapter. This abuse was traumatizing to Gillman, who was a well-behaved and studious child. It made him mistrust the institution which housed him and which was his family. After having led the services in Selkirk, Gillman was called into Osovsky's office and offered a scholarship to rabbinical school. According to Gillman, he was expelled from the Orphanage for having refused the opportunity.<sup>321</sup> However, Gillman was actually sent back to his father a year after the offer to attend rabbinical school had been made.<sup>322</sup> Sixteen was considered by the province to be the age in which children were old enough to be on their own, and Gillman's confident character and his father's relative stability meant that the Orphanage and

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319 Gillman, 9-11.

320 Gillman, 12.

321 Gillman, 12.

322 Gillman, 14.

Osovsky probably thought he could be sent home. But Gillman's perception of the Orphanage as a place where he experienced abuse shows how the institution could be alienating, despite its plentiful food, ice rink and the close bonds between the children.

Gillman's day when he was living in the Orphanage would have been highly regimented. The Orphanage annual report from 1923-1924 shows how the Orphanage operated, with photos of the senior band, the Girl Guide troop, the Wolf Cub pack, and the kindergarten run by the women of the Ladies' Auxiliary. There is also a schedule listed in this report, which shows a packed day for children like Maurice Gillman, who had to fit public school, religious school, play, homework and sleep into a short 24 hours.

7.00 am.	the first bell rings, all get up and wash, make beds, dress, sweep the floors, wash basins.
7.30	Prayers for older boys. Play for younger ones.
8.00	Breakfast.
8.30	School inspection and off to school.
12.20	Wash up for dinner.
12.30	Dinner
1.00 pm.	To school.
4.15	Lunch.
4.30	Hebrew school classes: 2, 3 and 4. Play for the younger ones.
6.30	Supper.
7.00	Band or choir.
9.00	School Home Work for the older children. Bed-time for the younger ones. <sup>323</sup>

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323 "Jewish Orphanage and Children's Aid of Western Canada Report for the Year 1923-1924," Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, JHC 10, File 1, 37-38.

Another account of life in the Orphanage is Rabbi Reuben Slonim's published memoir, *Grand to be an Orphan*. In his book, Slonim focuses more on the personalities and the philosophies of the leading teachers and staff that he met in the Home, specifically Osovsky, Mr. Frankel, the Hebrew teacher for the older children, Cantor Ostrow the choir leader, and Mr. Cocking the band teacher. Slonim's book is filtered through his experiences later of being a rabbi – he recounts discussions he had with teachers in full paragraphs and in situations that probably didn't happen, such as in front of a class of restless children. His book was released before Gillman wrote his memoir, and Gillman quotes from the passage that described his group of siblings as smart, neat and rather quiet.<sup>324</sup> Like Gillman, Slonim also noted that the food at the Orphanage was good, and that they didn't go without clothing. He remembers going to the movies on Friday nights, a treat which is a violation of Sabbath laws, but which the children enjoyed.<sup>325</sup> He also discussed that the orphans were excluded at public schools and socialized together. And Slonim made special mention of Osovsky's physical abuse of children.<sup>326</sup> Slonim observed the emotional undercurrents in the Orphanage, noting that the children lived in an atmosphere of intense bullying, that Osovsky cheated on his wife with female members of staff, and that Cantor Ostrow made sexual comments about some of the older girls.<sup>327</sup> The Orphanage was in many ways an enriching environment, providing a good education, but it was also physically, socially and sexually dangerous for some of the children.

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324 Slonim, 44.

325 Slonim, 48.

326 Slonim, 58.

327 Slonim, 47, 55-57, 86-87.

The familial rifts that happened between parents and children were also noted by Slonim. Slonim describes his relationship with his mother, whom he loved very much but who had felt compelled to admit him and his sisters to the Orphanage:

When I visited my mother on Saturday afternoons, away from the Home, I felt like a guest. Our relationship had no chance to wear. I always had the feeling of putting on a suit of clothes for the first time or breaking in a new pair of shoes. There was no comfort in the visit and therefore no solace, although our attachment was strong and our affection demonstrative. Perhaps too demonstrative, to make up for the hours and days we did not share.<sup>328</sup>

This emotional distance that happened between parents and children after a stay in the Orphanage was also noted by Gillman. When Gillman went home to his father, life was far more strenuous and impoverished than the Orphanage officials may have considered, both physically and emotionally. His father was living on the homestead near Frobisher, and the train ride there took eight hours. When Gillman arrived at the station, he had to ask the town drayman on the platform if his father was there, as he had no memory of his face. By this time, Gillman's Yiddish, his father's primary language, was no longer fluent, so they had difficulty communicating and didn't know each other well.<sup>329</sup> Gillman wrote,

We had almost forgotten about him. He was not a man for writing letters, etc.; although he sent money to the Home as often as he could afford to do so...I figured out when I got there that with the amount of animals and chores he had, it was next to impossible for father to have come to see us. Although I must say eight years is a long time.<sup>330</sup>

In the country, Gillman and his father lived in a two room shack, with no electricity or plumbing. It was hot in summer and cold in winter, made of saplings chinked with mud, with no insulation. During the winter, Gillman and his father heaped manure or snow around the walls as a primitive form of insulation, and slept underneath buffalo robes with their hats on. The house was heated

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328 Slonim, 26.

329 Gillman, 14.

330 Gillman, 14.

by a Quebec stove, a cylindrical tube of iron that had space for one pot on top for cooking, common to many families but limiting in the amount of food that could be prepared. On winter mornings the water in their pails in the house would be frozen. The stove was fed with coal that they had to travel with two wagons and teams of horses nine hours to the Bienfait Mine to pick up. In order to save money, they would fill the first wagon by cleaning the scales of dropped coal, which was free. On the trip home, Gillman and his father walked to save the horses.<sup>331</sup> They were lucky, as they had a clean source of water in a deep well, which they not only used for drinking water but also for refrigeration.<sup>332</sup> When his father needed medical care, he had to leave the farm for two weeks, leaving Gillman without any way of knowing how long he would be gone or what was happening.<sup>333</sup> Gillman returned to Winnipeg in 1928 in order to study, and eventually became the owner of an auto-parts business. His father followed him to Winnipeg in 1935. Gillman bought his father and new stepmother a new house once he could afford to do so.

Although Gillman was sent to live with his father without provisions made for any further education and training, this was not the case for many other alumni. Those without families who could or would take them home were placed by the Orphanage in further education, factory or apprentice work or as tutors/clerks for rural Jewish families. Eighteen children are noted as staying in the Orphanage in order to attend St. John's High School, although it does not appear that all graduated.<sup>334</sup> The records indicate that at least ten teens were sent to the Success Business College, a local private college, to be taught clerical skills such as shorthand, accounting and

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331 Gillman, 15.

332 Gillman, 17.

333 Gillman, 16.

334 Records for YL, YF1, SA2, RH2, RE1, QT4, OL, NY1, NO2, NG1, MK, LB1, KW1, KO1, KO2, KJ, KH, LE3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

typing, and were often allowed to live in the Orphanage during this period of transition.<sup>335</sup> Seven alumni are noted in the records as having attended university, although most did so after they had left the Orphanage, but two boys, VM1 and 2, were allowed to live in the Orphanage while they went to the University of Manitoba.<sup>336</sup> Five boys were sent to the Jewish Theological Seminary in Chicago for rabbinical studies, although only two graduated from the program.<sup>337</sup> Other teens were sent to small town Jewish families to work in the families' stores as clerks and to tutor the families' children in Jewish subjects, or, were found a factory job or an apprenticeship in Winnipeg. Gillman, in being sent back to a relative, was an exception, and it is noteworthy that he was not given a chance to acquire further education or job training. He was, however, educated religiously and lived his life within the Jewish community, which would have been seen by the Orphanage staff and volunteers as having been a fulfillment of the institution's mandate.

## **Conclusion**

Gillman's life with his father after the Orphanage was one of deprivation and hardship. Life for both rural and urban western Canadians was marked by poor housing, poor health and uncertain employment. These limitations on people's lives existed due to the decisions of a coterie of businessmen who governed, especially in Winnipeg. The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage relieved some of the pressure on these families by taking in their children during a crisis and by their Jewish social worker helping them to access other services. But this only shifted the problems to

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335 Records for ZY2, VF4, SA2, RH2, QB1, NA4, LE2, LI1, LB2, JG1, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

336 Records VM1 and 2, VF2, QT3, MK, LE3, KV, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

337 Records ZW3, VF2, TW2, TW3, LQ1, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

the social service sector, allowing governments to forestall structural changes that could be changed through legislation that limited worker exploitation, landlords' inaction in taking care of their properties, and other anti-poverty interventions.

This situation was perhaps most easily shown in the ZB case, with the family who was living in interior rooms with no windows. The Jewish social worker did not record having called the city building or health inspector to condemn this apartment. She did not record reporting the second apartment that they found, with two rooms on different floors and with no heat. Nor is there any indication that reporting these homes would have had any real implications for landlords, as the final suite that the ZB family rented had its health ban removed at the request of the social worker. How did this couple even get to see an apartment that should have been under repair?

Perhaps the landlord didn't take the ban from the health department seriously, knowing that in the Winnipeg housing market, someone would be willing to rent it. This episode shows how weak the city's interest was in forcing landlords to meet hygienic and structural standards. It also reveals how the Jewish Orphanage did not disrupt the City's ineffective housing monitoring system.

By contrast, the texture of life in the Orphanage was shown by Gillman and Slonim to have been educational, social, materially comfortable and sometimes fun. But the presence of bullying and abuse in the Orphanage was destabilizing and emotionally unsettling, as was the lack of a connection that some children had with their families. The Orphanage may have saved its children from going to a Christian orphanage and losing their Jewish heritage, but the children did not appear to have left the institution prepared for the real life experienced by western Canadian Jews. The Jewish Orphanage may have been successful in its goals of gathering Jewish

children away from Christian institutions and presenting the Jewish community as modern and integrated, but its participation with the governance of the City and the province meant that when children aged out of the institution, they often returned to the abject poverty that most Western Canadians were forced to live with.



## **Chapter 5 – Inside the Four Walls: Power and its Limits**

The Orphanage may have been founded as an instrument of Jewish education for children in need, but it ended up giving power and status to those who may have otherwise not found it.

Within the Orphanage, individuals acquired power that gave them an influence over the lives of the children and families. But this power was not unlimited. Above the staff in the Orphanage hierarchy were the Board of Directors who could seem peripheral to the running of the institution but who actually held power. Another check on the power dynamic were those parents, who, through their own emotional distance from their children, didn't really care what the Orphanage wanted. Sexual abuse was another upending force, creating the Orphanage's greatest failure. The Jewish Orphanage was apparently willing to tolerate an amount of abuse perpetrated by staff or children.

Two staff members, Aaron Osovsky and Pearl Finkelstein in particular, illustrate how the Orphanage was used to gain power in the Jewish community. Osovsky's use of violence against children and a mother indicate the scope and limitations of his powerful position. Pearl Finkelstein, the Orphanage's long-running social worker, used her connection with the Orphanage to create her own career. Parents also exercised power by resisting attempts of the Orphanage to alter their behaviour and simply refusing to cooperate. And it was sex, an otherwise completely unacknowledged force within the four walls of the Orphanage, which could wreck havoc on the power structure of the institution. The inability of the modern state to help superintendent H. E. Wilder protect a child from sexual abuse meant that his power was limited

by an official disinterest. At the heart of this chapter is an examination who was really in charge of the Orphanage: the staff, the Board, the parents, or the State?

## **The Individuals who gained power**

### ***Aaron Osovsky***

In the case of Aaron Osovsky, his power was extensive and for many years, unmitigated. Osovsky's personality is well known in the Jewish community, even many decades after his death. He was an energetic and passionate Jewish leader, in possession of many skills and talents. Osovsky emigrated from Russia in 1904 and began in Winnipeg as a labourer with the Canadian Pacific Railway, and in 1906 founded a chapter of the Poale Zion, a Labour Zionist group. With that group Osovsky created a Jewish library and a Yiddish theatre group.<sup>338</sup> No information was left behind about the search for the replacement for Louis Greenberg, so the process of how a railway employee came to be a leading child welfare worker in Winnipeg are unclear. However, in one of the Children's Records I came across Osovsky's signatures on the Admission and Discharge forms for a child admitted in 1918, with his home address, 471 College Avenue, listed on the address line for the Superintendent.<sup>339</sup> Clearly, by this point Osovsky was heavily involved with the Orphanage either as a volunteer, or as a staff member, such as the secretary. It is with this association through a more junior position in the Orphanage that this man, who had no social work training, was able to replace a more senior and trained superintendent.

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338 Roz Usiskin, "The Winnipeg Jewish Community: Its Radical Elements, 1905-1918," *MHS Transaction* 3: 33, 1976-77, accessed July 16, 2019, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/jewishradicals.shtml#064>.

339 Record SP, *Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings*, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Osovsky must have seemed like an inspired choice for superintendent, as his dedication to the Jewish community was evident in his volunteer work. He was a local man, well known to many people, a believer in Zionism, friendly to socialism but not too socialist, having some credentials as a working man without a strong union background – Osovsky could appeal to *macher* (Jewish lay leader, often a big donor as well as a volunteer) and regular Jews alike. He was also married, and his wife was considered one of the assets that he brought to the job. He was an energetic and passionate person, and he must have made a good impression on the Board with his earlier work with the Orphanage. His outgoing personality would have been considered an asset when it came to fundraising for the Orphanage throughout the prairies every summer. By 1921 when he was hired, Osovsky was 45 years old, so a good patina of age must have gilded his face. He appeared Jewishly involved enough to educate Jewish children and charismatic enough to work well with non-Jewish bureaucrats.

It's difficult to separate out Osovsky's persona from the character described by Reuben Slonim in his memoir. Slonim's book can be challenging: it contains conversations presented as long, full-paragraph sermons, constructed by a rabbi after thirty years in the business, unconscious that everything he writes tends to the didactic. But when he writes about his own experiences the book rings true. In his book, Slonim was grateful to Osovsky for his elementary education and for pushing him toward taking the Bronfman Scholarship that funded at least the first part of his rabbinic education. He also notes the tremendous pressure that Osovsky had to live with, overseeing a complex organization, fund-raising for it, working with the courts, parents, extended families, the social worker and his bosses, the Board of Directors. But Slonim also sketches out

Osovsky's flaws with very strong language, describing his controlling tendencies, his hair-trigger temper, and his narcissism. Slonim's description, along with the fictionalized account of the Orphanage superintendent in the Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*, could be viewed as unfounded gossip. But I have found supporting evidence that show Osovsky's behaviour as abusive.

The first account is from Maurice Gillman's memoir that was discussed in a previous chapter. On page 11 of his memoir, Gillman's recollections turn detailed. He recalls one night when the lights were off in the synagogue where the choir had gathered to practice. The choirmaster asked him to run downstairs to the office where the light switches were located. However, once Gilman arrived, he realized from the shouts coming from the office that Mr. Osovsky was punishing another child. Since the choir was waiting, Gilman decided to knock on the office door and interrupt Mr. Osovsky in order to make his request.

To my surprise the door opened and a fist hit me (Mr. Osofsky's) and knocked me across the hall into the concrete wall. I don't remember, but someone picked me up and took me to the Hospital room just at the end of the hall. A Mrs. Koyle, a nurse who was on staff...sewed me up. I had a large cut under my chin. I don't remember who or when the lights were opened. But what I do remember from then on until today – I never stand in front of a door when I have to knock.”<sup>340</sup>

For the following sentence the font of the text (typed by Gillman's daughter-in-law Louise) changes. The sentence reads, in all capital letters, and underlined, “NEVER AGAIN WOULD I STAND IN FRONT OF A DOOR WHILE KNOCKING. ALWAYS TO ONE SIDE.”<sup>341</sup> This is the only font change in the body of the memoir, and it indicates that for Gillman, this was a deeply important and traumatic event in his life.

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340 Gillman, 11.

341 Gillman, 11.

It is easy to dismiss negative events of the past by explaining that previous generations had different ideas about abuse and violence than contemporary values. This may be true, but Osovsky's actions would have been considered an inappropriate use of violence by the standards of Canadian educational thinkers during his own time. However, there is no jurisdiction in Canada in which Osovsky would have been censured for his actions. There was an acknowledgment within Canadian educational culture that physical abuse could be harmful and was not an ideal method of instruction. The use of violence was agreed to be sometimes necessary in order to assert the hierarchy of society – children's behaviour must be corrected. However, adults have long acknowledged that this violence can escalate and cause harm to children.

As Anne McGillivray describes in her 1997 article on child abuse in Canadian law, this legal situation was reinforced by two concepts: the first was the Roman concept that the parent has the right to beat his child for correction;<sup>342</sup> the second concept is that of *in loco parentis*, that teachers and other authority figures related to the care and education of children take on the responsibilities and rights of parenthood. The concept of *in loco parentis* is the cusp of the matter: parents in Canada still retain the right to strike their child. Until the 2004 Supreme Court ruling, section 63 of the Canadian Criminal code stated that it was “lawful for every parent or person in the place of a parent, schoolmaster or master, to use force by way of correction toward any child, pupil or apprentice under his care...”<sup>343</sup> Although the legislation and jurists put qualifiers on this

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342 Anne McGillivray, “‘He’ll learn it on his body’: Disciplining Childhood in Canadian Law,” *International Journal of Children's Rights* 5, (1997): 200-201.

