



# “Immigrants established JIAS so that JIAS could establish immigrants”

## OUR HISTORY

This has been the motto of JIAS since its inception. For almost 100 years JIAS has acted as the Jewish community’s arm and soul helping immigrants when they arrive in Canada.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Canada’s Jewish population totaled just over 16,000. On the other side of the world life had become unbearable for the Jews of Eastern Europe. Trade barriers, denial of credit and heavy taxation were demoralizing the population. Church-sponsored anti-Semitism, blood-libels and scapegoat politics that bordered on fanaticism led to the massacre of Jews in Kishinev, Russia in 1903. And after the failure of the Revolution of 1905, pogroms occurred in about 600 villages and cities throughout the Russian Empire. Jews continued to flee Eastern Europe, as they had since the pogroms began in the Russian Empire in 1881. Many of those Jews immigrated to Canada.

“In the pre-World War I period,” wrote prominent Canadian Samuel Bronfman, “immigration to Canada meant escape from the hell of Czarist Russia; it meant surcease from the torments of European oppression; it meant economic opportunity denied under the repressive laws of the vast Russian lands. Also after a time it meant [the reuniting] of families and proximity to relatives and friends in the United States. It became a symbol. Few were the families who were not called upon to assist their kinfolk to pay steerage passage fares. Few were the homes that did not receive letters from Europe requesting help in

emigration plans. All were touched by the plea for immigration possibilities.”

The pogroms in 1918 and 1919 in Russia and sporadically in the Ukraine through the 1920’s saw tens of thousands of Jewish men, women and children massacred, sparking the largest exodus of Jews since the Spanish Inquisition. Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS) records show that despite Canada’s stringent immigration policy, the Jewish populations swelled to 121,000 after World War I.

By 1919, with the pleas of East European Jews (usually family members or friends) who were suffering the ravages of war and pogroms, the question of immigration was at the top of the Canadian Jewish community’s list of priorities. To facilitate the entry of a beleaguered European Jewry, Canadian Jews had to combat restrictive immigration quotas that listed three categories for countries of origin – preferred, non-preferred and other. Most Jews came from non-preferred countries.

In the spring of 1919, the first plenary assembly of the newly established Canadian Jewish Congress in Montreal passed a resolution calling for the creation of central Canadian bureau for Jewish immigration. It was further resolved that an office for the Jewish Immigrants Aid Society (as it was originally named) be open in Quebec. With the founding of JIAS, the Canadian Jewish community recognized the need to create an effective instrument both to influence Canadian immigration policy and to cope with the increased demands of immigrant aid work.



1921 Immigrants arriving at Halifax. Included in the group is Jewish historian David Rome (Courtesy, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, JIAS Collection)

Moreover, through JIAS, Canadian Jewry was perpetuating the long tradition of Jewish self-help contained in the notion that one Jew is responsible for another, as well as giving institutional expression to the halachic dicta of saving a Jewish life (pikuach nefesh) and redeeming the captives (pidyon hashevuim). Thus, by establishing JIAS, the Canadian Jewish community was acting not only in the interest of immigrants, but also in the long term interest of the Jewish people.



## The Early Years of JIAS

In August 1920, S. Bernard Haltrecht, a young university graduate, who had made a special study of the Canadian immigration problem, was appointed to administer the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society in Montreal and at the ports. Mr. Haltrecht described JIAS' first months in Montreal as follows:

"There is a certain amount of romance attached to the early history of almost every great movement or institution.



S. B. Haltrecht, first Director of Jewish Immigrant Aid Society.

When the Society was first established, it had no home, no headquarters, no [place] in which to meet or to perform its required work. The Secretary and General Manager had his first office in a corner of the Baron de Hirsch Institute. The Zionist Headquarters offered one of its rooms as a private office for the Manager, while the Canadian Jewish Congress, which shared with the Mizrahi a joint office on the top floor of the Molson's Bank Building, offered the services of [its] stenographer for an hour or two a day.

