

“NOT BEING RELIGIOUS DIDN’T TAKE AWAY FROM THEIR JEWISHNESS”:

The Complexities of Lived Religion among Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century BC Jews

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A RECENT SURVEY OF JEWS in the United States conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reports what appear to be rather surprising findings. While Jews are at least as likely to belong to synagogue and to send their children to religious schools as their Christian counterparts are to belong to churches and to send *their* children to religious schools, they are much less likely to attend services, to pray on their own, or to believe in God. On a number of measures, American Jews who are affiliated with synagogues appear to be no more religious than Christians who are not affiliated with churches. One commentator argues that such data reveal that, for Jews, religion is less about personal religious faith than “a matter of group belonging,” some of the appeal of which is secular.¹ Is this mix of religiosity, a need to belong and what we might see as more secular behaviour, a recent phenomenon among North American Jews? Were Jews more traditionally “religious” in the past? The North American literature tends to suggest that this was the case, at least for the majority of the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Jewish immigrant generation.² This article explores this question by looking at the complex relationship between

* This article is dedicated to my father, Gerry Marks (1930–2013), who lived the contradictions and relished the ironies. I would also like to thank Eve Chapple for her excellent research and transcription assistance on this project, Graeme Wynn and the anonymous readers for their helpful comments and Daniel Stone and the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada for their recognition and support of an earlier version of this paper.

¹ Anthony Weiss, “Survey Numbers Show American Jews to Be Less Religious on Many Measures,” *Jewish Daily Forward*, 10 October 2008. Data taken from the US Religious Landscape Survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

² The literature suggests that things started to change for the second generation, although that seems to vary significantly by location. See, for example, Ewa Moraska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996);

religious belief, practice, community, and a sense of Jewishness among late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jews in British Columbia.

We currently know very little about the history of Jews in British Columbia – beyond their involvement, primarily as merchants, in the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes of the late 1850s and 1860s.³ Such studies as exist are predominantly filiopietistic or remain unpublished as graduate theses.⁴ This article's central concerns are of larger relevance to understanding the history of Jewish ethnic and religious practice and identity because, by examining the complex mix of religious and irreligious practices that they followed, it considers how Jews in British Columbia between 1880 and 1920 defined themselves as Jews. One conclusion is that the binaries used in many histories of North American Jewry (religious Jew versus atheist, Orthodox versus socialist) are inadequate characterizations of the lives and convictions of these people.

Jews in British Columbia lived in small, or in some cases tiny, Jewish communities, which often required them to make major compromises in their religious and community practices. Moreover, BC society (like that of the Pacific Northwestern states), was and remains more secular than that in the rest of North America. This may have affected the nature of Jewish self-definition in the province, particularly for young

and Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second-Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

³ Gerald Tulchinsky mentions the Jewish communities of British Columbia several times in his major works of Canadian Jewish history; however, given the breadth of what he is covering, he cannot go into much detail. David Rome has also done some work on the subject, but the major historian of BC Jewish communities is Cyril E. Leonoff, who has published several works on the subject, most recently "The Rise of Jewish Life and Religion in British Columbia, 1858-1948," *The Scribe: Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia* 28 (2008): 1-204. Leonoff's work focuses on the development of Jewish institutions in British Columbia, primarily in Vancouver, home to most BC Jews, as well as on providing important information on the backgrounds of the men and women who were most active in British Columbia's Jewish communities. See Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Lester, 1992), and *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (North York, ON: Stoddart, 1998); David Rome, "Jews in the Cariboo" (reprinted from the *Canadian Jewish Yearbook, 1939-40; Jewish Western Bulletin*, BC centenary ed., 1858-1958, 30 June 1958; and "Notes on Some of the First Jews West of Ontario," *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 2, 1 (1978): 71-72); Cyril Leonoff, *Pioneers, Pedlars and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities in British Columbia and the Yukon* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1978). See also the special issue on Jews in British Columbia published by *Western States Jewish History* 37, 3-4 (2005); and Richard Menkis and Ronnie Tessler, "History of the Jews of British Columbia," Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia (hereafter JHSBC), 2001, available at <http://www.jewishmuseum.ca/timeline/Pages/main.html>.

⁴ Two important unpublished theses are Christine Boas Wisenthal, "Insiders and Outsiders: Two Waves of Jewish Settlement in British Columbia, 1858-1914" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1987); and Lillooet Nordlinger McDonnell, "In the Company of Gentiles: Exploring the History of Integrated Jews in British Columbia, 1858-1971" (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2011).

men.⁵ At the same time, the complex mix of religious, semi-religious and irreligious Jews found in British Columbia, all of whom identified as Jewish, is very much part of a larger, transnational story of Jewish immigration, particularly the massive nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration of Eastern European Jews, who fled persecution and immigrated to Canada, the United States, Britain, Argentina, South Africa, and other countries.