343 F. Henry Johnson, *Changing Conceptions of Discipline and Pupil-Teacher Relations in Canadian Schools* (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1952), 52.

right to hit children, stating that it should be done without anger, without permanent damage, and after the adult has conducted some kind of quasi-judicial decision-making process, in 1952 F. Henry Johnson noted that courts had become more accepting of corporal punishment by teachers over the course of a century.<sup>344</sup> This leniency may have been caused by Canadian courts refusal to include the testimony of children, who were seen as being more likely to lie in order to seek revenge against the teacher.<sup>345</sup> Nor was the causation of pain to the child considered by Canadian courts to be a sign that the teacher had taken punishment “too far,” as the 1951 Quebec case of *Campeau vs. R.* found that the point of corporal punishment is the causation of pain, and that the resulting bruises or contusions are of no importance in judging whether or not the blow was abuse.<sup>346</sup>

But there has been resistance to teachers having the right to abuse their students since the beginnings of public education in Canada. Bruce Curtis, the pre-eminent scholar of the establishment of public schools in nineteenth century Ontario, has noted not only court proceedings against abusive teachers, but also student and parent retributive beatings of teachers and the trashing of schools.<sup>347</sup> These are illustrations of parental and student resistance to abuse by teachers, but the culture of pedagogy has also been questioning both the efficacy and violence at the heart of school discipline since the early nineteenth century with the publications of works against corporal punishment by Scottish educators. In the 1840s, American educator Horace

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344 *Ibid.*, 53.

345 Charles Wrock, *A History of Legal Actions Arising out of Controversies with Respect to Corporal Punishment in the Public Schools* (MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1975), 105-106.

346 McGillivray, 212.

347 Bruce Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West 1836-1871* (London: The Althouse Press, 1988), 336-338.

Mann published his favourable impressions of Prussian schools where good teaching had eliminated corporal punishment.<sup>348</sup>

When it came to Canadian school policy however, the most influential Canadian pedagogist Egerton Ryerson, admitted in 1868 that school regulations regarding appropriate use of corporal punishment were purposefully kept vague, in order to give teachers the ability to use their judgment while being made aware that there were to be some limits to their power.<sup>349</sup> A 1917 issue of the Canadian *Western School Journal* provided teachers with a helpful list of principles to consider when punishing: “9a. Punishments should be such as is best adapted to the offense. 9b. Never punish in anger 9c. Except in extreme cases, never administer corporal punishment without the consent of parents etc.”<sup>350</sup> Later on in the twentieth century, a Toronto student outlined how the strap (a long piece of leather used for hitting children) was used against students in a ritualistic manner: the child was led into the classroom while other students watched silently as the punishment was administered with the strap.<sup>351</sup>

When Osovsky punched Maurice Gilman, he failed to follow the steps outlined in *Western School Journal* article: he did not administer the punishment after having issued a reprimand, nor did he seem to weigh the judicial implications of the blow, or the appropriateness of his action in relation to the crime of knocking on the door. And yet, as described by Gilman, nothing happened to Osovsky in consequence, even though at least one adult, the nurse Koyle, (who later became

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348 Curtis, 311-316.

349 Curtis, 341-343.

350 “School Government,” *Western School Journal* 12, 1, (January, 1917): 12.

351 Paul Axelrod, “No Longer a ‘Last Resort’: the End of Corporal Punishment in the Schools of Toronto,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 91, 2 (June 2010): 270.

the first Jewish social worker) tended his face and therefore witnessed the assault. The superintendent felt free to act out of anger knowing that as paterfamilias he held immense power over every-day life in the Orphanage. Osovsky in reality had possibly unfettered power over the bodies of the children in his care.

In the Children's Records I have found another description of abuse that was similar to Gillman's. It was an explosion of anger toward an unsuspecting victim, in this case, a mother who was visiting her child. Mrs. YI was an immigrant who had been separated from her husband. She had two little children, and was referred to the Orphanage by the Stella Day Nursery. Her extended family was helping the mother, but her problems were daunting: her husband was not in the country; her children were very young, one still an infant; she had a skin condition from working with fur in the garment factory; and the children were suffering from a ringworm infection. Worst of all, Osovsky seemed to dislike her, and told the social worker he thought the mother was avoiding her responsibilities – after all, she was wearing a good fur coat! Of course, it's possible that Mrs. YI had made her own coat, or had purchased the coat cheaply from the furrier where she worked. Unlike Osovsky, the Jewish social worker and the Children's Bureau were convinced of the woman's dire poverty. The animosity between Osovsky and this woman culminated with a shocking episode. From her children's file, written by a social worker whose initials were JL on April 24, 1930:

Mr. [Mrs. YI's Brother-in-Law] called the Bureau Office asking if the Supervisor would call at his home, as Mrs. YI was there confined to bed. There was a matter she would like me to discuss with the Supervisor of the Bureau. On April 29<sup>th</sup> I called at the home of Mr. Brother in Law, and had a talk with Mrs. YI and learned that she had some trouble at the Jewish Orphanage on visiting her children on the afternoon of [date]. It would appear that Mrs. YI had brought her children some candies which Miss Osovsky [Mr. Osovsky's daughter] thought were not Kosher.



Mrs. YI, however, claimed that these had been blessed by the Rabbi, and Mr. Osovsky never gave her a chance to explain but took hold of her and threw her against the wall so that she fell and dislocated her shoulder which so upset her that she has been confined to her bed for a week and her arm was in a sling. Mrs. YI claims that she did not say anything to Mr. Osovsky to cause trouble. She claims she can never go back to the Jewish Orphanage to see the children. It was pointed out to Mrs. YI that she should make an effort to re-establish her home as soon as her arm was better. Mrs. [Mrs. YI's Sister] stated that her sister is a very nervous and delicate woman and easily upset. She was so ill when she left the Jewish Orphanage that she had to call a policeman who in turn called a doctor who in turn saw that she got back to the [Brother in law and sister]'s. At first they feared that her shoulder was broken and they had to have X-rays taken. Dr. Hollenberg was in attendance.<sup>352</sup>

After this incident, the mother asked for help from the Children's Bureau and the United Hebrew Relief Board to get an apartment and furniture so that she could take her children home. It took her three more months to get everything in place.

This incident is similar to Gillman's: the mother had a small conflict with Osovsky's daughter, but Osovsky exploded at the woman in violence and anger, throwing her against a wall. Even though the woman experienced visible physical injuries and other adults witnessed the event or its effects, nothing happened to Osovsky to correct his behaviour. Neither the social worker, the policeman who found Mrs. YI or Dr. Hollenberg reported Osovsky to any authorities or challenged him and he faced no consequences. While Mrs. YI's brother-in-law asked the social worker to report the incident to the Supervisor of the Children's Bureau, there was no further documentation that concerned this incident in the file. This incident suggests that Osovsky gained enough power through being Superintendent to be able to assault women and children with impunity. By working so well with the authorities of the Juvenile Court and the Children's

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352 Record YI1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Bureau, Osovsky was viewed as a vital part of the Winnipeg social service sector, and his position was unquestioned.

Four years after he assaulted Mrs. YI, Osovsky was fired from his position, but the reasons why are unclear. The official line was that he was not fired, but that he resigned out of his own volition, in opposition to proposed changes to the structure of the Orphanage. According to the President of the Board, W. Cohen, writing in the *Israelite Press*, the Orphanage Board had been changing policy for two years and was hoping to appointment an assistant to the Superintendent. They were also hoping to involve more institutions in the care of the children, in order to help them more quickly re-integrate into the community.<sup>353</sup> The exact nature of the new policies were not mentioned, and nor were the other institutions that were to be involved more in the lives of the children. Nor did policy appear to change much after Osovsky left.

Although the statement published by Cohen in the Yiddish *Israelite Press* made Osovsky's resignation sound like a mutual parting-of-the-ways, Osovsky himself stated that he was fired from the Board. A number of favourite alumni corresponded with Osovsky, especially those boys who were sent to Chicago to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary with funding from the Bronfman Scholarship for Orphanage boys. Their letters were often archived in their Orphanage files, along with carbon copies of the superintendent's responses. In a Hebrew response to a letter from ZW3, dated February 6, 1934, Osovsky stated that he was glad to be done with dealing with the fools on the Board.<sup>354</sup> It was inappropriate, to say the least, for Osovsky to denigrate some of

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353 W. Cohen, "The Out-Going President of the Orphanage Explains Osovsky's Resignation," *Israelite Press*, January 9, 1934, 1.

354 Record ZW1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

the adults who were still in control over the dispersion of the Bronfman Scholarship, which ZW3 was receiving while he attended seminary. But Osovsky, at least in the two occasions discussed above, had previously exhibited behaviour that was inappropriate. He had climbed his way to his position of Superintendent of the Orphanage through his hard work as a volunteer in the Jewish community, and in spite of his lack of education in social work or education. Osovsky went on to run the Jewish Old Folks Home until his death in 1948.<sup>355</sup> As a member of the Jewish social service world, Osovsky enjoyed considerable power over vulnerable people's lives. He acquired this power by working well both with non-Jewish bureaucrats and the Jewish communities of Western Canada, and was able to present the Jewish Orphanage as a key component of that Western Canadian Jewish identity.

### ***Pearl Finkelstein – Class, Gender and the Scope and Limits of kindness***

As Suzanne Morton wrote in her biography of pioneering Canadian social worker Jane Wisdom, the lives of social workers can illuminate both the limits and possibilities of an individual's actions.<sup>356</sup> Another staff member who acquired power from working in the Orphanage was Pearl Finkelstein. Finkelstein was one of the staff members who worked with the staff and with families of the Orphanage, and she was another amateur who climbed through the volunteer structure of the Orphanage to become one of its key employees. Born in 1896, Pearl Finkelstein was the granddaughter of Tevye Finkelstein, one of the first Jewish settlers in Winnipeg.<sup>357</sup>

According to Slonim, Finkelstein was a noted leader of the Girls' Auxiliary at the Orphanage,

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355 "Aaron Osovsky, Local Leader, Zionist, Dies," *Winnipeg Tribune*, Thursday, January 29, 1948, 8.

356 Susan Morton, *Wisdom, Justice and Charity : Canadian Social Welfare Through the Life of Jane B. Wisdom, 1884-1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 3.

357 "Pearl Finkelstein Silver," *Winnipeg Free Press*, Thursday, September 12, 1991, 23.

“There was not only a Board of Directors and a Ladies Society but a Girls Auxiliary, a group of young women headed by Pearl Finkelstein, who ferreted out our hobbies and provided activities for leisure hours.”<sup>358</sup> The records show that she worked during the late 1920s and 1930s. As a member of one of the founding families of the Winnipeg Jewish community, she was deeply invested in the creation and maintenance of Jewish communal institutions. It’s also clear that she genuinely cared for the families with whom she worked.

Allan Levine’s history of the Manitoba Jewish community, Pearl Finkelstein is noted as being Moses Finkelstein’s daughter, but this is incorrect, although she was a part of the influential Finkelstein family.<sup>359</sup> Moses Finkelstein was a well-known leader of the Jewish community, having served as an alderman in 1904, and was thus the first Jew on the prairies to serve in public office.<sup>360</sup> The rest of the family was well-known as well: Tevel Finkelstein was a tough settler, battling within and without the Jewish community to get his own way, be it selling liquor in his grocery store, or serving as President of the Shaarey Zedek synagogue for multiple terms.<sup>361</sup> Her aunt Eva Finkelstein was the first Jewish woman to attend the University of Manitoba, graduating in 1896.<sup>362</sup> Pearl was actually the daughter of a lesser-known child of Tevel, Calman or Colman, and her accomplishments as an adult woman have been almost completely forgotten by the Jewish community. Until I found her notes in the file, I had no idea the extent of the work that was done by the Jewish social workers with the Children’s Bureau before the hiring of Thelma Tessler. Tessler was the first Jewish social worker in Winnipeg to have academic training in her

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358 Slonim, 15.

359 Levine, 172.

360 Harry Gutkin, *Journey Into Our Heritage: the Story of the Jewish People in the Canadian West* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1980), 187.

361 Levine, 65.

362 Gutkin, 173.

field, and she is best known for her work with bringing Holocaust refugee children on a special transport to Canada.<sup>363</sup> The community of refugee children were prominent in the Jewish community and spoke fondly about Tessler. But the families who interacted with Pearl Finkelstein did not seem to discuss their experiences with her publicly, possibly because they didn't form a cohesive, recognizable group like the Holocaust refugees, which held reunions and fundraisers for many years.<sup>364</sup> Finkelstein, however, worked hard for the Orphanage children but received very little formal recognition.

Finkelstein did leave an oral history interview that was conducted for the Jewish Historical Society of Manitoba, now the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, in 1968, under her married name, Mrs. Sol (Pearl) Silver. (I will continue to refer to her as Finkelstein, as that was her name in the period under discussion.) In it, Finkelstein described her childhood within the close community of the Manitoba Jewish community. Her father ran many businesses in his life, including multiple rural stores and a large farm in Rosenfeld, Manitoba. The family prospered and she lived a comfortable life. In addition to her early volunteer work with the Orphanage Girls Auxiliary, Finkelstein was also involved with the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) Juniors. Finkelstein recalled making Channukah hampers with the NCJW Juniors for Jewish families on relief, and visiting the homes of people who needed those hampers. She dated her involvement in the Orphanage from 1918 until 1931, when she began working for the Orphanage. Her own reminiscences about her work in the Orphanage was superficial, explaining how she

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363 "Thelma (Bessie) Tessler Edwards," *The Arizona Republic*, March 18, 2010, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/azcentral/obituary.aspx?n=thelma-bessie-edwards-tessler&pid=140820429>.

364 Matt Bellan, "War Orphans Hold Reunion: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Orphans Brought to Canada by Canadian Jewish Congress from 1947-1949," *Canadian Jewish News*, July 30, 1998, 24.

tried to find the children jobs when they were older, and describing the kinds of families who used the Orphanage.<sup>365</sup>

Although she didn't emphasize her accomplishments, the records reveal that despite her lack of a professional education, Finkelstein was a determined, helpful and sensitive worker for her clients. This is all the more impressive considering that while she may have been a member of the Jewish elite, and was a third generation Winnipegger, she never showed any sense of superiority over her desperately poor clients. It seems that professional boundaries were not as firmly kept by Finkelstein as they may be today, and she often had clients over to her home for dinner. She would meet her colleagues from the SWC and the Children's Bureau and discuss cases with them on the streetcar where their conversations could be overheard. Her specialty seems to have been finding jobs for the teens who were aging out of the Orphanage into the grim prospects of 1930s Winnipeg. Most of this work was conducted face to face, meeting with employers at their factories to try to persuade them to take on an unskilled teenager. But Finkelstein also worked very hard with parents of children when the first call was made for help from the Jewish social worker. Without professional training, Finkelstein relied on her extensive familial and friendly networks within the Jewish community, and her sympathetic and non-judgmental temperament, to help her clients. Unlike the more professional social workers who came after her, Finkelstein rarely commented in the file on the furnishings of the home she was visiting, unless getting the family some furniture was part of the brief. She also seemed to have little interest in her clients' sex lives, the reasons for their business failures, and their arguments with their neighbours, unless

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<sup>365</sup> Mrs. Sol (Pearl) Silver (nee Finkelstein), interview by Nathan Arkin and Harvey Herstein, March 8, 11, 18, April 1, 2 and October 16, 1968, Tape 292, transcript, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

those problems contributed to the crisis. In her lack of interest in parents' sexual behaviour she was similar to Mrs. Koyle, the first social worker, who most likely trained Finkelstein.

A family's time spent in the Orphanage could be short, but their involvement with the Jewish social worker could last years, and Finkelstein developed relationships with many of her clients that lasted years. Families were very poor and in need of help in navigating the complex requirements of social welfare organizations, which could take a long time. For example, in the case of Mrs. JD, help was required over a period of five years. Mrs. JD was a single mother, as her husband was in jail in the United States. During her first few months of receiving attention from the Children's Bureau, Mrs. JD was assigned a non-Jewish social worker who focused on her sexual history, as both mother and her baby were suffering from a sexually transmitted infection. As Mariana Valverde has argued, Jews were often seen by British-Canadian Protestant elites as being deficient in sexual morality and to be carriers of disease and promoters of vice; this case must have recalled this stereotype to the non-Jewish social worker.<sup>366</sup> But after three months, Mrs. Koyle took over and worked with Mr. Toni of the SWC to get Mrs. JD established in her own home. The mother's health was still poor, however, and she was about to have surgery when she asked for Finkelstein's help, after Koyle had retired, in admitting her older child to the Orphanage while she planned to recover at a fresh air camp for mothers during the summer before the operation. During the course of placing little JD in the Orphanage, Mrs. JD told Finkelstein that her hospital bills for the planned surgery were refused coverage by the City, even though the doctors had offered to waive their fees. Finkelstein then called Mr. Levadie at the

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<sup>366</sup> Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 105-106.

SWC, who worked with St. Joseph's Hospital to ensure that the operation would not cost the mother. Finkelstein, working with Miss Stoller the social worker with the General Hospital, was able to find funding for a medical corset from the National Council of Jewish Women for Mrs. JD. The mother then left town for work, but when she returned she needed help finding an apartment, and Finkelstein traveled around the city with her to find an appropriate place for the family. Finkelstein then worked with the United Hebrew Relief's worker Miss Ginsberg to arrange for financial help to cover the shortfall between relief payments and the rent; she also worked with Mrs. Sam Bermack of the National Council to arrange for the loan of a go-cart when one of Mrs. JD's children broke his leg and couldn't get around without wheels. When it was time for the JD children to attend the Talmud Torah school for a religious education, Finkelstein ensured that the mother would not have to pay tuition. Mrs. JD needed emergency medical care for a third time, and the children were admitted to the Orphanage for a third time for a short period.<sup>367</sup> Over these five years, Finkelstein was not only helping the mother admit her children to the Orphanage, but was also coordinating between the various organizations that existed in order to ensure that she and her children received what they needed. Finkelstein, with her extensive contacts within the Jewish charitable world and within the social services field, could get things done for her clients.