With the arrival of a great number of new immigrants [in the fall of 1920], restrictions were rigidly enforced. As a result, many immigrants found themselves detained and in danger of deportation to the countries from

which they had made every effort to flee. Appeals had to be made on their behalf. To deport them was equivalent to sending them to a certain death. It is very difficult to realize the magnitude of the work as well as the multiplicity of details that the Society performed in those days.

With the coming of the fall and winter of 1920-1921, the work of the Society was extended. When the Port of Quebec closed, several hundred [detainees] were transferred to Montreal. At the same time, the Port of Saint John opened and boats began to come there as well as to Halifax, bringing many immigrants, a good portion of whom were rejected for non-compliance with small technicalities of the Immigrant Act.

The detainees, although held for no fault of their own (they all innocently boarded the steamer and paid their regular fare, being informed that the doors of Canada were open to them), had to suffer not only the inconvenience and unpleasantness of involuntary detention, but were forced to pay for their board and room at \$1.50 a day which was later increased to \$1.75. The government held the steamship companies responsible for payment of such maintenance expenses in case immigrants were deported without paying what was due.

The companies demanded, in addition to the \$20 that the government required as a

deposit from each detained immigrant whose case was appealed to Ottawa, a case deposit or satisfactory guarantee from responsible



Ledger pages listing some of the earliest JIAS assisted immigrants. (Courtesy Canadian Jewish Congress Archives JIAS Collection)

persons that the maintenance for any length of time would be paid, otherwise they insisted on having the immigrant deported immediately the \$20 originally deposited was used up.

The Society took upon itself a responsibility, the magnitude of which was not foreseen, for the cost [of maintaining those Jews who appealed]. It did not take many months before the bills from the steamship companies amounted to over \$10,000. It was an enormous burden, almost impossible to carry. Many have criticized the Society for being too liberal. Such criticism may find some justification, but when dealing with human lives, we cannot always be dictated to by logic."

## Incorporated in 1922

On August 30, 1922, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada was legally incorporated, with a \$600 donation that covered its initial operating expenses. JIAS had its headquarters at Notre Dame Street in Montreal. It established branches and dispatched agents to ports and railroad stations across the country - wherever Jews had settled. JIAS' presence was soon felt.

Mr. Haltrecht describes an incident that took place in 1921. A ship arriving in Halifax with a Jewish passenger list of 156 had every one of them rejected and ordered deported back to the countries they had fled. The Society made intensive efforts to prevent them from being sent back to "the hell from which they had barely escaped with their lives." Many were finally admitted under special permits.

By 1923, immigration had slackened, and in that year regulations became even more stringent, virtually prohibiting the entry of Jews from eastern Europe. JIAS reduced its staff to a minimum, closed the Montreal headquarters and rented smaller offices.

Mr. Haltrecht describes an occasion in 1923 in reference to which he says, "Actual rescue work stands out in the annals of our history." Thousands of Jewish refugees, who had escaped from pogroms in the Ukraine, had

found temporary refuge in Romania. However the Romanian government had demanded that either they left voluntarily or they would be deported back to where they had come from - which meant certain death. The doors of almost every country were closed to them, and "their distress was indescribable."



Jewish Immigrants from the SS Asia arriving in Halifax 1924 (Courtesy, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, JIAS Collection)

The Chairman and Secretary of the Canadian Committee of the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) hurried to Ottawa to plead the case before the Minister of Immigration. The government granted permits for several thousand refugees to enter Canada, at the rate of 100 a week; on the understanding that JCA would ensure that none of them became public charges. Haltrecht called this "a noble act on the part of our Government, which was so unselfishly performed for no other than humanitarian reasons," and would, he said, "be deeply engraved in the hearts of the Jewish

people."

Earlier, when the number of Jewish immigrants was low, calls had been made for the Society to be discontinued. Cuts in staff had been made, but fortunately, the skeleton of the organization had remained. Had it not been for the existence of the Society, the refugees could not have been so successfully looked after and absorbed.

The prospect of the influx of immigrants led to the reopening of the Notre Dame Street headquarter in Montreal, and the reorganization and revitalization of branches in Toronto, Winnipeg and elsewhere across the country. The wave of Russian Jewish refugees, who had been stranded in Romania, lasted from December 1923 to November 1924, during which time 3,400 people entered

Canada.

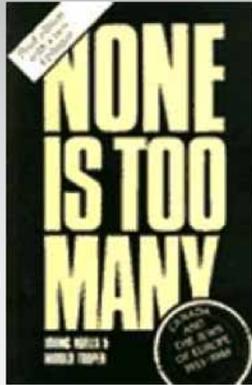
Mr. Haltrecht, unaware of the tragedy to come, ended his 1925 report optimistically: "With sympathetic co-operation and proper assistance from community, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada can be expected not only to fill the simple purpose of affording temporary relief to immigrants, but to encourage the further rescue by immigration of our benighted people from lands like Russia, Poland and Romania from the blight of persecution which threatens to annihilate them."

## Pre-war rescue efforts

By the mid to late twenties, ominous clouds again appeared over Europe with the rapid rise of the Nazi party in Germany. In Canada, the Great Depression of the 1930s brought rigorous new immigration laws stipulating that only British subjects, US citizens and a few privileged nationals were allowed entry.

The timing could not have been worse for the Jews. In March 1933, only weeks after Hitler was appointed Chancellor, an urgent telegram arrived from Paris, pleading with JIAS to persuade Canadian authorities to admit German refugees. Every appeal fell on deaf ears. "The only hope for admission is to apply on a case-by-case basis," the Minister of Immigration advised. JIAS frantically began tracing Canadian relatives for German Jews, and German relatives for Canadian Jews. They prepared documentation for Canadian sponsors as well as for German Jews visiting Canada, who were terrified to return. The Nuremberg Laws, passed on September 15, 1935, legally disenfranchised Jews. Their only chance of escape was emigration.

In 1936, a JIAS delegation met with Canadian



"None is too Many" by Irving Abella and Harold Troper explores the Canadian Government's stand on Jewish immigration prior to the Holocaust

immigration authorities to request the admission of 100 Jewish families - with a promise to disperse them throughout the country. Anti-refugee forces created a clamour, and the request was refused. Instead, the authorities permitted JIAS to assist only German Jews who could bring capital with them, or whose relatives were in a financial position to receive them. So, at a time, when emigration from Germany was still possible, Canada's doors were shut. By the end of 1937, 140,000 Jews had fled Germany. Of these, 11,005 - a tiny fraction of Canada's total immigration figure - were admitted to Canada.

The outbreak of war brought immigration to a standstill. JIAS, however, busied itself making plans for the mass migrations that would come at the end of the war. JIAS and Congress became the lobbyists for a post-war rescue, while United Relief Agencies took on the responsibility of financing refugees and programs. A nation-wide list of European relatives was organized in preparation for a post-war search.

## Resettling survivors

Rescue, resettlement and rehabilitation became the theme of JIAS' post-Holocaust efforts. As the war drew to an end, JIAS and Congress prevailed on the federal government to revise its closed-door policy, and records show that the government agreed to "participate in the rescue and resettlement of Displaced Persons (D.P.s) from the emergency camps of post-war Europe." In 1947, the World War II War Orphans Project came to fruition,

when the admission of one thousand orphans was granted by an Order-in-Council, subject to inter alia guarantees regarding reception, placement and public charge liabilities, all of which JIAS undertook. A total of 1,116 children were brought to Canada.



Jewish Orphans from Europe (photo courtesy Ontario Jewish Archives, JIAS Collection)

Joseph Kage, a student at McGill School of Social Work who had himself arrived from Minsk in 1934, agreed to join JIAS for a year



Dr. Joseph Kage, National Executive Vice-President of JIAS Canada until his retirement in 1983.

to help with the project. He stayed with JIAS as National Executive Vice-President until 1983 dedicating himself to helping new Jewish immigrants and making their integration journey a positive experience. Dr Kage was among the first professionals in the field to be engaged by JIAS. He occupied the position of Director of Social Services, National Executive Director and was subsequently named National Executive

Vice President. He remained with JIAS until his retirement in 1983, overseeing many waves of Jewish immigrants and refugees. He authored the book "With Faith and Thanksgiving: The Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigrant Aid Effort in Canada (1760-1960).