The other part of Finkelstein's job was helping teens transition from the Orphanage to adult life, and she often had to visit her contacts in the Jewish community to find teens jobs and boarding/foster homes. The story of the ZK children is a complex one, as they spent many years in the Orphanage. After their mother died, their father disappeared to look after a sick sister in the

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<sup>367</sup> Record JD1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



United States, and never returned. Problems occurred when it was time for the ZK children to find their way in the world. They had been made wards of the Orphanage in order to secure municipal funding for their maintenance, but the Province and the city considered children to be grown by sixteen, and refused to fund their support after that age. Meanwhile, the Ladies Auxiliary had to provide teens with enough clothes and other personal possessions before they left the Orphanage. But even with the new clothes and possessions provided by the Ladies Auxiliary, the teens were not ready to live on their own. In the corpus of the Children's Records, I never found a sixteen year old who did not experience distress at being placed out of the Orphanage. Managing their money, getting along with foster parents, employers or landladies, and keeping themselves clean, were often skills that teens could not seem to manage until they were at least eighteen. ZK1, at sixteen, was unable to manage his money. ZK1's record indicates that he fell behind on his rent to his landlady, spending his money on the things like cigarettes and gambling. In order to try to get him to straighten up, Finkelstein recruited Osovsky and members of the Orphanage to speak with ZK1 about his debts. She also helped him keep his lodgings by pleading with the landlady, and found him a new job when he lost his old one. Eventually, he left town for work, writing at least once to Osovsky to keep in touch.<sup>368</sup>

The second sibling, ZK2, was perhaps more responsible with her money, but also experienced difficulties growing up without the benefit of the intimate relationship that exists between parents and teenagers. ZK2 was very reliant on Finkelstein as she was truly alone in the world. ZK2 and the Orphanage staff decided that she would train in nursing, and she was enrolled in an apprenticeship program with a local hospital. At a certain point in her training, ZK2 was required

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368 Record ZK1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

by the apprenticeship program to buy a pair of white nursing shoes, and Finkelstein made an appointment with her to go and get them, with the Orphanage covering the cost. But Finkelstein and ZK2 ended up going to the movies instead once ZK2 explained that she probably was not going to be promoted further in the program. ZK2 was let go from the training course, and lost her room because she ran out of money. She once again turned to the Orphanage and the Jewish social worker, most likely Finkelstein, who found her a new position and new place to live.<sup>369</sup> It could be seen as unprofessional to take a client to the movies, and it certainly didn't help the teen find a new path forward. But maybe what ZK2 needed on that day was a moment of friendship.

Being untrained in professional social work meant that Pearl Finkelstein didn't receive as much education as some of the women who succeeded her. But her connection to the Orphanage gave her considerable power and agency, and it allowed her to independently work for years.

Finkelstein worked until her marriage to Sol Silver, the owner of Western Glove Works, when she was around 40. If she hadn't been active in the Girls Auxiliary, it's unlikely she would have been hired as the social worker. But during her time as the Jewish social worker, Finkelstein helped numerous families recover from crises and get re-established. The Orphanage allowed her to acquire a certain amount of power to act within other people's lives, and to influence events for the children and families that she clearly cared about. With that power, Finkelstein lived a life that was structured around her own professional work. Unlike Osovsky, who also used his volunteer activities within the Orphanage to acquire a career that gave him a lot of power, Finkelstein's power was unacknowledged, even by herself. Although she was respected within the social service world and within the Orphanage, the role of social worker was less public and

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<sup>369</sup> Record ZK1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

had much less prestige. Unlike the superintendent, the Jewish social worker was not the all-seeing patriarch of the Orphanage. Instead she was seen as a woman who did a lot of good while working very hard for her community.

### **The Limits of Power – Parents, Teens and Sex refusing to Co-operate**

Not everyone enjoyed the power that the Orphanage held over their lives, and there were plenty of ways in which the total power enjoyed by the superintendent, and to a lesser extent, the Jewish social worker was challenged. Most parents wanted their children back with them as soon as possible, but there was a minority who were happy to leave and never look back. Some would take their children home but were actually unable to provide care, due to either their own temperaments, employment or health problems. Their children would be returned to the Orphanage when they couldn't cope. Teenagers also resisted the extensive rules that were necessary to govern a large institution but could not re-negotiate the rules for themselves as they might have been able to do if they had been living at home. Conflicts between teens and adults would have greater ramifications than a familial disagreement, as in the Orphanage there were many younger children watching and waiting to pick up tips on how to raise mischief. And the final aspect of life that showed the limits of the Orphanage's power was the reality of sexual abuse within the institution. The limited ability of the Orphanage to address sexual abuse was related to the lack of language to discuss sex, as well as the lack of support for children who experienced sexual abuse in the Jewish community and in the wider Canadian context.

### ***Parents refusing to parent***

Most of the cases of families in the Orphanage involved temporary care for children while a parent was ill and the other parent had to work; when this occurred, the Jewish social worker would interview the extended family to see if any could take in the children for a short period of time. Often the extended family refused to consider taking in the children, citing their own children or their own ill health. Some parents, however, left the city or openly refused to care for their children.

The case of the JL family shows how one mother grew so accustomed to having her children cared for by the Orphanage that by the time she was financially stable, she refused to take her children home. Mr. and Mrs. JL were religiously divorced, a fact that confused the non-Jewish social worker who first received their file. When they came to the attention of the Children's Bureau, the father was temporarily staying with the family after his discharge from Stony Mountain Penitentiary but was concerned that he would soon be sent back to prison for violating his parole. The children had been born in two groups to the same parents, with the older siblings in their twenties, already working, and two very young ones. Complicating matters, Mrs. JL was under the care of Dr. Max Rady and needed surgery. This social worker admitted the two younger children to the Orphanage, and then Bess Lander, one of the social workers who came after Finkelstein, was hired as the Jewish social worker and took over the case. Lander helped Mrs. JL regain relief after she was discharged from the hospital, but her recovery was very long. The records indicate that the children were finally taken home a year after they had been admitted, possibly because Wilder, the superintendent, had written to Mrs. JL asking her to stop visiting her

children so often, as they would become upset every time.<sup>370</sup> But that was not the final admission, as Mrs. JL's health was still fragile. Seven months later the JL children were re-admitted for another two months, as their mother was in pain while she tried to work to support the family, and she needed further medical treatment. The readmission was bad for the eldest boy, JL1, who was suffering from the separation from his family. Mrs. JL had no furniture and was reluctant to take the children back, but the Children's Bureau was beginning to lose patience with this mother. They noted that even when Lander made appointments for Mrs. JL with her doctors, she refused to go. Miss Pollfaxen, the social worker at the General Hospital, wrote a letter to the Children's Bureau stating that this mother was well enough to go back to work. Lander then arranged a meeting about the JL family with Mrs. Welch of the Relief Department, Mr. Berlatsky of the United Hebrew Relief and Miss Moore of the Children's Bureau. The result of this meeting was that Lander tried to convince the mother to quit work, go on relief and find an apartment that could accommodate all three of them. But Mrs. JL refused, stating that she lived in constant pain and couldn't take them home. The Children's Bureau were tired of dealing with Mrs. JL, and made her and her children the responsibility of the Jewish Orphanage. The Orphanage decided to keep the JL children as they had nowhere to go.

In order to help Mrs. JL reestablish her family, Lander then tried to get the Relief Department and the UHR to help the mother find a new place and get new furniture, but they were both very hesitant. A doctor at the General Hospital tried to book a dentist's appointment for Mrs. JL to get all her teeth pulled, but she refused to go to that appointment as well, causing Pollfaxen to refuse to work with her. Lander smoothed over this conflict, Mrs. JL had her teeth removed, and then

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<sup>370</sup> Record JL1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Lander asked the National Council of Jewish Women to get her dentures. In order to discharge the children, Mrs. JL had to find a suite for all of them, but she kept finding places out of the price range that relief would grant her. Finally, Lander became frustrated, and told Mrs. JL she had to work with UHR herself to get the furniture. But Lander was a dedicated worker, and she couldn't help but try to reunite these children with their mother, so she negotiated with the UHR to arrange for the family to receive coal.<sup>371</sup> All was well for nine more months, but then Mrs. JL needed some further surgeries. She asked for a housekeeper so that her children could stay with her while she worked, but although once again Lander searched very hard, no housekeeper could be found. This time the children only had to stay in the Orphanage for six weeks. But the fourth and final admission happened another eight months after they were discharged the third time, but this time there is no information about the reason why they were admitted in their file. The JL children remained in the Orphanage for four more years. There is evidence that even though the JL children were used to the Orphanage, they were unhappy there, especially JL1; at one point, he had to come home early from the B'nai Brith Camp because he had run away from camp.

Mrs. JL seems to have been able to resist pressure from the Jewish Orphanage to take home her children, so much so that they remained in the institution until its closure in the late 1940s. The year the children were discharged, the Orphanage had shrunk in population considerably.

According to the Children's Records (which are incomplete), there may have been 35 children in the institution throughout the year, but it was built for 100. This left the two JL children, who first entered the building as pre-schoolers, living with only a few other children in a large and echoing Orphanage. By the 1940s, Mrs. JL had found a good job where she was making \$80 a month, and

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<sup>371</sup> Record JL1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

she had tracked down her ex-husband from whom she was receiving \$40 in support, garnished from his wages, but for the two years before the discharge it was noted that she was only paying \$10 a month for both children's maintenance. Over the previous eight years, her children had spent a total of only twenty-four months with their mother in periods of under a year. Mrs. JL met with Thelma Tessler, the social worker who had taken over the Jewish social worker position and the running of the United Hebrew Social Service Bureau, the predecessor of the current Winnipeg Jewish Child and Family Service, in order to protest taking her children out of the Orphanage. Representatives of the Children's Bureau and the Orphanage board were also at this meeting.

At this meeting, Mrs. JL lashed out at Tessler:

Miss Tessler brought this story here [to the meeting] and I told Miss Tessler "Your [sic] working for the Board trying to get rid of the children". Miss Tessler is trying to get the children pushed out. She told my father she was working for the Orphanage and taking orders from them. She is making a lot of trouble in the Mount Carmel Clinic, Orphanage etc. When a person draws opinions from my mouth I'm entitled to say anything. Her [Tessler's] job is to go about the community and tell tales and try to get rid of children. Children are brought into this home for education from all over Canada. In this manner the children are brought up right here. I can't take them home. I'm not taking the children home."<sup>372</sup>

In this meeting the mother threatened to put the children in a non-Jewish, or "Gosha," home if they were discharged. She also stated she didn't want them placed in a foster home. Mrs. JL said that she would only take them home once she had a secular divorce and remarried – but once she divorced the \$40 a month spousal support would stop. She also stated that she needed at least a year before she could take them.<sup>373</sup> This time, her protests didn't work, because the Orphanage was closing. But Mrs. JL accomplished something impressive: by being generally obstructive,

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372 Record JL1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

373 Record JL1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

she was able to live without her youngest children for their longest time in the Orphanage, four straight years. If the Orphanage hadn't been closing, her threat of placing the children in a non-Jewish orphanage may have been effective, as this was the very fate that the Jewish Orphanage was trying to prevent.

### ***Teenagers in the Jewish Orphanage***

Parents were one group of people involved in the Orphanage who resisted its authority over their lives; the other group was the teenage children who lived in the institution. In a family, it is possible to renegotiate the rules and expectations for each child as they need to change, although not every family does this successfully. In the Orphanage, a large institution with many children and fewer adults, there was no negotiation. Teenagers tended to chafe under the rules of the Orphanage but had nowhere else to go, unless the superintendent was able to find a parent or relative to take them. Sending them back to their family or to strangers for work training was certainly a preferred option, especially by Osovsky, who had no patience for teenagers' disobedience. Wilder also had no patience for rebellion, but seemed reluctant to dump children unless they had somewhere safe and helpful to go. This led to loud and public conflicts in the Orphanage, and Wilder sometimes resorted to slapping teens or meting out punishments. Inside the four walls of the Orphanage a rebellious teen could unleash chaos.

Wilder had difficulties with the children who had remained in the Orphanage for an extended period of time. The NO family illustrates how difficult adolescence could be for a child living in an institution. There were three NO children in the Orphanage, although they had five more



siblings who were older, and a father and a grandmother. They were first admitted after their mother died in childbirth, but even when they were older, they only went home for a short stretch of a few months, because they were “too much” for whichever family member had taken them in. The children eventually became wards of the city so that their costs were funded by the municipality, as the entire family had difficulty finding work during the Depression, and couldn’t pay maintenance fees. The eldest spent eleven years and the two younger children spent fourteen years in the Orphanage, so their adolescent rebellions were performed in front of an audience of younger children. NO1, the eldest boy, had the most obviously troubled adolescence.

NO1 didn’t thrive in school, and so the Orphanage staff tried a few work placements to see if any would job appeal to him. At first when Pearl Finkelstein found him a job in a garment factory, NO1 was allowed to eat in the Orphanage kitchen instead of the dining room, so that he could eat according to his work schedule. But when he quit that job, he insisted on continuing to eat in the kitchen, which led to a loud argument with Wilder. During the course of this multi-day argument, NO1 smoked cigarettes in the Home and passed around a jar of mustard that he had bought himself, and which was against the rules (probably due to kashrut considerations). When asked what he was doing to find another job, he replied that Miss Pearl would find him another. Actually, Finkelstein had had so much difficulty finding NO1 the first job that she had asked her future husband, Sol Silver, for a job at his Western Glove factory. But the conflict worsened. Some of the female staff came to Wilder and told him that NO1 had been making sexually aggressive and vulgar comments to them. At this point, Wilder lost patience. He told NO1 that he was informing the Admission and Discharge committee that he wanted him out of the Orphanage, and that he was on probation for one week. NO1’s adult sisters then came to Wilder to plead for

NO1 to remain in the Orphanage, telling Wilder that Mr. Osovsky wouldn't have treated their brother this way! Wilder replied that this boy belonged in the Institute in Portage or a relief Camp.

It was at this point that the father went to the devoted David Spivak, Board member and surrogate grandfather, to complain that his son was being expelled onto the street without anything but the clothes on his back. This wasn't true, but Spivak bought the boy a few extra items in sympathy. Wilder soon found NO1 a placement on a farm in Edenbridge, the Jewish farm colony, to see if he could make it as a farmer, but NO1 soon left for one of his sisters' homes. He became ill and on the recommendation of Judge Hamilton was readmitted for a month in order to recover. Wilder then found him a job as a tutor/clerk with a rural shop-keeping family. Wilder wrote NO1 a worried letter when he got this position and had moved to the small town, reminding him that the Orphanage relied on donations from rural families, and warning him against treating the local girls badly.<sup>374</sup>

The power of the Orphanage superintendent was disrupted by NO1's rebellion. NO1 found the Orphanage stifling, and was unprepared for the rigors of finding a job and the realities of paid labour. But as a teenager, when he needed some flexibility, the Orphanage could not grant it, and when NO1 needed to have his behaviour addressed, his family tried to intervene, pitting a Board member against the Superintendent. Wilder's power over the institution was challenged directly through the other children, as NO1 smoked in front of them and shared contraband with them. It

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<sup>374</sup> Record NO1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

was also challenged through the staff, as NO1's sexual and aggressive behaviour them. Wilder was challenged through the family, as NO1's older sisters angrily confronted him, and through the family using the Board, as Mr. NO asked David Spivak for help preventing NO1 from being expelled. Wilder himself felt that his power to approach rural donors was challenged by NO1's potential bad behavior. But although NO1 was able to temporarily disrupt the power structure of the Orphanage, he was not able to defeat it. And when he was in need, the Orphanage there for him and able to help. Managing teenagers was difficult, but the Orphanage staff tried their best to help teens find their place in the world. However, the Orphanage found its greatest challenge in helping the victims of sexual abuse. In these cases, Orphanage staff's best were never good enough to overcome the structural lack of supports for children who had been victimized.

### **Sexual Abuse and the Orphanage – Power, Children, and the failings of the Orphanage**

Sex was an unspoken topic in the Orphanage, and a disruptor of the power dynamics in the institution. Although Reuben Slonim's memoir discussed Osovsky's affairs with the nurses and Cantor Ostrow's sexualized discussions of the older girls, the children themselves appear to have had no direct sexual education.<sup>375</sup> This left their sex education limited to whatever they picked up from their peers and the culture at large, and left them vulnerable to sexual exploitation. I found in the files a persistent inability to discuss sex and sexuality, with even the most seasoned superintendent, Wilder, unable to address issues about sexuality and sexual abuse in honest and clear language. In many ways, the silence around sex allowed sexual abuse, inside and outside the Orphanage, to flourish. In addition, when Wilder needed help managing the two very serious

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<sup>375</sup> Slonim, 57, 86-87.

cases of sexual abuse within and without the Orphanage, he found that there was simply no help to be found. Two cases of sexual abuse shed light, one which focused on a perpetrator of sexual abuse within the Orphanage, and one case of sexual abuse of a child by her family. In both cases, Wilder sought expert help with these teens but was unable to find appropriate treatment. Working within the Canadian social welfare sector allowed the Jewish community to control where Jewish children were institutionalized, but in the case of addressing sexual abuse, working within the system limited how much the Jewish Orphanage was able to achieve.

Silence was the topic that met children and adults who tried to analyze any kind of sexual experience. When Slonim asked his mother, the Orphanage cook, about an incident where he witnessed Osovsky and a nurse kissing, her only answer was “*Narishe sachen* (foolish things).”<sup>376</sup> In a much later file, the social worker Ruth Farber, who worked with Thelma Tessler during the last years of the Orphanage, had a conversation with three alumnae who were struggling to adjust to living outside the Orphanage. These young women had many complaints about the way they had been raised in the Orphanage, and one of those complaints was about the lack of clear instruction about sex and romantic relationships. Farber wrote that the girls did not feel that they were given any instruction on sex and romantic relationships, “This was quite evident from the manner in which the girls described this. (Alumna) said instructions on ‘the body’ ‘when a girl gets bed’, ‘when boys and girls go out and what to do.’”<sup>377</sup>

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376 Slonim, 57.