A trickle of survivors was admitted when JIAS helped immigrants from displaced-persons camps in Europe to resettle across Canada. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the gates of Canada finally opened.



Holocaust Survivors Arriving in Halifax (courtesy of Ontario Jewish Archives, JIAS Collection)

### Post-War immigration

From 1947, for about five years, Canada experienced a period of expanding immigration. This was partly due to the labour needs of the Canadian economy and partly due to Canada's undertaking to help solve the serious refugee issue resulting from World War II.

In 1952, new immigration regulations were introduced, curtailing the admissible categories of immigrants and especially affecting refugees and unsponsored groups. There were still thousands of stateless persons in Europe - victims of the war - who needed to be resettled.

In the spring of 1953, several important changes in the admissibility of immigrants were introduced. Three categories of immigrants were established: (1) sponsored cases, (2) approved church programs and (3) open-placement cases.



Young boy with CARE parcel August 1948 (courtesy of Ontario Jewish Archives JIAS collection)



JIAS language class, Montreal 1950's (photograph courtesy Ontario Jewish Archives, JIAS collection)

## Fleeing the Hungarian Revolt

The revolt in Hungary in 1956 brought approximately 30,000 Hungarians to Canada, a small percentage of whom were Jewish. JIAS resettled a number of families, some of whom stayed in JIAS homes for a short while.



Hungarian Jewish Congregation Chanukah Party 1958. Many of the children are receiving the first Jewish education of their lives. (Photo courtesy Ontario Jewish Archives, JIAS Collection)

## Arriving from North Africa

The year 1956 also marks the beginning of the arrival in Canada of Jewish immigrants from North Africa. By that time, Dr. Joseph Kage, the Executive Director, had held several meetings with Morocco's royal family to negotiate the exit of thousands of Jews. By the end of 1973, Canada had received 39 Jewish immigrants from Algeria, 270 from Tunisia and 6,605 from Morocco. To date, about 25,000

North African Jews have immigrated to Canada through JIAS.



Moroccan immigrants arriving in Canada  
(Photo courtesy of Ontario Jewish Archives, JIAS Collection)

## Soviet troops invade Czechoslovakia

When Soviet and satellite troops invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, some Jewish citizens, who were vacationing outside their country, sought refuge in Canada. The vast majority of these refugees were professionals and highly educated people, the elite of the country. They were all allowed into Canada, and JIAS was involved in resettling some of them. Some 150 to 200 families came to Canada from Czechoslovakia.

## Anti-Semitism recurs in Poland

After World War II, fewer than 5,000 Jews remained in Poland. Nonetheless, in 1970 the Jews were once again blamed for the economic woes of the country. Fleeing the outbreak of anti-Semitism at the time, Jews escaped to Rome and Vienna. Through a joint effort with HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) in New York, some families came into Canada.

## Soviet Jews freed

The early 1970's saw the beginning of the migration of Soviet Jews, culminating in the largest mass migration of Jews since



Russian Immigrants arriving in Canada  
(Photo courtesy of Ontario Jewish Archives, JIAS collection)



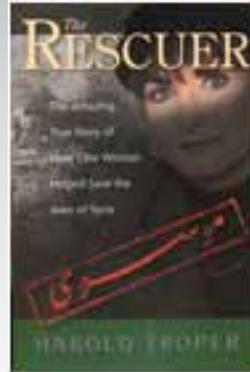
World War II. Dr. Kage and Michael Herling, an executive member of the Board of Directors of HIAS as well as a JIAS board member, visited Europe and learned first hand the size and scope of the movement of thousand of Soviet Jews.