377 Record LI1, 2, 3, and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

### ***Sexual Abuse within the Orphanage – the case of NG3***

This lack of a clear language to describe sex was most apparent in the case of NG3. NG3 had two older siblings, NG1, a sister, and NG2, a brother. Their parents were disabled and their grandmother assisted the parents in caring for the children, but after she died, the children were admitted to the Orphanage with their parents' agreement. NG2 was at first thought to be a problem, as he had stabbed a classmate, and it was his appearance in Juvenile Court that brought this family to the attention of the Jewish social worker. NG2's behaviour improved, however, as he grew older. NG1 was bright and was discharged in her teens so that she could care for her mother; Tessler helped her get enough credits so that she could graduate high school. But Wilder never liked NG3, considering him to be a bully, and at some point, according to Wilder's private notes, he went from being a bully to being a sexual predator. Wilder wrote,

The sadistic tendencies of NG3 continue to manifest themselves now in other and more dangerous forms. Repressed, apparently, and unable to beat and torture the younger boys, he now attempts homosexuality. [Name of a child] related a nasty story. The older boys have caught several times NG3 attempting to practice it on some of the younger boys, he was admonished by them, and threatened, until now [another child's name] discovered that he attempted it with his sister. He, [second child], so incensed he could have 'murdered' NG3; he told [first child], who after considerable hesitation decided that the best thing would be to tell me. He naturally found it difficult to 'explain.' Words failed him; however he conveyed sufficiently for me to understand; I tried to show enough concern to encourage him, though not so much as to frighten him. Inwardly I was nevertheless alarmed – knowing NG3 I feared the worst. Promised [first child] that I would deal with him [NG3] accordingly.

I was prepared not merely to give NG3 the 'third degree' but to punish him severely if he should decry. Took a heavy strap with me and called him upstairs where we would be alone. Whether it was my visible concern, or the appearance of the strap – or my tone of voice – or was it 'craftiness' – he made a free confession. The story he told was not so much distressing as – revealing a condition which

needs deeper study. Naturally he tried to hedge at first. He did not blurt out. He was determined, however, to shield. Perhaps my self-possession and calmness disarmed him. I did not start by accusing him; I tried to 'worm it out.' My opening words were: "NG3 – I got you here, all alone, just you and I because I believe you have something to tell me that no one else ought to know. I am ready to listen; but I am also very determined to get the real truth and the whole truth; if it should take the whole day and the whole night, you will remain here with me until you come out with it completely." I spoke as calmly as I could but firm.

He understood though he hedged and by degrees, after proding [sic] he related a not too savory story. First, he admitted that he 'played' both with some boys and girls; named them. Why? Just curiosity. How did he come to think about it and when? - From the boys at school and especially on his Mother's home-street. The boys all 'boasted' about it. He emphasized that none of our boys talked about it. On the contrary, when they heard of what he was up to they 'took the guts out of me' – Particularly his brother NG2. 'You can leave it to him – he'll murder me if he learns that I am still doing it.'<sup>378</sup>

As it transpired, NG3's first sexual experience with another child was when he visited the home of two children who had been boarders at the Orphanage, sent by their family to Winnipeg from their remote home in order to get an education. The brother encouraged NG3 to fondle his sister, which NG3 insisted she had wanted. After that day, he engaged in sexual activity with younger children, but when the older boys found out about what he was doing, they beat him without telling Wilder. Upon discovery of this behaviour, Wilder took action. He informed NG3 that if he touched another child sexually he would be immediately sent to the Institute for Boys in Portage la Prairie, with no second chances. The children who had reported NG3's actions were disappointed by the lack of a punishment for NG3, but Wilder reassured them. He next arranged for a psychiatric evaluation of NG3, writing to the psychiatrist,

NG3 has been somewhat of a problem during the past few years resenting the institution the necessity for complying to its rules and the restrictions necessary for group life. For some time the attendants have felt that NG3 has had an unhealthy influence on the other children, and in the last few months there have been

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378 NG1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

intimations of possible homosexual practices with the younger children. It is because of this factor that we are asking for an examination of the boy, in the hope that he will discuss more freely with the psychiatrist his habits and conflicts.<sup>379</sup>

The psychiatrist, Dr. G. L. Adamson, found nothing abnormal with NG3, writing back to Wilder,

This boy was examined to-day as arranged. He discussed his problems quite frankly. He has the usual adolescent problems, sharpened to some extent by the fact that he has lived in an institution for so long, A psychometric indicated dull normal intelligence.

In my opinion this boy would probably do better if a foster home could be found for him. This might do a good deal for him in inspiring him to acceptable behaviour as an individual. I do not feel that the history of homosexuality (such as it is) or his other escapades indicate any fundamental personality defect.<sup>380</sup>

Although he could have had him sent to the Institute for Boys, instead Wilder tried making arrangements with an uncle of the children, who assured the Board that NG3 could live with some of the members of his extended family. Perhaps the uncle heard something about NG3's behaviour, because he then dragged his feet on collecting NG3. The Board informed this uncle that NG3 would be expelled into the street if he wasn't take out of the Orphanage soon - it had been ten months since the psychiatric evaluation. In these ten months, NG3 was found being very rude to the nurses and other staff, so much so that Wilder told him he would take him to Juvenile Court just for that behaviour alone. Eventually, NG3 was brought in front of Juvenile Court for destroying a private garden, and placed on probation. Wilder refused to take NG3 back into the Orphanage after these charges, and Bess Lander helped the extended family to take him in.<sup>381</sup>

The lack of clear language here is indicative of the particular silence around sex that was common in the Orphanage, and it was this silence that helped to make sex into a destabilizing

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379 NG1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

380 NG1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

381 NG1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

force. First of all, the child who reported finding NG3 fondling a younger girl was unable to articulate what he had seen. Wilder wrote that, “He naturally found it difficult to 'explain.' Words failed him....”<sup>382</sup> As the children had not been taught the language for sexual parts of the body, it was very difficult for this boy to express what he had seen. The older boys, even NG2, perhaps bound by a code of silence, were trying to deal with NG3 themselves, beating him whenever they caught him with a younger child, but this didn’t stop his behaviour. Their silence was only broken when one brother was close to murdering NG3 for performing some kind of sexual act on his younger sister, and that brother’s friend decided that the situation had gone on too long. Finally, Wilder himself seems to have been limited in his language about how to speak about NG3’s actions. Although NG3 sexually abused both boys and girls, Wilder incorrectly used the term “homosexual” for this activity, both in his notes and in the reference letter to the psychiatrist. This mischaracterization may be why the psychiatrist didn’t find any evidence of homosexuality in NG3; after all, he wasn’t sexually interested in men or boys his own age, but boys and girls who were younger than him.

Wilder’s reluctance to send NG3 away shows how he had had no training or experience with sexual abuse, and the social service sector as a whole could not address this situation. During the time NG3 remained in the Orphanage after he was discovered, he stayed with the same younger children who had been abused by him. I think it’s important to note that the older boys who were beating NG3 all believed that what was he was doing was abusive, even though they didn’t have the words to describe it. Wilder, too, believed that NG3 was a sadistic bully even before he heard about his sexual activity. NG3 himself didn’t deny that he sexually abused younger children and

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<sup>382</sup> NG1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



he didn't try to justify his behaviour. According to all the people involved in this case, NG3's behaviour was wrong and inexcusable. But there is no evidence that Wilder spoke with the younger children who were his victims. Their voices are not heard at all. And Wilder had no efficient way of dealing with NG3, except to send him to the Institute for Boys, which he did not do, as it seems he was terribly reluctant to send any teen there. Even the psychiatric expert had no real guidance for how to deal with NG3, except for advising that he be sent to a foster home. Without giving the children any kind of sex education, the Orphanage was unable to prevent an older teen from sexually engaging with younger children, or to address the victim's trauma once it had happened.

### ***Sexual Abuse Outside the Orphanage – trying to get help for a victim***

By the far the saddest case of sexual abuse that upset the power dynamics in the Children's Records of the Orphanage was in the PW family. Four generations of this poor and troubled family were involved with the Orphanage and a host of other social service agencies for twenty-three years, lasting until the closure of the Orphanage. The family had many children, but three were committed to the Orphanage. After PW1 came in front of Judge Hamilton for a case of truancy, his wanderings around the city and the family's loud arguments were brought to the attention of Osovsky. Before he was committed to the Orphanage for supervision, with the full support of his parents, PW1 received a full psychiatric evaluation from Dr. Alvin Mathers. He found PW1 low in intelligence and in some way "psychopathic," and recommended that he be committed to an institution with continuous, firm supervision.

The Jewish Orphanage was able to provide more supervision than his parents, and so PW1 was sent there. He was diverted from the non-Jewish institution in favour of going to the Jewish Orphanage, so that he could be care for in a religiously appropriate setting. His behaviour improved in the Orphanage, but the principal of the Luxton School, Mr. Floyd, found this child to be completely unengaged, sleeping through class, and he ordered an evaluation from the school system's psychologist, Dr. Crawford. Dr. Crawford was concerned that PW1's IQ had dropped since Dr. Mather's evaluation, and suggested he be sent home. The Orphanage tried to send PW1 home on multiple occasions, but he would always return, as his parents couldn't control his behaviour. After seven years of this behaviour, Osovsky and Mr. Levadie of the SWC tried to engage in an intense project of lifting PW1's family out of poverty. The SWC would find them a better place to live, Osovsky would find them a housekeeper to help the mother, and the Ladies' Auxiliary would help them pack up and move. In the end, it was the mother who refused to move. Notably, the Jewish social worker, probably Pearl Finkelstein, was concerned that teenage siblings of opposite sex were sharing a bed, and wondered where PW1 would sleep when he was sent home.<sup>383</sup>

A year after PW1's discharge, the oldest sister in the family tried to have her brother sent out of the family home, testifying in Juvenile Court that he was disruptive and criminal. Taking the lead in a court case to have him sent to an institution, she wept and stated that she was embarrassed to describe what went on in the home. He didn't work and he hit other members of his family, as well as tearing his own clothes and destroying objects. It's unclear from the files what happened

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383 Record PW1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

to PW1 at this point, when he was in his late teens. In addition to behavioural problems and an intellectual disability, PW1 also sexually abused his younger sister, PW3, and taught his younger brother, PW2, to do the same. This made PW3's life misery. Her situation soon came to the attention of Wilder by the provincial Department of Health and Public Welfare, which was alerted to the child's wanderings through the city. A letter from the older sister to the Orphanage states that she had told Judge Hamilton about PW1's sexual abuse of his sister during the court case, although a transcript of that testimony was not in the file.

Three years later, everything became worse. PW2, the brother who had learned to sexually abuse his sister by PW1, was admitted. PW2 was also psychologically evaluated, and noted to be of a low IQ. Bess Lander was the social worker involved in PW2's move to the Orphanage, the reasons for which are not made clear in the file. About a year into his stay at the Orphanage, Wilder went to Judge Hamilton to ask that PW2 be sent to the Knowles Home for Boys. Although he was reluctant to send a Jewish boy to a Protestant home, Wilder felt that PW2 was guilty of sexual "malpractice" and that he should be kept away from girls. Hamilton agreed to this plan, as long as the boy's parents also agreed. They must not have done so, as PW2 wasn't discharged for two and a half more years.<sup>384</sup>

After PW2's arrival, Wilder became concerned that he was engaging his sister in sexual acts. PW3's behaviour had become troubled. The other children made fun of her perceived lower intellectual capacity and the incest that she suffered from her brothers. She stole money from a

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384 Record PW1, 2 and 3, *Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings*, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

relative, and Wilder took out the strap in order to threaten her into confessing. PW3's sexualized behaviour had attracted negative attention, and she was targeted by some of the Orphanage boys for a sexual assault, which was only thwarted when a staff member entered the cloakroom. After this incident, the boys were warned not to do such a thing again, and PW3 was warned to stay away from boys. She ran away from the YMHA day camp during the summer to go to her mother's house, where she was in danger from her brothers. PW3 was by then too old for day camp but the Orphanage was concerned about her being unsupervised and bored during the day. About a month before PW2 was formally discharged, Wilder wrote in his notes,

I have discussed several times the case of PW3 with members of our Board, pointing to the fruitlessness, if not danger, of our handling of PW3's case. Her hereditary background as well as early environment, both pointed to early sexual awareness, mental deficiency and possible delinquency. With out [sic] lack of personal treatment, and untrained staff, it is impossible to attempt do more than check the evil tendencies, we cannot hope to effect a change.<sup>385</sup>

Wilder noted that there simply were no facilities for a child with PW3's problems in Manitoba, and hoped there was something for her somewhere else. Letters were sent to Jewish social service experts in Canada and the United States. Marcel Kovarsky, the Secretary of the American National Conference of Jewish Social Welfare, recommended that PW3 be sent to Bellefaire in Cleveland, a treatment home that had begun as a Jewish orphanage, but US Immigration rules prevented her transfer. Members of the Board consulted with Judge Hamilton, who thought that PW3 should be sent to a farm, a suggestion that Wilder rejected outright. A foster home was not thought to be helpful for PW3, because her behaviour was so sexualized it was unlikely that another family would take her on. There was a possible facility in Ontario, the Ontario Hospital

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385 Record PW1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

School, but they informed Wilder that under no circumstances would they take in a student from another province. PW3's older sister, who had tried earlier to stop the abuse, had moved to the United States and was asked if she would take in her sister. She wrote back to the Orphanage stating that she could not do so, as PW3 had psychological problems and needed constant supervision. Ethel Ostry of the Baron de Hirsch Society in Montreal told the Orphanage that there were no facilities in Canada which would accept patients from out of province. When Wilder then retired, the problem of how to help PW3 was unsolved. Miss N. Lipson took over running the Orphanage, but with the title of Matron, not Superintendent. She tried to arrange a foster home for PW3 in the country, but the family that she approached was hesitant. In the end, PW3 was discharged home, with the Jewish social workers, by that point Rose Hochman and Thelma Tessler, supervising this family. The supervision failed. PW3 became pregnant, and she and her mother took PW1 to court on a charge of sexual interference. The baby, PW4, was adopted out on PW3's request by the Orphanage in a closed adoption. Although she had the support of her mother, PW3 lost the court case against her brother. Since she had a reputation for being promiscuous, and her brother denied the charge, it was assumed that PW3 was lying.

According to Joan Sangster's study of sexuality and the Ontario legal system in the first half of the twentieth century, courts at this time were eager to find any way of excusing male family members from the crime of incest. In the case of PW3, her mother and sister tried to remove PW1 from the home by bringing charges forward in family court, without the official charge of incest. This was possibly a wise choice, as the framers of incest laws were more concerned with eugenicist ideas about consanguinity than with the experiences of girls and women, and it was unlikely that PW1 would have been convicted in a criminal jury trial on incest charges. But this

case shows that even with the presumably more sympathetic Juvenile Court, PW3 was not an ideal enough victim to receive justice. Sangster notes that in incest cases, if there was not a confession, some witness corroboration and a victim who had never exhibited any kind of sexual behaviour outside of the crime, the accused was usually acquitted. In fact, many of the cases that Sangster found in the Ontario records, similar to the case against PW1, did have witnesses to these crimes and were still dismissed.<sup>386</sup> The legal system was more interested in protecting the rights of accused men than protecting or providing justice to victims of sexual and family violence, even in a case where a child was born.

This family was, without question, the worst case of child abuse I found in the Children's Records and it was the clearest case of the Orphanage failing one of its children, illustrating the limits of its power, especially when it came to negotiating with Juvenile Court authorities and provincial boundaries. Although Wilder and the other Orphanage staff worked very hard to find a treatment option for PW3, absolutely no one, besides the older sister, was interested in removing her brother/abusers from the family home; their comfort was placed above PW3's safety. And PW3 was consistently framed as a co-offender in the sexual activities by the Juvenile Court and Orphanage staff, with Wilder blaming her sexualized behaviour on her character as opposed to the abuse which he knew she had experienced. For example, when she was set upon by a group of boys, he warned her about her behaviour, even though she had been victimized by them. Wilder also didn't follow through on sending PW2 to the Knowles Home for Boys, which may have spared PW3 from living in the same building with her abuser. In this case, Wilder's

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<sup>386</sup> Joan Sangster, *Regulating Girls and Women: Sexuality, Family and the Law in Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 44.

reluctance to send a Jewish child to a non-Jewish institution may have been rooted in the history and goal of the Jewish Orphanage, but was counter-productive to keeping PW3 safe.

The failure to protect PW3 did not belong to the Orphanage alone. The judicial, health and immigration systems of the Canadian state were all complicit in trying to protect their provincial boundaries. The older sister wrote in her letter refusing to take PW3 into her home, that she told Judge Hamilton about her brother's sexual abuse of her sister, but nothing was done to protect her by the Court. And after PW3 became pregnant, PW1 was still not found responsible for sexually abusing her; PW3's sexual behaviour, clearly influenced by her years of sexual abuse, was held against her, but PW1's was not held against him. Wilder spoke about PW3 as though she was a vector of evil, writing, "With out lack of personal treatment, and untrained staff, it is impossible to attempt do more than check (PW3's) evil tendencies, we cannot hope to effect a change."<sup>387</sup> No punishment was ever meted against PW1 or his PW2, but PW3 was forced to endure a pregnancy. The provincial systems which either failed to provide mental health care for a child abuse survivor, or refused patients from out of province, put financial and bureaucratic needs above those of a child. And the border systems in place between Canada and the United States prevented PW3 from getting help in Cleveland. Whatever power Wilder and the Orphanage accrued, it ran out in the face of real abuse, and PW3 was the one who suffered.

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<sup>387</sup> Record PW1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

## **Conclusion**

Power was an important motivator in creating the Orphanage, as ensuring that the Jewish community had the educative power over Jewish children was the founders' purpose. Power came to staff members in the form of control over families and their children in the Orphanage.

Osovsky used his extensive volunteer experience as a springboard to the Orphanage superintendent position. As superintendent he was able to use his power to gain prestige and prominence not only in the Jewish community but in Winnipeg's social service sector.

Unfortunately, he used the Orphanage as though it was his personal kingdom, and his power was only checked by the Board of Directors. Pearl Finkelstein used her position as the leader of the Girls' Auxiliary to get the job of the Jewish social worker, and tried to use her power for the benefit of the families whose lives were so different from hers. Finkelstein's lack of professional training actually meant that sometimes she was able to connect to her clients on a more personal level. She was also able to work independently in a time when women didn't have many professional options. The Orphanage therefore did not only benefit its children, but also its staff.

The Orphanage did not enjoy total control over its charges, its families or the social service system. Parents and teenagers were both able to challenge the system. Parents could use their ability to refuse to take their children home to resist the Orphanage. Mrs. JL, for example, became so accustomed to having her youngest children cared for by the Orphanage that after she became secure financially, she resisted having her children sent home. Teens were always a problem for the Orphanage, as they needed more independence and freedom than the institution was prepared to give. NO1 broke the rules of the Orphanage publicly, and was so obnoxious to



the staff that Wilder wanted to expel him right away. This teen upset the balance of power in the Orphanage through the power of adolescent swagger.

Sexual abuse overturned all the power relationships in the Orphanage. No one person, not any of the other children, a staff member or the superintendent, seemed to be able to prevent the abuse of younger children by older children in the institution. Nor could the victims be helped by the Orphanage. Considerable time was spent trying to help PW3 recover from a childhood of abuse, only to fail to prevent her from being abused again. When abuse did happen, perpetrators faced very few repercussions and there seemed to be no consideration for the experience of the victims. In the case of NG3, the victims were never discussed and never spoken to. In the case of PW3, there was an assumption that she was somehow at fault for the abuse that had been perpetrated against her, and no government would extend any consideration to her needs in order to help her. The Orphanage's power was thwarted by its own and governmental refusal to engage with the realities of sexual abuse, leaving victims, especially female victims, alone to cope with the ramifications of this form of gendered violence.

Although the power struggles described in this chapter make for compelling reading, it should be noted that in none of the cases did the will of any individual prevail in contests between them and the Orphanage governors. The parents and teens who rejected the orders of the Orphanage by refusing to cooperate with it, did, in the end, capitulate to its demands. Mrs. JL was forced to take her children out of the institution despite her opposition. NO1 may have brought his own mustard to the dining room and harassed the nurses, but he was forced to leave the Orphanage against his own and his family's will. Even Osovsky, whose power had seemed absolute, lost against the

collective will of the Board to see him leave the Orphanage. When the Orphanage lost a power struggle, it did so against the organs of the Canadian state. The brokering capacity of the Jewish Orphanage could only function when the state was willing to work with it; when it came to dispensing justice and psychiatric care to victims of sexual abuse, the state was unwilling to cooperate.

## **Chapter 6 – Making Canadian Children and a Jewish Future**

The relationship between Jews and Judaism is an ongoing dialogue throughout time. The Board of Directors, the volunteers and the staff of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage all had to make decisions about the kind and shape of the Judaism that they would teach the children. Some of the decisions by the Orphanage staff and Board appear to have been made without much discussion, but some were deliberate policy choices that were ideological and aimed at preserving Jewish culture. The institution itself granted some influence to the Jewish community that enabled it to elide contemporary antisemitic ideas about Jews. The result of the Orphanage's religious and cultural choices are reflected in three topics: the use of Orphanage events to create positive images of the Winnipeg Jewish community in the local newspapers; the approach the Orphanage took to children who had a non-Jewish mother, who according to Jewish law are not considered Jewish; and the experiences of Orphanage alumnae as they reflected on their Judaism in the letters they sent home to the superintendents. All of these efforts created a version of Judaism that appeared attractive and modern both to non-Jews and to the children of the Orphanage themselves.

The first section of this chapter will discuss the good press that the Orphanage generated for the Jewish community and for the individuals who worked and volunteered with the institution. Positive newspaper stories can create influence, and the Orphanage signified that the Jewish community was an ethnic group within the city that provided adequately for its children. This influence may have helped diffuse overt antisemitism within Winnipeg, but the Jewish community was loathe to spend its social capital on drawing attention to Canadian antisemitism.

The second section will explore the approach that the Orphanage took to the question of determining Jewish descent. The rabbinic tradition states that children born to a Jewish mother are automatically part of the Jewish people, but children born to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother are not. But the Orphanage staff often expressed the idea that the child of a non-Jewish father could be considered Jewish if the father wished for the child to have a Jewish education, and this assumption was confirmed by the participation of the community in some of these cases. This practice of extending the definition of Jewish descent to include as many children as possible furthered the Orphanage's goal of saving Jewish children from non-Jewish institutions. This chapter will then explore what Judaism looked like in the Orphanage for the children, especially the highlight of the Jewish year, the Passover seder. Finally, many of the alumnae of the Jewish Orphanage who remained in contact with the superintendents wrote movingly about their religious struggles after they had left the child-centred Judaism of the Home. Their struggles, and the superintendent's responses, were complex meditations on reconciling Judaism with modern Canada and the existential threat of antisemitism.

### **Influence through good press – Winnipeg Newspapers and the Jewish Orphanage**

Gerald Friesen has argued that it was the act of reading newspapers that joined Canadians to each other, just as much as the construction of the coast-to-coast rail and telegraph lines. The act of reading one of the large daily newspapers created a shared culture for literate Canadians which bridged time and space, and allowed people to take mental journeys through the new country. Newspapers allowed Canadians to imagine the same places and events, joining people from

disparate parts of their city, province and country.<sup>388</sup> By inserting their Orphanage into the local daily papers, the Jews of Manitoba made a small mental space in their fellow Canadians' imaginations for Jews. After almost one and a half millennia of Christian anti-Judaism, having the ability to promote a positive vision of Judaism in the newspapers which were busy shaping Canadian imaginations was perhaps one of the lesser-known benefits of Jewish life in Canada.

This act of creating good press for the Western Canadian Jewish community can be seen as the active construction of a modern ethnicity. According to Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber and their colleagues, ethnicity is something that is always being invented, reinvented and renegotiated in response to changes in the ethnic community and in the society surrounding it. The boundaries of this ethnicity are also being renegotiated. This constant, active change is performed not by individuals but by people in relationships with other members of their heterogeneous and sometimes conflict-riddled communities.<sup>389</sup> By promoting positive news stories both about the Jewish Orphanage as an orphanage and as a religious institution, the Jewish community was able to reinvent its own internal and external image as a modern, Canadian, religious ethnicity. The medium of this reinvention was local newspaper stories.

The public face of the Orphanage as it presented itself in the local newspapers was cheerful, one of a cohort of orphanages that all strove nobly to provide less fortunate young Winnipeggers with a good start. The two major Winnipeg English newspapers, the *Free Press* and the *Winnipeg Tribune*, often contained references to the Jewish Orphanage. As the thirty year period of the

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388 Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: an Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 147-149.

389 Conzen, Gerber et. al., 5-6.

Orphanage's existence coincided with the most antisemitic time in Canadian history, the Winnipeg newspapers' sunny portrayal of the Jewish orphanage was reassuring to their Jewish readers. The Winnipeg newspapers were a venue for the Jewish community to show itself in the best light, highlighting its care for its orphans and its commitment to the welfare of the city. The newspapers allowed and encouraged this identity construction, while simultaneously not fully engaging with the real antisemitism that was facing the Jewish community.

The newspapers wrote about all the Winnipeg orphanages using similar prose, which emphasized the healthfulness of the institutions' grounds, the good food received by the children, the homeliness of the building and atmosphere, and the goodness of the children. For example, the boys at Knowles Boy's Home were all, "shirts and shorts and sunburned limbs."<sup>390</sup> They lived in an institution that was simple but sturdy, "The big plain dining-room had white oil-cloth covered tables and sturdy green and white windsor chairs. No wriggling boy could disrupt those chair legs."<sup>391</sup> The harvest of the Knowles school grounds and the wholesome meals led to the robust health of the boys, many of whom kept in touch with the superintendent long after they had graduated and moved on to employment.<sup>392</sup> At St. Joseph's Vocational School, which took in very young Catholic boys as well as older children and teens, an article emphasized how the little boys were able to play happily: "The small boys of three to five years sleep in their own blue and white dormitory each bed sporting a white spread with a large bear on it They get a daily sunlamp treatment all winter and have their own kindergarten where they express themselves in crayon

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390 Lillian Gibbon, "Lads are Really at Home at Knowles School for Boys," *Winnipeg Tribune*, Thursday, September 28, 1939, 22.

391 Gibbon, 22.

392 Gibbon, 22.

colors and play with a variety of toys.”<sup>393</sup> The losses and traumas that brought children to these institutions were sometimes mentioned but in such a way that their current health and good spirits were emphasized. For example, at the Knowles School a boy who had traveled back and forth between Canada and China, and had suffered through war and the loss of his family, was seemingly flourishing, “The tall lad grinned pleasantly. He offered us a handful of ripe tomatoes from the heap he was piling up.”<sup>394</sup>

The Jewish Orphanage was discussed in the same fashion, using similar cliches and emphasis on the healing power of a clean and child-centred building, good food, outdoor play and chores. From an article which was published to commemorate the Jewish Orphanage building’s fifteen year anniversary, the *Free Press* reported that,

If one stops to inquire, there are shadows over the Orphanage, the shadows of the stories of the background from which these children have been rescued, stories of death, stories of degradation, stories of weaknesses, stories of helplessness. But these, so far as possible, are not allowed to enter within the doors. From these shadows the children have been removed. Whatever sunshine, good food, work and play, school and holidays can do for them, is being done.<sup>395</sup>

But the orphanages were not only discussed in formal articles. The scouting activities of the homes were reported upon in the children's pages of the newspapers. Orphanage children competed against each other at scouting and sporting events, and against other leagues and packs. Often visiting entertainers and philanthropists paid for all the orphans of the city to enjoy a play, recital or party. Annual picnics and outings, sponsored by service organizations and the *Tribune*,

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393 Margaret May, “Boys Learn to Help Themselves at Vocational School,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, Friday, September 22, 1944, 13.

394 Gibbon, 22.

395 “Record of Jewish Orphanage is One of Fifteen Years Of Noble Accomplishments,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, Saturday July 28, 1934, 5.

included all of the Winnipeg orphanages. These stories were very popular, and can be classed as their own genre of “Free entertainment for orphans” articles. It has been traditional, since the earliest orphanages, to train institutionalized children in music, and the Jewish Orphanage children seemed to have been popular choir and orchestral performers. Their band was especially noted, and when it participated in fundraising entertainments for Jewish and secular events, they were listed as headliners.

The children were not the only members of Winnipeg Orphanages who were lauded in the newspapers. The adults who led these organizations, such as the staff, but most especially the Board of Directors, the Ladies Auxiliaries and other associated clubs, such as Girls' Auxiliary, had many of their elections or meetings discussed in local newspapers. Requests from orphanage Boards to the municipal governments for help with infrastructure or taxes were published as parts of the city reports. In addition, the clubs announced all planning meetings and fundraising entertainments in the newspapers, especially in what appears to have been the cheaper and more popular *Free Press*. M. A. Gray, a Jewish politician who served on the school board and later as a city alderman as a member of the Independent Labour Party, received some positive press when he also served as President of the Board of Directors of the Jewish orphanage. For the regular, un-famous Winnipegger, being active in the Ladies Auxiliary of the Jewish Orphanage was not only spiritually and communally fulfilling, but it also gave one the thrill of being written up in the society pages.

It appears, therefore, that the Jewish Orphanage was embraced by the Winnipeg press, as one orphanage among a coterie of such institutions, all of which were funded by the Federated



Charities drives. Did this mean that the Jewishness of the orphans and their adult staff and volunteers were elided? Or were these wholesome and cheerful little Winnipeg orphans also allowed to be Jews? The Jewish Orphanage was touted as being one of the most modern facilities in the city, and as such, the Jewish community was able to link this modernity with their Judaism. For example, this glowing *Tribune* article was titled, “Jewish Orphanage Well-Equipped Institution in Modern Building,” but began with a description of the charm of the religious Sabbath as observed by the reporter. “It was the eve of the Sabbath at the Jewish Orphanage...”<sup>396</sup> and went on to laud the orphans' sweet singing voices as they welcomed the Sabbath with prayers. In 1939 and 1940 both papers showed an interest in the religious practices of the Jews of the city. Photos of the orphans were often a part of these articles, or the Orphanage was explicitly mentioned.<sup>397</sup>

One of the significant difficulties with researching in newspapers, especially the society pages, is that the researcher can be seduced by the unrelenting cheer and sweetness. Featuring no less than twenty two very positive mentions of the Jewish Orphanage in 1934's *Free Press* made the life of the Jewish community in Winnipeg appear very placid, without labour troubles, class conflict or any discrimination. But the time period of the Orphanage overlapped with the worst time for antisemitism in Canada, the 1930s and 40s. Historian Henry Trachtenberg has written extensively about the antisemitism which waxed and waned in Winnipeg from the very beginning of the Jewish community's establishment in the city in 1882.<sup>398</sup> Antisemitism, or the older prejudice of

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396 Anne King, “Jewish Orphanage Well-Equipped Institution in Modern Building,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, Saturday, May 12, 1924, 3.

397 “Shofar blowing: Winnipeg Jewry Prays for Peace As Their New Year 5700 Opens,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, Friday, September 15, 1939, 1.

398 Henry Trachtenberg, “Opportunism, Humanitarianism, and Revulsion. 'The Old Clo' Move' Comes to Manitoba, 1882-83,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 22, no. 2 (1990): 5-7.

anti-Judaism, is considered by historians to be a component of Western thought, and it was aimed at Jews as they arrived with the European settlers. That being said, by the 1930s the editors of the *Tribune* and the *Free Press* never, as far as I can tell, overtly expressed antisemitic stereotypes about its Jewish citizens.

Antisemitic pressures in Canada came from some varied quarters. There was the development of nationalist and racist groups on the prairies, including the Ku Klux Klan and the Canadian Nationalist party, which allied itself with British blackshirts. Then there was the growth of the Social Credit party in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, which embraced an antisemitic view of capitalism. In 1935 Social Credit won the Alberta provincial election, catapulting William Aberhart to power. Aberhart's complex attitudes towards Jews as international conspiracists made the Jews of Western Canada extremely nervous.<sup>399</sup> In Quebec, traditional Catholic anti-Judaism and the vicissitudes of trying to forge a coherent Quebecois national entity resulted in the prominence of Adrian Arcand, an antisemitic journalist who founded a fascist party.<sup>400</sup> And perhaps the most deadly and callous form of antisemitism was the Canadian government's staunch refusal to allow any Jewish refugees into Canada, as described in the classic book *None is Too Many* by Irving Abella and Harold Troper. Abella and Troper outline how the federal Department of Immigration, headed by Deputy Minister F. C. Blair, created immigration

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399 Janine Stingel, *Social Discredit: Anti-Semitism, Social Credit and the Jewish Response* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 4.

400 Pierre Anciau, "Interlude of Hostility: Judeo-Christian Relations in Quebec in the Interwar Period, 1919-39," in *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*, ed. Alan Davies. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 157.

parameters specifically to keep out as many Jews as possible, ultimately resulting in untold deaths.<sup>401</sup>

An example of one of the more obvious antisemitic trends that existed in Canada at this time was the Social Credit movement, which after 1935 was a fixture in Canadian politics. Social Credit's theorist and founder, Major C. H. Douglas, was a known antisemite, and beginning in 1935, Louis Rosenberg, the Canadian Jewish Congress' Western Division vice-president, began to sound the alarm in the Jewish community. But neither Congress nor the newspapers choose to engage the leaders of this movement on its entrenched antisemitism until 1941.<sup>402</sup> Still, the conspiracist roots of the party were known, just not investigated very closely. For example, when Social Credit swept Alberta in 1935, the *Tribune* published a front page biography of William Aberhart writing, "Is of German descent, but recently denied charges that he was anti-semitic or had any affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>403</sup> The *Free Press* did not discuss in any detail the antisemitism inherent in Social Credit until 1947 when it was mentioned as one of the Alberta party's many skeletons in its closet.<sup>404</sup> Part of the reason for this lack of Jewish engagement with the press regarding Social Credit was that the Jewish community itself was reticent to encourage any reporting about antisemitism. For example, when Rabbi Solomon Frank of Shaarey Zedek Synagogue in Winnipeg met with William Aberhart, Social Credit Premier of Alberta, in 1942, to confront him about antisemitism in the party, it was Frank himself who cautioned against publicizing what he considered to be a very successful meeting. According to Stingel, Rabbi

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401 Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948*. (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, Publishers, 1986), 7-15.

402 Stingel, 33-37.

403 "Mr. Aberhart," *Winnipeg Tribune*, Friday, August 23, 1935, 1.

404 W. R. C. "Social Credit Skeletons: For Some Years This Government Has Indulged in a Period of Orthodoxy but Its Basic Authoritarian Philosophy Remains," *Winnipeg Free Press*, Monday, April 21, 1947, 1.

Frank thought that the meeting had gone well but he urged the Canadian Jewish Congress not to publicize it, out of deference for the Premier's privacy.<sup>405</sup> This meant that any kind of public engagement of Social Credit's leadership with the antisemitism within its own party was delayed, only to resurface and to get far worse after Aberhart's death.<sup>406</sup>

The portrayal of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage in local newspapers highlights both the scope and the limitations of engagement between the Jewish community and the press during the first half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, by situating its orphanage as one orphanage among many, and by highlighting the charm and sweetness of its children, the Jewish community was able to create a positive image for itself in Winnipeg. The limits of the influence that was generated by the Orphanage good press, and all the other good press that was generated by the Jewish community in Winnipeg and in other Canadian cities, meant that while looking at the great work of local Jews, everyone could avoid looking at local antisemitism. Although institutions like the Orphanage generated sunny local press, it gave the impression that the only news fit for the public sphere about the Jewish community was positive news. Good news kept the Jewish community within the bounds of Canadian respectability, and possibly protected it from negative attention, but it also legitimized antisemitic speech and actions by Canadian politicians and bureaucrats. This was the outside face of the institution and the Jewish community. The children lived inside the Orphanage and the Jewish community, and for them the

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405 Stingel, 44-46.

406 An interesting link between Alberta and international antisemitism was the acceptance and promotion of eugenics and the sterilization of marginalized people during the time of the Jewish Orphanage. For a discussion of the Alberta eugenics program, please see Jana Grekul, Harvey Krahn and Dave Odynak, "Sterilizing the 'Feeble-Minded': Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929-1972," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, no. 4 (December 2004): 358-384.