Between 1973 and 1980, JIAS received thousands of families who immigrated to Jewish communities across the country. From Immigrant to Citizen,” denotes the scope of JIAS’ work. The approach to the task has changed considerably over the years. Resettlement encompasses reception, finding housing, finding jobs, providing financial support, where necessary, until the immigrants get on their feet, celebrating Jewish festivals, etc. It was not until the mid-1970’s , when the Soviet Jews, who have represented the majority of JIAS clientele over the last 30 years, began to arrive in significant numbers, that the concept of integration, the long-term process of psycho-social adjustment involved in transforming the individual from immigrant to self-reliant citizen, began to evolve.

## 1980’s The Secret Syrian Operation

The story of the “emigration” of Syrian Jews is unparalleled. It is one that cannot be told here other than to mentioning JIAS’ role. In a highly clandestine operation that lasted from the late seventies until 1995, Judy Feld Carr, a prominent member of the Toronto Jewish

Community undertook to rescue Jewish teenagers from Syria.



The story of the secret Syrian operation

Once they were in Canada, JIAS assisted, supporting them emotionally and, for the first year, financially too; arranging for them to live in kosher homes; and helping them to integrate.

## 1990’s Rescue from Bosnia-Herzegovina

In 1992, JIAS had submitted to the immigration authorities 63 applications to sponsor some 160 Jews from Bosnia-Herzegovina as refugees for settlement in Canada. The applications were approved and refugees began arriving in fall of 1992. Twenty of those families settled in Toronto, 10 in Montreal, and the remaining families in Windsor, Hamilton,



A group of new immigrants at the train station after their interview for permanent status in Canada at the Canadian Consulate in Detroit in the 1990’s

Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver.

In the fall of 1995, JIAS and other immigrant settlement and religious organizations were approached by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to locate sponsors, who would resettle refugees from concentration camps in the war-ravaged region of the former Yugoslavia. Groups of private individuals and the government shared the cost of resettling the refugees in Canada. As a result, refugees, including many young children, were rescued. JIAS received a generous donation to assist in the resettlement of these families.

In 1996 JIAS developed a community mentorship program together with West Preparatory Public School and the Toronto Board of Education. The program was started

in response to the needs of many Jewish refugees from the former Yugoslavia whose children were enrolled in the school. Many of these parents were professional and highly educated people who were unemployed or underemployed.

True war refugees, these new members of Jewish community faced a daunting challenge. They had lost their homes and livelihoods; many had lost family and friends; and some had left behind parents and siblings in Sarajevo.



Argentine children join others at a community dance party. (Picture courtesy Jewish Federation of Winnipeg and Jewish Child and Family Service, Winnipeg Manitoba)

## The new wave from Argentina

A vibrant, flourishing Jewish life has existed in Argentina since the end of the 19th century, when Baron de Hirsch opened up the country to Jews fleeing the pogroms of Eastern Europe. With the changes in government and fluctuating economy, an increase in anti-Semitism has been felt throughout the major cities. This came to a head in 1994 with the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the Jewish Community Centre (AMIA) in Buenos Aires. Since that time, the flow of Argentines seeking a more

secure life in Canada has significantly increased and enhanced our communities from coast to coast. The Winnipeg Jewish community, with the help of Jewish Child and Family Service, our service provider in Winnipeg, and with the Manitoba Provincial Government, initiated a special project, which has allowed a significant number of Argentine Jews to settle in

Winnipeg. There are now approximately 180 Argentine families who have integrated well and become active members of the Winnipeg Jewish Community. JIAS was actively involved with their resettlement.

## JIAS' work continues

Jewish immigrants and refugees continue to flow into Canada from all over the world and JIAS is always there to help them. In the last decade JIAS has helped Jews from many countries including Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, the Former Soviet Union, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, Venezuela, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe.

Each new wave of immigrants presents a new step for JIAS as we embrace the newcomers into our communities and learn about their specific needs, culture and traditions. The important work performed by JIAS would not be possible without the partnership and co-operation of our service providers across the country.