Orphanage focused with a sharp intensity on their religious education, in the hopes of retaining the next generation within the fold.

Canadianizing the children was not seen as problematic for the Jewish Orphanage, as the children attended the local public school. Instead, away from the prying eyes, the Orphanage focused on providing their children with a solid Jewish education and identity. In order to save as many children for the Jewish people, the Orphanage and the Western Canadian Jewish communities accepted those children whose mothers weren't Jewish. In this, it was extending its mandate to save Jewish children from non-Jewish institutions to include children who were, by rabbinic Judaism, not considered Jewish.

### **Patrilineal Descent – Answering the Question of who is a Jew**

Judaism was lived within the Orphanage according to the beliefs and practices adhered to by its governors and staff. One of the most surprising aspects of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage's Children's Records was the presence of children in the Orphanage who did not have a Jewish mother and yet who were being raised as Jews. Judaism may be a faith but the Jewish people include those who are atheist, and to some extent even apostates. Jewish law has ruled since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE that the children of a Jewish mother are always Jewish, but those children who have a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother are not.<sup>407</sup> The rabbinic principle of matrilineal descent was actually against the precedent set in the Torah, which showed many marriages

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<sup>407</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness : Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1999), 263.

between Israelite men and non-Israelite women.<sup>408</sup> This approach to determining who exactly was and was not a Jew changed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when the post-Babylonian leader Ezra tried to expel 113 non-Jewish women and their children from the small, recovering Jewish community of Judea.<sup>409</sup> The idea of matrilineal descent was still not standardized during the Second Temple period, which dates from 513 BCE until 70 CE.<sup>410</sup> The rabbis of the Mishnah (the first codification of what is referred to as the Oral Law) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, however, discussed exactly how to determine the status of irregular marriages, including, in its final clause, the children of a gentile woman, which were ruled to be gentile, like their mother.<sup>411</sup> Shaye Cohen believes that this shift from patrilineal to matrilineal descent was an innovation in Jewish law, based on contemporary Roman law.<sup>412</sup> Although this principle was an innovation, it stuck, and was considered Jewish law by all Jewish movements and cultures, until 1983, when the American Central Conference of Reform Rabbis moved to accept the children with only one Jewish parent, either mother or father, to be Jews as long as they performed certain rituals in public, such as getting circumcised, enrolling the child in Hebrew school, having a bar mitzvah or being confirmed from a synagogue Hebrew school.<sup>413</sup> One of these rituals includes declaring to a congregational rabbi that the family intends to raise the child as a Jew and enrolling the child in a religious school.<sup>414</sup> Most other Jewish movements and traditions have rejected the approach of the Reform movement, even as more and more Jews are living their lives according to this principle.

It has caused a schism in modern Judaism.

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408 Cohen, 265-266.

409 Cohen, 267.

410 Cohen, 269-272.

411 Mishnah Kiddushin, 3:12.

412 Cohen, 293-297.

413 M. H. Vogel, "The Resolution on Patrilineal Descent: A Theological Defense," *Modern Judaism* 6, No. 2 (May 1986): 129-130.

414 "Reform Judaism: Resolution on Patrilineal Descent, March 15, 1983." *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed August 9, 2019, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/reform-movement-s-resolution-on-patrilineal-descent-march-1983>.

However, the Children's Records of the Jewish Orphanage indicate a lived tradition of accepting the children of Jewish fathers that existed long before 1983, and was being practiced in the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage. The decisions made by the staff of the Orphanage did not seem to meet any objections from rabbis or *mohelim* (circumcisers). The approach that the Orphanage took to patrilineal descent was slightly different than that of the Reform rabbis. The Orphanage would accept the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother as long as the father wanted to educate his children as Jews – except, of course, when it ignored that principle too. And the Orphanage went against the municipal and provincial funders, getting maintenance funding for children who could have lived with their non-Jewish relatives instead of being housed and educated in the Orphanage.

One expression of the Orphanage's approach to patrilineal descent was in a case of children who were not admitted. They were living in another province, and both their parents had died. Their extended family wanted to bring them to Winnipeg but to house them in the Orphanage. Their mother had not been Jewish, and the children had not been raised as Jews. Superintendent Osovsky wrote on February 2, 1933, to the Social Welfare Council, which had referred the case to the Orphanage, that, "There is a prevailing rule that if the mother was none [sic] – Jewish – the children usually take the faith of the mother, unless the father takes care that they receive a Jewish upbringing."<sup>415</sup> But more often, the Jewish Orphanage did accept children who only had a Jewish father, even if doing so meant that they went against the policies of municipalities. Care was taken not to bring attention of this situation to state officials.

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415 Record ZJ1 and ZJ2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

The YV family is an example of the complications that arose when the Orphanage tried to determine Jewish status when there were non-Jewish relatives involved. The father was not successful in finding steady work, and after his non-Jewish wife died in their rural town, he admitted his children to the Jewish Orphanage, except for the baby of the family who was adopted by relatives of the mother. Mr. YV was ill and unable to secure stable work, but after some years it was discovered that he was making some extra side money as a musician. The Children's Bureau then began to dock his wages \$15 to go towards the Orphanage maintenance. Soon after this was arranged, Mr. YV left town for another province, although he occasionally sent the Orphanage money. His extended family was either uninterested or unable to care for these children, but their mother's parents, their grandparents, were desperate for connection. The grandparents wrote to Osovsky asking if they could visit and they sent their grandchildren Christmas presents. Osovsky responded telling them that they were free to visit the children at any time.<sup>416</sup> But in reality, Osovsky was not willing to let these children be raised by their non-Jewish relatives.

When the Orphanage tried to get maintenance payments for the YV children from the city of Winnipeg, the city charged the costs to their home rural town. This town was shocked at the cost of the Jewish Orphanage, and refused to pay maintenance, noting that for that daily price, they could arrange foster homes for the children in the town with their mother's relatives. At this point Osovsky sprang into action. The Jewish social worker got in touch with Mr. YV's relatives, trying to get his current address. Osovsky then contacted Mr. YV to prevent the children from growing

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416 YV1, 2, and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



up in the care of their non-Jewish family, stating in a letter that he did not want them raising the children, without giving a reason why. According to his correspondence with the grandparents, there was no reason to suspect that they would be anything but kind to the YV children. Osovsky also wrote to the Jewish communal organization in the province of Mr. YV, asking if the father had remarried a gentile or a Jewish woman, as well as whether or not he could support them, and whether or not he was planning to adopt the children out in his new town. The gentile status of the mother's relatives was mentioned in this letter; it was clearly foremost in Osovsky's mind. It seems that Mr. YV must have been evaluated positively by the Jewish social service agency, although in truth he had a history of being financially unstable and passive about the care of his children. The children were sent to live with him in another province.<sup>417</sup> But this story does not have a positive outcome: YV3, the girl of the family, had a difficult youth and adolescence. Six years after her discharge, the Jewish social service agency in her new province contacted Mr. Wilder. She had been hitchhiking around the country, and showed up at their office, pregnant and in need of help. Was it true, asked the letter, that her mother was not Jewish? And was she still the ward of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage? Wilder responded that YV3 was no longer the ward of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage. Five years after that letter, another letter came to the Wilder, again asking if YV3 was still the Winnipeg Orphanage's ward, as she had given birth to an "illegitimate" child again.<sup>418</sup> The Jewish Orphanage's concern with preventing the loss of Jewish children to the Jewish community was considered by the Orphanage staff to be more important than what was best for the YV children's lives beyond their Jewish identity.

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417 YV1, 2, and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.  
418 YV1, 2, and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Another case involved a non-Jewish social worker who had taken an interest in a marginalized Jewish child. XD was a British Columbia child whose parents had both waived their parental rights in order to make him available for adoption. But XD hadn't been adopted. His foster parents ended up returning him to a Children's Home, where he spent two years before a delegation of women from the National Council of Jewish Women met him and discovered that he was Jewish. And it appears, from a letter that Osovsky sent, XD had been given both a circumcision and had had a "Jewish baptism." Most likely the phrase "Jewish baptism" meant the immersion in a Jewish ritual bath which is included in the Jewish conversion process. Rabbi Nathan Pastinsky was involved in the case, as he is named in the file, so he must have viewed the conversion as valid or maybe even had conducted the immersion. However, there are many questions generated by this case. If the father willingly signed away his parental rights, how did he come to convert XD? Did a rabbi or a *mohel* participate in this conversion, and how did a very disconnected father convince them to do so? In addition, according to the rabbinic tradition, a child who was converted should be offered the chance to renounce their conversion at the time they reach their religious age of majority, but there is absolutely no indication in the file that this was done around the time of XD's bar mitzvah.<sup>419</sup>

Instead of having any family, a gentile social worker had befriended XD when he was living in the British Columbian Children's Home, and kept in touch with him, sending gifts as well as money to pay for extra lessons to the Jewish Orphanage for years after his move to Winnipeg. She even visited him in Winnipeg and had him visit her during the summers. The British Columbian Jewish community was very wary of this woman's motives, intimating that she would

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419 Ketubot, 11a.

snatch XD and raise him as a Christian, but because she was so positive and helpful, Osovsky allowed the relationship to continue. The common teenager exasperation with orphanage living set in when XD was sixteen, and he ran away from the Home to a family that his friend the social worker knew in Manitoba. The Orphanage agreed to send him back to BC, boarding him with a Jewish family, with whom he attended the local synagogue. The Jewish community insisted on keeping XD within the Jewish community, even though the only person who had taken an interest in him was the non-Jewish social worker.<sup>420</sup>

In another case, patrilineal descent was stretched even further. A Danish woman, Miss RT, had had an affair with a Jewish man, but when she became pregnant he refused to marry her. Hoping for a reconciliation with the father, Miss RT asked for the Jewish Orphanage's help while she was in the Church Home for Girls. By this time the father was not involved with her and her child at all. At first, Pearl Finkelstein was unsure of how to proceed. Finkelstein wrote in the record, "Worker explained that it was not customary according to our rules and regulations, to place babies in Institutions according to their religion, and that this baby is really not Jewish but Danish since she is the sole guardian of him, and that the Bureau Case Committee might take exception to a child of a Danish mother being admitted into a Jewish Institution, however, since she requests it, we will place the application in this way and leave it to the Committee to decide."<sup>421</sup> According to Miss RT, her friends had shunned her once they discovered she was having a baby with a Jew, and perhaps that influenced her desire to convert her child. She was adamant that her son be cared for at the Jewish Orphanage, however, and RT was circumcised in the Orphanage,

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420 Record XD, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

421 Record RT, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

even though his Jewish father had asked Miss RT to have an abortion, refused to speak with Finkelstein about his son (they knew each other socially), and left town soon after the child was admitted. There were problems with this case, as the mother was consistently unable to manage working, living within her means and paying maintenance. After much pressure from the Children's Bureau, the Orphanage and Juvenile Court to make some kind of arrangement for discharging her son Miss RT decided they would return to Europe. Alderman Gray and Mr. Wilder worked very hard to arrange for the transit tickets for the RT family to return to Denmark at a low cost.<sup>422</sup> In this case, the standard expressed by Osovsky for patrilineal descent, that the child was Jewish if the father took care to educate him or her Jewishly, was ignored. The father wanted nothing to do with RT, and it was on the request of his Danish mother that he was considered Jewish. Although Finkelstein was the social worker, his admission was reviewed by the Orphanage's Admission and Discharge committee, which included staff and volunteers. I found no mention in the file of RT being taken for immersion in the ritual bath to formalize a conversion. In this case, Jewish religious law was stretched in order to prevent the admission of a child into a Christian institution.

Conversion to Judaism by mothers was considered by the Orphanage to be less permanent than the Jewish status of children of Jewish fathers. Mrs. RE had converted to Judaism from Catholicism upon her marriage to Mr. RE, but after the marriage broke up, she herself disappeared, eventually found living in total penury in the Home of the Friendless. Mr. RE was sent to jail around this time. The children were admitted the first time by their grandmother after both parents left the children with her. At the time of the first admission, Osovsky testified in

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<sup>422</sup> Record RT, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Juvenile Court that he did not want to take in the RE children, because the mother might chose to revert to being a Roman Catholic and would be free to take her children with her. The RE children were discharged to their father after three years in the Orphanage, but after nine months he admitted them again, overwhelmed with the responsibility of their care. The RE children came from a chaotic family, and they all had complicated histories when they lived in the Orphanage.<sup>423</sup>

What does this mean? According to Jewish law, a convert is the same as Jews who were born to two Jewish parents; therefore, they are Jewish for life.<sup>424</sup> But Osovsky clearly didn't feel that this mother's conversion was permanent, and that she had the right to return to "her" people, and to take her children with her. This statement of Osovsky's calls into question any conversion without an inherited link to Judaism. In the case of the RE children, they were always considered Jewish, even though their desperately poor mother didn't consider herself Jewish and kept in loving contact with them for their lives in the Orphanage. Even with Mrs. RE's obvious devotion, her children were unhappy. At some point, RE2's violence was so extreme that the Orphanage had him sent to the Portage Institute for Boys, for the safety of the other children, and both RE1 and 2 spent time in Jewish foster homes, in the hopes that these homes would help them overcome their violent tendencies.<sup>425</sup> But at no point does it seem that there was a discussion after their admission as to whether or not these children were Jewish, even though it may have been tempting to distance the community from them. Their father's Jewishness seemed to have granted them a stable Jewish identity, while their mother's Jewish identity was considered inherently

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423 Record RE1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

424 Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah, 8:1.

425 Record RE1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

unstable. This contradicted the letter of rabbinic law, which considers adult conversion a final act; it appears that the Orphanage decided its own terms for conversion to Judaism, and was willing to use any possible definition of Jewishness in order to encompass as many children as possible.<sup>426</sup>

In the three cases described above, the children's Jewish status was a point of discussion for the Orphanage staff. The following two cases included the acceptance of non-Jewish mothers by their neighbours in Winnipeg. Brought to the attention of the Orphanage by the Knesset Israel Sisterhood, the VC family's mother had recently died in a TB sanitarium. The two VC children were being taken care of by their maternal grandmother, who was said to be Ruthenian (Ukrainian), alcoholic, and abusive. Mr. VC was adamant that the children be admitted, saying that he did not see what his wife's nationality had to do with anything.<sup>427</sup> The objection from the Orphanage may have been that the family had recently moved from another city and so the children would not have been eligible for municipal funding. But it's important to note that the Knesset Israel Sisterhood, at least, considered the children Jewish enough for admission into the Jewish Orphanage.<sup>428</sup> In the case of the TB family (indicating their letter code that replaced their last name, not tuberculosis), the non-Jewish mother was so accepted by her neighbours that a friend insisted on coming with her to meet with the social worker in order to translate for her from the Yiddish. This family was poor and ill, and their children stayed in the Orphanage a short time.<sup>429</sup> The Orphanage and Bess Lander, the social worker, didn't question the children's Jewish status; perhaps if they were Jewish enough for their mother to speak more Yiddish than English,

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426 b.Yebam., 47b.

427 Record VC1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

428 Record VC1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

429 Record TB1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

they were Jewish enough for the Orphanage. These two cases indicate that the Winnipeg Jewish community was willing to stretch the definition of Jewish descent to include the children of Jewish fathers.

The Jewish Orphanage made the choice to accept as many children as possible in order to ensure that no possible Jew was lost to the community. During the first half of the twentieth century the Canadian Jewish community was very aware of the existential threats that faced international Jewry, as well as the failure of the Canadian state to help Jews fleeing violence. If the Jewish community could not influence Canadian bureaucrats to save Jewish lives, they could at least turn inward and save Jewish children who lived in Western Canada. The next section of this chapter will explore exactly how the Orphanage gave its children a Jewish education.

### **Living Jewishly**

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage worked very hard to give its charges a Jewish education, including the after-school lessons, the choir, the on-site synagogue and the involvement of the Jewish community members in the running of the Orphanage. Judaism, however, is not a dry lesson plan, but is instead a practice interwoven within ordinary life. Did the Judaism taught and lived by the Orphanage carry forward into the children's lives as adults? At least for some of them, it did. After they graduated, some alumni of the Orphanage corresponded with the superintendents. Their religious lives during and after graduation were often discussed by both the superintendents and the children. A number of the teens expressed some discomfort at having left the religious life of the Orphanage and of Winnipeg. Others did not have the same

discomfort, and received a written admonishment from the superintendent for celebrating Christmas. The reports of the graduates were indications of whether or not the Orphanage had succeeded in ensuring that the next generation of the Jewish community were committed to remaining within the community.

### ***Jewish Life in the Orphanage***

There are hints throughout the Children's Files about the Jewish life in the Orphanage and they indicate that the institution was not very concerned with the details of *halachic* observance. The case of the QI family, for example, indicates that the Orphanage was not strict about observing Jewish laws around holiday observance. Miss QI was suffering from tuberculosis, health problems, total abandonment by her baby's father, and more worryingly, was a candidate for deportation back to Poland, as she had debts to the hospital and was sick with TB, thus rendering her a "public charge." The Jewish social worker and Osovsky both tried to help Mrs. QI, advising her to get the help of an immigration lawyer, and alerting the Jewish Immigration Aid Society to her case. But at some point she must have been very discouraged about her chances with the Canadian Immigration authorities, and she left town while her son was safely living in the Jewish Orphanage. About a year later, the Orphanage discovered that Miss QI had established a business in another Canadian city, and asked her to make arrangements for her son to be sent to her. The Orphanage knew a Winnipeg woman who was traveling to Miss QI's new city, and was willing to accompany the little boy on his train journey for the price of \$15. What is surprising is that the train trip that Miss QI arranged was planned so that her son and the woman escorting him arrived on the morning of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, when fasting, prayer and



abstaining from work is a large part of its observance. Traveling great distances is prohibited on Yom Kippur. Jewish holidays begin at sunset, so the technical observance of the holiday would have begun the night before QI and his train caregiver arrived. Neither Osovsky or the woman who agreed to take the child with her objected to this plan!<sup>430</sup> QI was reunited with his mother. Strict adherence to Jewish law was apparently of little importance to the Orphanage staff and these Jewish adults.

According to Reuben Slonim, this casual attitude to the details of religious observance was not unusual for Osovsky or the Orphanage as a whole. For example, Slonim tells a funny story about Rabbi Kahanovitch having visited the Orphanage in order to deliver a commemorative Sabbath morning service for the institution's anniversary, and after hearing the girls in the children's choir, delivered a blistering diatribe against the inclusion of female voices within the service (there is a complicated halachic discussion about the sexual quality of female voices).<sup>431</sup> Slonim says that Kahanovitch's sermon galvanized the community to support not a tightening up of religious observance in the Orphanage, but to embrace a liberalization of the Judaism, by allowing girls in the choir, shortening the grace after meals, and allowing boys to take their skullcaps off after blessings were said.<sup>432</sup> Slonim also notes that Osovsky himself was personally not observant, eating bacon when outside the Orphanage.<sup>433</sup> There is absolutely no evidence of a public struggle over religious observance in any other source connected to the Orphanage, and it's difficult to see how Slonim, who was a child at the time of this event, would have been aware of these struggles.

In fact, in a letter to one of the Orphanage boys who was studying for the rabbinate with the

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430 Record QI, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

431 Slonim, 30.

432 Slonim, 31.

433 Slonim, 188.

Bronfman Scholarship at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Chicago, Osovsky wrote to VF2, “If I suggested to you the course you are at present pursuing, it was because that it appeals to me personally more than anything else. If I could live over my own life once more this would be the course I would take, because I see immense possibilities in it.”<sup>434</sup> It seems that Osovsky had a complicated relationship to Judaism, encouraging boys to go into the rabbinate and yet not necessarily embracing observant Jewish practice for himself.

The children in the Orphanage sometimes found it difficult to maintain a spirituality during adolescence because of peer pressure. Wilder’s notes on UV4, from when she was about sixteen, observe that, “She had been fairly observant of the religious rites, pious and imbued with a serene faith; now she has become blasé, sophisticated. To my question why she does not pray and generally cash away her former attitude which we liked and became her so much [sic] her immediate answer was: 'because they are teasing me – making fun of me – as an old fashioned girl.’”<sup>435</sup> This statement is very interesting, as all of the Orphanage children had the same religious activities . Was it her classmates at public school who were teasing UV4 about her religiousness? Or did the other teens at the Orphanage see their religious upbringing and ritual as old fashioned?

For both staff and the children, celebrating the Jewish holidays provided the high point, especially the Passover seders (ceremonial dinners commemorating the exodus from Egypt and slavery). Both Osovsky and Wilder were very proud of their seders. In a letter to LQ1, who had

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434 Record VF1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

435 Record UV1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

grown and was studying in another city, Osovsky wrote proudly about that year's Passover celebrations:

Dear LQ1:

I was very happy to receive your letter, and intended to read it to the children at one of the Sedarim, but somehow it slipped my mind. However, I am going to read it tonight, and it will be just as appreciated. The decorations are still on, and the place is still wearing a holiday air.

We had the most wonderful 2 sedarim in the history of our Home. The Dining-Room was even more beautifully decorated than ever. A little change here and there; a little addition in one corner and another transformed the room into a place of beauty and joy.

Also, I have donated a big silver cup to be contested for by all the tables, and the table that gets the best marks would get the cup. On the cup appears the name of [illegible] and is kept by the winning group for the entire year. The contest was very close, the race between [child's name], [child's name] and [child's name], and [child's name], winning by one point.

All throughout the 2 evenings, a most wonderful, jovial spirit prevailed. Each table competed against one another for their behaviour, their merry-making, stunts etc. and that kept the pot boiling so that the evenings passed all too soon and the mornings set in. We had this year with us [alumna's name] and her Chosson [Yiddish for fiancé or groom]; [alumna's name] and her fiance, who she is going to marry in a couple of weeks; [alumna's name] and her Chosson. So you see, it was a regular family affair. By the way, your sister [name] was also there – but without a Chosson. Nevertheless, she was as beautiful as a doll, and very jolly.

Wishing you the best of success and please convey my kindest regards to [alumnus] and [alumnus].

I remain,

Very truly yours,

SUPERINTENDENT<sup>436</sup>

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436 Record LQ1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

Skits are not a traditional part of the Passover seder, nor are decorations or contests, although all can be incorporated easily into the night if the leader chooses, as it is a ritual based on story telling. A game where children find and then ransom a piece of matza (unleavened bread) is a traditional aspect of the evening, and must have been quite exciting with so many children running around the Orphanage. A ritual guide, the *Haggadah*, needs to be read, but it's unclear how much of it was completed, although the fact that the dinners went on until the morning may indicate that both the formal and informal parts of the seder were celebrated. The presence of alumni at the seders is also notable. The three alumnae who invited their fiances to the Orphanage seder were treating the Home like it was their family; in the Diaspora there are two nights of seders, and young couples often attend their families' seders on alternating nights. I found invitations to Passover seders sent to alumni throughout the Children's Records. For example, YR2 was invited to attend the Orphanage seder six years after he had aged out.<sup>437</sup>

Osovsky describes children as active participants in the seder. This contrasts with my grandmother's family seders in Toronto in the 1930s, which were described to me by her as being painfully boring. Only her father read the texts and only the boys chanted a few things that they had learned in Hebrew school. She and her sisters were only expected to help serve the food. But in the Orphanage, all children were indeed encouraged to participate and to be creative: for example, a Passover play written by OZ1 was included in his and his sister's file.<sup>438</sup> Another example of the children's involvement in the seder was in the file for YB1. She was a disobedient and dramatic teenager, and Wilder often found her obnoxious, writing in his notes on her that he

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437 Record YR1 and 2, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

438 Record OZ1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

wished he had more psychological training, presumably so that he could do a better job of understanding her. Wilder did not often strike the children, but when he did, it was the teenagers, as he had no patience for their rebelliousness and need for individual attention, and he did slap YB1 across the face at least once, according to his notes in the file. Still, when he realized that YB1 had a dramatic flair he gave her a leading role in the Passover seder, which he noted that she enjoyed very much.<sup>439</sup> Even less-favoured children were encouraged to enjoy the Passover seders at the Orphanage. Ensuring that every child had a positive experience of Jewish life would, it was hoped, counter the resolutely Christian atmosphere of contemporary Canada.

But Jewish culture includes more than Judaism. The Orphanage school also included lessons on two aspects of Jewish culture that were important to the Western Canadian Jewish community, Zionism and the Yiddish language. Zionism was expressed through in the Orphanage through the teaching of Hebrew in a manner that was different from the traditional Biblical Hebrew, but could instead be used as a spoken language. The common method in the twentieth century for teaching children to speak Hebrew, known as *Ivrit b'Ivrit*, was for instructors to use Hebrew when teaching all Jewish subjects. The Jewish Orphanage classes were supervised by the Talmud Torah school, the Jewish religious afternoon school which was located at the corner of Charles Street and Flora Avenue in the heart of the North End. This school, after having gone through struggles between Zionists and Orthodox parents, consistently taught *Ivrit b'Ivrit*, and promoted Mizrahi Zionism, or Zionist philosophy rooted in Orthodox Judaism.<sup>440</sup> Rabbi Kahanovitch was also committed to Mizrahi Zionism. The children of the Orphanage no doubt would have been

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439 Record YB1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

440 Herstein, 66.

included in the Jewish community's general celebration over the Balfour Declaration of 1917, when the British government pledged that its support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Beginning in 1918 and for a few years afterward the Jewish community held mass meetings and parties to mark the event.<sup>441</sup> The only description of how Zionism was taught in the Orphanage beyond Hebrew instruction comes from Reuben Slonim's memoir. Slonim describes how Osovsky was overjoyed with the opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925, and the Orphanage choir and band was booked to play the community celebration. Slonim described Osovsky giving a stirring speech at the celebration that moved the crowd to wild applause.<sup>442</sup> Slonim's memoir goes on to describe the philosophical differences between Osovsky and Mr. Frankel, the Judaics teacher, regarding Zionism, describing the two men had an intense discussion in the classroom. According to Slonim, neither of these men espoused a Labour Zionism, which is the philosophy which would have been taught at the other major Jewish school, the I. L. Peretz Folkshul.<sup>443</sup> What is clear is that the Jewish Orphanage experienced Zionism both within and without its walls, and that this Zionist expression was similar to that of many other Winnipeg Jewish children, especially those who belonged to more traditional families who sent their children to the Talmud Torah.

The children at the Peretz Shul learned Yiddish instead of the Ivrit b'Ivrit system of the Talmud Torah. Founded by parents who rejected religious Judaism in favour of socialism and Labour Zionism, the school taught Jewish culture based on the Yiddish language. The Folkshul parents were not comfortable with the religious texts taught by the Talmud Torah, and believed that mere

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441 Levine, 180-181.

442 Slonim, 128-133.

443 Levine, 151.

religious instruction would not encourage children to stay within the Jewish community.<sup>444</sup> By 1914 a Yiddish school was established in Winnipeg, and in 1915 it was named after the Yiddish author I. L. Peretz.<sup>445</sup> The Peretz Shul became the hub for all Yiddish activity in Winnipeg, engaging parents and other adults in evening classes and other cultural activities, and was so successful that in 1920 the school's influential *Mutter Farein* (mother's organization) began to offer a day school for its children.<sup>446</sup> In 1925, the Talmud Torah changed its policy to include Yiddish in its curriculum, as a response to the success of the Peretz Shul to attract so many members of the community.<sup>447</sup> The Jewish Orphanage did teach Yiddish, although from Maurice Gillman's description of his reunion with his father when the two had difficulty communicating, it's not clear if this instruction was effective.<sup>448</sup> This lack of Yiddish proficiency is notable because both Osovsky and Wilder, the longest-serving superintendents of the Orphanage, had been dedicated Yiddishists before they took on the job, Osovsky as a Yiddish journalist and dramatist, and Wilder as the editor of the *Israelite Press*. Slonim, however, remembers acting in Yiddish theatre productions, both in the Orphanage and as a child actor at the Yiddish Queen's Theatre.<sup>449</sup> As Yiddish culture was so strong in Winnipeg, and since the Orphanage children were integrated within the community, they benefited from access to this culture, even if the formal instruction in the language was weak.

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444 Herstein, 98-99.

445 Herstein, 103-104.

446 Herstein,

447 Herstein, 78.

448 Gillman, 14.

449 Slonim, 141-142.

## *Jewish Life after the Orphanage*

But what happened after a child left the Orphanage, returning to the Canadian world where Judaism was not viewed as normative? The alumni who wrote about Judaism to the superintendents usually did so because they missed the culture of their lives in the Orphanage. Some, however, were happy to get away from the atmosphere in the Home and explore mainstream Canadian culture. YB1, who did so well leading the Passover seder with her dramatic flair, later went to live with her mother when she needed to leave the rigid confines of the Orphanage. A Jewish social worker in her home city went to evaluate her mother and new stepfather, and did not recommend that the family be reunited, as Mrs. YB's new common-law husband was a non-Jew, and in addition they were living on relief. A local rabbi wrote to Wilder to echo these concerns. However, Wilder and YB1 both decided that the reunion was for the best, and YB1 rejoined her mother. Soon she was writing back to her siblings and friends in the Orphanage about her joy of finally being able to celebrate Christmas! This happened in the winter of 1939-1940, and Wilder was beside himself with alarm, writing to her,

Reading between the lines of your letters, I can sense a rather superficial regard concerning the your relationship with the Gentile or Jewish world. You understand, of course, that we are very much concerned that you should remain attached to and interested in Jewish life...

We cannot afford to lose any individual of quality now that so many of our best sons and daughters are being forcibly snatched away from us. It is a matter of life and death and personal comforts and conveniences must be disregarded and our whole life devoted to the one task of saving the Jewish people for the future. We are not living in an ideal world where each individual may be permitted to follow his own inclinations. We are put on the spot and forced to take a stand, with or against our own people.<sup>450</sup>

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450 Record YB1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



The Orphanage had been established to prevent just this eventuality – the loss of Jewish children to the seductive Christian world. YB1’s letters reached Wilder just as the Jewish community was consumed with worry about friends, family and communities that had just experienced the Nazi conquest of Poland. The stakes in the Orphanage’s main goal had been raised higher. This was probably too much pressure for a teen who had just been reunited with her mother to understand.

Many of the alumni of the Orphanage who wrote back to the staff did mention missing the Orphanage's Jewish life. This was the case with YX1, who had spent most of her childhood in the Orphanage when her father was convinced that he had to remove his children from the Home. He was working as a traveling salesman in the southern United States, and despite having a good income, as soon as his children arrived he dumped the younger two in a Jewish orphanage two states away from the town where he lay his head. He boarded YX1 with the other Jewish family in that town and took YX2 on the road with him. All the children were now miserable, and YX1 was particularly isolated. Her brother, YX2, wrote to his friends who were still in the Orphanage that he would like to “get back” at Osovsky for playing such a “dirty trick” on him, but bragged to the other children, “ We only have to pray twice a year there!”<sup>451</sup> But for YX1, life was so much smaller in her new town. Osovsky wrote to her to admonish her not to spend time with non-Jewish boys (in their correspondence, they were referred to as “English boys”), but there was no one else to spend time with. YX1 wrote sadly to Osovsky around Passover that they had had not much of a seder, and there was no “shiel” or shul (the Yiddish word for synagogue) in her community of two Jewish families.<sup>452</sup>

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451 Record YX1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

452 Record YX1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

The lack of Jewish practice in small rural towns was often mentioned in letters to the Orphanage by those sixteen and seventeen year olds who were sent to work as clerks and tutors for Jewish rural shopkeepers. For a teen to have aged out of the Orphanage meant that they had spent a large portion of their childhood surrounded by children their own age. Used to living in Winnipeg and socializing within the Jewish community, the loneliness of Jewish life in small towns was stark. Even if the teen was getting along with their foster family, living within a family was a new and disorienting experience. Often they didn't get along with their foster family, as they had no idea about normal behaviour in a family, especially regarding chores. The foster families had expectations of these teens -- that they would be diligent, grateful and good tutors -- that exceeded most of the teens' maturity level. If they had complaints about "their orphan," foster parents would write to the superintendent, whom they knew personally from his trips around the prairies every summer to solicit donations. Some of the letters between the superintendents and the teens were newsy, sometimes the letters contained a lecture from the superintendent.

When the teens complained in their letters, sometimes they noted how different Jewish life was outside the bubble of the Orphanage. ZY2, for example, who was finding it difficult teaching and working as a clerk, was terribly lonely and upset that she was unable to celebrate the Jewish holidays in a synagogue. Osovsky wrote back to her, admonishing her, "...the world does not like tears, a million dollars for a smile and a penny for a bushel of tears. So smile, smile and smile. Learn to be happy under all circumstances."<sup>453</sup> Some teens didn't necessarily miss the spiritual

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453 Record ZY1, 2 and 3, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

aspect of Jewish life in the Orphanage, but they did feel singled out as the only or one of the few Jews in their small towns. YJ had been brought to Winnipeg by his uncle as an orphaned refugee from a pogrom in Eastern Europe. As a teen YJ was sent to a rural town as a clerk, and soon found himself working in a store, being asked to slaughter and butcher animals, and living with people who only wanted to talk about farming, duck hunting, and drinking beer. Desperately bored, YJ sent Osovsky some money with the request that a valve trumpet and a music book be sent to him, which Osovsky paid for himself, sending YJ both the items he asked for and returning the money. YJ recounted in a letter how he tried to explain anti-Jewish discrimination to these farmers, which as an orphan of a pogrom he had personally experienced. YJ also related a funny story, marred by his use of a then-common slur for a Chinese person. When he went into the local Chinese restaurant for a meal, and the owner offered him a pork dish, all the customers answered together, “He won’t eat it!”<sup>454</sup> It must have been very difficult for a child who had had to escape anti-Jewish violence to feel so isolated, with his Jewishness so marked and commented upon. All the work done by the Orphanage to engage YJ in his Jewish identity became a source of pain for him when he was so far from the community.

Even in Chicago, in a Jewish setting, the Jewish education that the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage provided was deeper than that experienced by other Jews. LT3 was an Orphanage success story, reported on in the *Jewish Post* for going to Chicago to train as a nurse in the Jewish hospital. At the hospital, her Orphanage and public school education served her well: she completed the nursing course, and during her time in Chicago she was a member of the hospital choir and orchestra. She also informed Osovsky that at the Jewish hospital’s staff seder, she was the only

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454 Record YJ, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

“sister” (nurse) able to ask the *feer kashes* or the four questions, a moment in the ceremony when four traditional questions are chanted or sung by the youngest child.<sup>455</sup> During this time, Jewish women were often not given a formal Jewish education, as was my grandmother’s experience. By giving girls leadership roles in the Passover seder and sending them to work as Jewish tutors, the Orphanage, possibly without much consideration, gave women religious leadership roles that are now seen as normal but in the 1920s, 30s and 40s were unusual. The Jewish Orphanage’s focus on Jewishly educating its children meant that many of them were able to access more of their religious culture than may have been possible for them if they had remained within their families.

## **Conclusion**

It’s possible that many of the children who lived in the Orphanage, most of whom were there temporarily, didn’t think much about the Judaism they experienced there. The effect of living in the Orphanage for the bulk of a childhood, however, seemed to have given some children an especially close attachment to Judaism. Significantly, the moment in time in which the Jewish Orphanage was operating imbued the Orphanage’s mission to retain children in the Jewish People as of utmost importance. Five of the families in the Children’s Records had suffered the loss of one or both parents due to a pogrom in Eastern Europe, and during the 1930s and 40s the Canadian Jewish community was struggling to convince the Canadian Immigration department to crack open the country’s doors to allow in refugees from the Nazis. This existential dread influenced the decisions that the Orphanage made around its press presence in Winnipeg, how it

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455 Record LT1, 2, 3 and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.

determined the definition of a Jewish child eligible for their help, and the Judaism lived within the Orphanage.

The staff and the children of the Orphanage carried a heavy burden on their slim shoulders. In addition to doing their jobs of running an institution, helping struggling families or doing the intense work of growing up, the Orphanage also acted as one of the largest sources of good press for the Winnipeg Jewish community. There was a need for the Orphanage to do this work, as the 1930s had an antisemitic Canadian Prime Minister, an antisemitic Immigration Deputy Minister, and an antisemitic Alberta government – Jewish communities needed as much positive news as they could get. The charm of Jewish children singing in choirs, the normality of Jewish women holding teas and bridge parties as fundraiser, and the reputation boost for Jewish leaders to be named as board members, turned this Jewish charity into a vehicle of Canadianization. Inside the Orphanage, the focus by staff was on retaining as many Jewish children as possible, which meant that they stretched the definition of exactly who was a Jew. It's possible that the practice of allowing children without a Jewish mother was inherited from Eastern Europe, or that it was an innovation in response to the unique conditions of life in Canada; whatever it was, it seems that the Orphanage superintendents had the support of the Jewish community in their decisions. The child-centred aspect of Jewish religious life in the Orphanage was perhaps the most important aspect of fulfilling its goal of retaining Jewish children. After the Orphanage, for some of the alumni, Jewish life in other places seemed to have felt flat compared to the joyful holidays in the Home. It seems that the Jewish life in the Orphanage was different than the life lived by other Canadian Jews, and more available to girls and more exciting than the Judaism the children may have received if they had lived within their families.

The Orphanage and the children who lived within it excelled at performing Judaism, both for themselves, the Jewish community as a whole, and for the non-Jewish readers of the local newspapers. This Judaism was attractive, child-centred and existed within the walls of the Orphanage. Founded as a response to the pressure created by the existence of Christian orphanages, the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage countered with a Judaism that was translatable for non-Jewish audiences and for its own children.

## Conclusion

The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was more than a place that housed children. As this dissertation has argued, it was an instrument founded by the Jewish community to stake a claim in the modern Canadian state. The Orphanage was also a place to rescue Jewish children away from the same state, a place to nurture children and a place to safely abandon them so that they would receive a standard of care unavailable in any other institution or in their own homes. The Orphanage was also a tool of the Jewish community that allowed it to subvert or collaborate with the needs of municipal, provincial and federal authorities as it saw fit. Staff and volunteers in the Orphanage tried to create a loving Jewish home for the children of the western Canadian provinces, but sometimes the Home was not successful, and both abuse and neglect occurred, occasionally due to governmental intransigence. The challenges faced by the families who were allied with the Orphanage could seem insurmountable, as they suffered from intense poverty, illness and insecure employment, and their housing was often drafty, difficult to find and insecure. Many of these families were immigrants, having come from Eastern Europe or other parts of North America, unused to institutions like the Orphanage, but familiar with the traditional concept of *tzedakah*, or communal justice-based charity. But if the Orphanage spoke about *tzedakah* to its Jewish community, it achieved its goals by also working well with municipal and justice authorities, and with approaching its *tzedakah* by utilizing the ideas of modern social welfare.

As I have argued, this claim of being on a participant in modern social welfare orphanage work was short-lived, as Jewish orphanages in Winnipeg only existed for 35 years. Some parents used

the Orphanage as a way to foist responsibility for their children onto the elites of the Jewish community, and some took the help that the Orphanage offered with thanks, and collected their children as soon as they were able to do so. The adults who ran the Orphanage used it for their own personal purposes as well, either to wield power over children or on behalf of children. The Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was first conceived in the early 1910s, when there were very few social supports for families, but as the decades went on, municipal and provincial governments began to fund, oversee and legislate social welfare services that helped poor families. Part of the pressure to create and expand these services happened because charities like the Orphanage were clearly meeting a need, and their staffers could present a professional assessment of the state of families in the province. But as fewer and fewer families needed the Orphanage, its purpose became unclear. Internationally, the idea that most children were happiest living in a family and not in an institution overtook the popularity of orphanages at the same time that the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage was at its heyday in the 1920s. The Jewish social workers, at first allied with the Orphanage and working as its least-publicized staffers, eventually took over the jobs of evaluating families and finding them the help they needed to keep their families together, replacing the Orphanage as the Winnipeg Jewish community's social service agency. The work of child-welfare was uncoupled from the expensive and challenging task of housing children in one building. A one-stop agency for Jewish social services was established. Different tools were called in to work with a more centralized and professional Canadian social services field.

The founders of the Jewish Orphanage did not know that they would be cooperating with municipal and provincial authorities when two different childcare institutions were opened by two groups of Jews, but it did become one of the main functions of the final institution. It took



five years for these two groups to agree to merge, despite having plenty of children to care for. The dispute was over naming rights, as one benefactor wanted the orphanage named after his mother, and the other group refused. Only the Esther Robinson Orphanage, which had the backing of the wealthy benefactor, had any provincial or civic recognition; the Canadian Jewish Orphanage which was completely volunteer-run, had little and left few traces. During the time between amalgamation in 1917 until the discussion about closing the Orphanage that began in the late 1930s, it seems that the Western Canadian Jewish community was happy with its method of dealing with families in crisis. Many of the families associated with the Orphanage needed the help of the Orphanage staff in order to arrange childcare and to navigate the Winnipeg social service network. The network of services which were available often had arcane rules and a changing cast of characters, and the Jewish social worker could improve the quantity and quality of assistance a family received by persuading the workers at the Social Welfare Council or the Children's Bureau for a little extra time or funding. In addition, the social worker could call on the United Hebrew Relief, the National Council of Jewish Women or the Knesset Israel Sisterhood to augment what a family received from the municipal agencies. This negotiation was possible because the municipal government organizations, such as the Children's Bureau, knew that the Jewish community would be willing to accept taking on charity cases and fundraise themselves. The Canadian state had told the Jewish community that it would be responsible for caring for its own people when the refugees arrived in 1882, and the Jewish community remembered this obligation.

The superintendents and the Jewish social workers, especially Osovsky, Wilder and Finkelstein, had extensive social networks within the Jewish community and built strong professional

relationships with the staff of the municipal social service sector and the Juvenile Court. Osovsky and Wilder knew every Jewish family from Fort William, Ontario to Victoria, British Columbia. Finkelstein, with her roots that stretched back to the founding of the Winnipeg Jewish community, occasionally found herself having had friendly relationships with the families that she helped or the employers whom she approached for jobs for the alumni. Perhaps these connections helped personalize the families to these staffers, who were, after all, running an institution that was funded partially by governments. But the family connections could go both ways, making the Orphanage less of an organ of the modern Canadian state and more of an informal Jewish boarding house. Families sometimes could feel like they were entitled to abandon their children or at least to use the Orphanage's childcare to make their adult lives easier, because they knew the staff and they knew the Orphanage. Children, especially teens, sometimes found living in the Orphanage unpleasant or unbearable, but could only use the limited power of petty rebellion to influence their own lives. Often teens were sent to live with the families that the superintendents knew from their travels throughout Western Canada, extending the Orphanage's reach into the rural hinterlands by shipping out their graduates to rural shopkeepers.

The Orphanage was able to broker between the state and the Jewish community because its staff and governors were intimately aware of the Jewish context that surrounded its children and families. The children often came from families that had suffered from antisemitic violence, familial violence, chronic illness, unstable employment and dire poverty. Some of these situations were related to the conditions in Winnipeg and rural communities, and others were unique to the Jewish community. Most of the children only stayed for a short period of time until their mother could recover from illness or childbirth or a combination of the two. This is why it was possible

to close the Orphanage in the 1940s, as the families who had needed some temporary childcare or housekeeping help were able to provide that care themselves once wages rose with the war, and government services, like relief, improved access, and immigrant families stabilized.

If families benefited from increasing government support, it was also true that they had suffered from government neglect. Zoning rules are a class issue, and as many of the Orphanage families were working class Winnipeggers, they had lived with the decisions made by the business elites of former generations who had condemned the North End to terrible housing and infrastructure. The provincial governments played their parts as well, limiting services in a fear of incurring deficits, and sticking to borders and boundaries that meant nothing to people trying to make decisions about the best place to live. National boundaries and immigration policies kept the Orphanage families in a state of anxiety, preventing them from reuniting with family members, getting the care they needed, or keeping them in fear of deportation back to nightmarish situations.

Inside the gleaming, modern Orphanage, life was complicated. The food was good, the building was pleasant, fire proofed and it had a beautiful garden. The children received a public school education, and valiant attempts were made to find them a trade or even to provide them with further education. There were Hebrew lessons, a synagogue, a choir, and a band with music lessons, so children left knowing both their religious culture and how to play an instrument or sing. The boys were given a simple bar mitzvah, and if they wanted, could pursue rabbinic training, a luxury which would have been denied other Jewish working class boys in Winnipeg. But there was no protection in the Orphanage from assault or sexual predation, as the Orphanage

gave the children no sexual education, ignored bullying and was able to provide no psychological treatment for the very troubled inmate. The modern facade hid the fact that neither the Jewish Orphanage nor the modern state that supported it could adequately stop abuse or help to treat the trauma it generated.

If the Orphanage was founded to funnel children to the Jewish community through the organs of the Canadian state, it had a side effect of granting the adults who ran the Orphanage prestige, access to children and satisfying work. Both Aaron Osovsky and Pearl Finkelstein were able to get their jobs after volunteering with the Orphanage and with other organizations. Although social work and education were in the process of professionalizing, that trend missed Orphanage staff by a few decades. Osovsky took his new position and used it to extend his social network and to use his power over children and parents. He made the Orphanage a truly Western Canadian as well as a Winnipeg institution, working well with the Juvenile Court and social services and with the donors across Western Canada. Within the Orphanage, though, he was an abuser, lashing out in anger against children and women with no penalties for his behaviour. Osovsky forgot that he lacked absolute power and that it was the elites who worked as the Board of Directors who had the power to make sure he left. Finkelstein used her position with as the head of the Girls Auxiliary to jump into the paid position as the Jewish social worker. Although she lacked training, she worked hard on behalf of the Orphanage families and the teen alumni, trying her best to get them the care that they needed, and because she was untrained, she seemed to avoid excessive consideration of the families' "morality." Finkelstein was able to work in her career for about a decade before her marriage. The Orphanage granted these adults a career, and gave board members like David Spivak the chance to be involved in many children's lives. This power

system which benefited adults existed even though the Orphanage insisted that it existed solely to help children.

In the framing of my research I considered Gramsci's ideas about the use of culture by elites to achieve a kind of consent to their hegemony by the non-elites. In this construction, intellectual workers bridge the gap between the State and civil society and the masses of people appear to subject themselves to be governed by the elite, a relationship then enforced by the State. The social workers at the Orphanage worked in the capacity as "intellectuals", enforcing cultural expectations; certainly Osovsky and Wilder, with their previous experience as journalists, acted as such "intellectuals."<sup>456</sup> But I have also argued against Franca Iacovetta, who saw the post-war Canadian social work field as being solely assimilationist, that the Jewish Orphanage social workers sought to help their clients with careful consideration of their the mental health and the cultural backgrounds.<sup>457</sup> The Children's Records of the Jewish Orphanage reveal that the staff of this social service organization sometimes actively resisted Canadianization of their clients, and instead of blindly enforcing the dictates of the State, quietly subverted borders and Canadian norms, all in order to ensure the continuing Jewish education of its children. But, echoing the findings of Lisa Mar in her work on Chinese Canadians elites, the Jewish Orphanage staff often acted as brokers between the State and the Jewish community, especially when it helped members of its community evade deportation.<sup>458</sup> Following Conzen, Gerber and their colleagues, the establishment, maintenance and referencing of the Orphanage in the newspapers was a method of reinventing and renegotiating Jewish identity in Winnipeg.<sup>459</sup> The "orphanage" in Canada was a

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456 Gramsci, 12.

457 Iacovetta, 67-73.

458 Mar, 5-7.

459 Conzen, Gerber, et. al., 3-41.

Christian institution; by adopting and promoting their own orphanages, modern Jews were able to stretch Jewish culture so that it could fit within the culture of the Western elites who ran the charitable and governmental sectors.

In the end, though, this conclusion needs nuance. Methodologically, the bulk of this thesis was based on the Children's Records, documents which were created by the adults who ran the Orphanage and the Children's Bureau. This reliance arose in part because when I placed an article in the *Jewish Post and News* asking for oral histories of the Orphanage, none of the alumni responded, even though other people in the community told me that they had read the article. I believe that for many of the now elderly alumni, examining their time in the Orphanage or the family crises that preceded it was not appealing. It is easy to dismiss the experiences of the children of the Jewish Orphanage as being historically unimportant. After all, the children of this Orphanage suffered far less than children who were housed in other institutions. Some social commentators occasionally posit that since the current child protection system of mostly foster care is very broken, maybe institutional childcare settings are the way forward. After conducting this research, I believe that even the community-supported and relatively open Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage still held dangers for children. The children of the Orphanage gained many things, but they were also exposed to abuse by other adults and children, and at the same time, not given adequate exposure to the outside world. This was not due to malice or ill-intention, as the Jewish communities of Western Canada wanted the very best for its children and refused to leave them at the mercy of the Canadian state.

For some children, the Orphanage gave them a better life than they would have had with uninterested extended family, their disconnected or abusive parents or foster parents. But for some of the alumni, the Orphanage hadn't prepared them well for the outside world. Their complaints were that they had had too little knowledge of real life, and hadn't been taught how to think or manage for themselves. The conversation that the social worker Ruth Farber had with three alumnae in 1948, when the Orphanage was closing, was quoted in Chapter 5, but I will cite the full text here. Please note that the girls thought that they were being cleared out of the Orphanage so that it could house the Holocaust refugee children who stayed in the Orphanage while their foster homes were being found; actually, the Orphanage was closing anyway, and they were close to the age of being placed out. They would have been forced to leave even if the Holocaust orphans were not arriving.

[Alumna] soon became the spokesman for the three girls. She complained to W. [worker] that all the children who had formerly lived in the Home were now being neglected by the Agency. Whenever she came up to see Miss Tessler, who is her W. she was told to come some other time. All the girls agreed that it was necessary to take care of the refugees who had just come to this country, but it was not necessary to neglect the foster children as a result.

Then the girls spoke of their life in the Home and the way it was different from living in a foster home. In the Home all their needs were taken care of, everything from laundry to food. They always had clothing, though used, and so they felt no different from all the children who lived with them. Also they were not taught to think for themselves, and were told that whatever a superior said was correct. This was the condition of these children when they left the Home. They were dependent on others to do their work and thinking for them.

What these girls were angry and disappointed about was the fact that they were never told what to expect when they came out of the Home. As [alumna] said "We came out of the Home and were faced by a big strange world." She said that when in the Home they had their small group of friends and when visitors came they were given full instructions on how to conduct themselves. But when taken out of the Home they were frightened of everyone. LI3 said they when she first came out of the Home and had to meet someone she would either run away or could hardly say anything. She said that 'no wonder people think we are lazy, because we weren't told how to do things.' When she had to wash her

clothes for the first time she didn't know what to do and her foster mother thought she didn't want to do it.

'People think we're different' they all chorused. They felt that people, who the girls referred to as 'they' didn't understand them. 'They' only do things for us because they pity us. The girls agreed that they were insecure and needed a lot of understanding. But due to their treatment they have learned to trust only those children who lived in the Home with them and going through the same things as they were.

They all felt the Home or anybody who took care of them made no effort to keep families together.

In [alumna]'s case she was suddenly made responsible for her sisters' behaviour and yet she was not prepared to handle this responsibility.

'We are never given a second chance.' They felt they wanted to learn, but were not allowed to learn by their mistakes. Nor did the girls feel they had anybody to talk to. For example they were never given any instructions on sexual matters. This was quite evident from the manner in which the girls described this. [Alumna] said instructions on 'the body' 'when a girl gets bed', 'when boys and girls go out and what to do.'

Now the girls wanted security and they felt they hadn't found it. That is why they kept to themselves, didn't want any ties with anyone, went for walks alone, they had to think things out for themselves because they found that was the only thing they could do. They wanted to keep close only to the people they could trust – the children they had lived with in the Home."<sup>460</sup>

I thought it was important to end this thesis with the final say given to children who had lived in the Orphanage. Reading social service records is emotionally troubling, as they present an intimate look into the life of a family in crisis. They are problematic sources, as they are constructed through the perspective of social workers, who in these records wrote about themselves in the third person, and it was easy to forget that they had a subjective author. Because most sources were written by adults, it was easy to overlook the lives lived by children within the four walls of the Orphanage, so I was happy to find the above source, even if it was

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460 Record LI1, 2, 3, and 4, Jewish Child and Family Service Holdings, Jewish Orphanage of Western Canada Records.



recorded by a social worker. The three girls paint a complicated picture of the security and plenty that had been provided by the Orphanage: it left children feeling uncomfortable outside the institution, where the rules were less clearly communicated, and more was expected from them.

I am also hampered by my own bias: my grandfather was raised by Norwood, a Jewish orphanage in London, England. He was profoundly grateful to Norwood, just as many alumni of the Winnipeg Jewish Orphanage were grateful, and so I grew up believing orphanages were wonderful places, despite having seen the movie version of the musical *Annie* too many times. Giving children an education in their cultural inheritance, as well as access to a general education, music lessons and help transitioning to adult life, were the significant achievements of the Orphanage. Giving poor families help negotiating with the modern state and even helping them work around the hard borders of North America assisted these families to cope and often to reunite. But the Orphanage was also sustained by what it gave to its staff, volunteers and the Jewish community as a whole, over and above what it gave to the children and families who needed it. When fewer families needed the Orphanage, the community struggled to accept its closing, even though it meant that smaller numbers of children were in need of shelter and more families were able to stay together. This was because the Canadian Jews of the Western provinces were emotionally invested in the Orphanage's image as a modern, up-to-date and yet still very Jewish aspect of their community. But this very useful tool could no longer justify its primary existence, and the loss was not felt by the children of the Western Canadian Jewish community, more of whom were able to live at home with their families.

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