The transnational nature of the BC Jewish experience resonates with stories my mother and father told me about the mix of contradictory and complex religious, semi-religious, and secular practices they experienced as children in South Africa with parents of Eastern European Jewish heritage. My father's mother kept scrupulously kosher, with four sets of dishes – dairy and meat, as well as separate dishes for Passover – but my father cannot remember her ever lighting Shabbat candles on Friday nights. My father's father went to synagogue every morning of the week except Saturday, which was the busiest day in his shop.⁶ My maternal grandfather's family were staunch socialist atheists, spending much time in heated political debates over articles in the socialist paper *Forward*, which they received from New York, and derided Jewish religious practices. Yet my atheist grandfather insisted that his son have a bar mitzvah because he himself had “missed out” on this as a child.

The international literature on Jewish immigration history is very strong, particularly for the United States, but much of it focuses on broader patterns of institutional and cultural change among American Jews, on economic development, and on questions of assimilation, secularization, and the complex relationship between ethnicity and religion. There has been little work at the individual and family scale on the complex, messy nature of turn-of-the-century “lived religion” among Jews. American scholars Robert Orsi and David Hall use the term “lived religion” to mark how ordinary people (in their case Christians)

⁵ For the more secular nature of the entire Pacific Northwest, see, for example, Patricia O'Connell Killen and Mark Silk, eds., *Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004); Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Tina Block, “Everyday Infidels: A Social History of Secularism in the Postwar Pacific Northwest” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2006). For British Columbia, see also Lynne Marks, “Leaving God Behind When They Crossed the Rocky Mountains: Exploring Unbelief in Turn-of-the-Century British Columbia,” in *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901*, ed. P. Baskerville and E.W. Sager, 371–404, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

⁶ For a discussion of this phenomenon in the United States, see Annie Polland, “Working for the Sabbath: Sabbath in the Jewish Immigrant Neighbourhoods of New York,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 6, 1 (2009): 33–56.

took what they wanted or needed from dominant religious beliefs and practices, mixing the sacred and the secular, in ways that often did not fit with theological orthodoxies (or ministerial expectations) but that worked for the people involved. Lived religion enabled some people to challenge existing religious and political structures, and it allowed most to make sense of their worlds, providing them with the cultural and spiritual resources to navigate the contradictions and hardships of their lives.⁷ Other than in some recent studies by Annie Polland, which focus on Jews in early twentieth-century New York City, lived religion has not been a central focus of Jewish historians.⁸

The concept of lived religion is particularly complex when applied to an ethno-religious group like the Jews, for whom religious practice or affiliation can be as much or more about ethnic identification (i.e., maintaining a sense of Jewishness) as it is about religious belief, while for some a sense of Jewishness has nothing at all to do with religious belief.⁹ Scholars argue that ethnicity and religion were more firmly fused among late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Eastern European immigrants than they were for those who followed them, although a large minority of socialist Jews rejected religious belief and saw their Jewishness, or “Yiddishkeit,” as a secular ethnicity. Following Annie Polland, I see a need to transcend the prevailing dichotomization of

⁷ See, for example, David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Robert Orsi, *Thank You: St. Jude Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁸ Annie Polland, “Public History and Gender Studies at the Eldrige Street Synagogue,” paper presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, June 2008, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Annie Polland with Daniel Soyer, *Emerging Metropolis: New York Jews in the Age of Immigration, 1840–1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Polland, “Working for the Sabbath.” For some reference to these ideas, see also Paula Hyman, “Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902,” in *American Jewish Women's History: A Reader*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell, 123–24 (New York: New York University Press, 2003). Earlier work by Jenna Weissman Joselit and Deborah Dash Moore also presents relevant material regarding changes in popular Jewish culture in the United States among both the immigrant generation (Joselit) and, later, American-born generations (Joselit and Moore). See Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and LA* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); and Moore, *At Home in America*.

⁹ For more sociological discussions of the link between religion and ethnicity among present-day Jews see, for example, Uzi Rebhun, “Jewish Identity in America: Structural Analyses of Attitudes and Behaviours,” *Review of Religious Research* 46, 1 (2004): 43–63; or Vivian Klaff, “Defining American Jewry from Religious and Ethnic Perspectives: The Transitions to Greater Heterogeneity,” *Sociology of Religion* 67, 4 (2006): 415–38.

Eastern European immigrants into socialists (who may have come from various political factions but who were generally atheists and actively hostile to religion, if not necessarily to Jewishness) and the Orthodox (who tried to remain true to biblical teachings by following Jewish laws on a range of matters, including dietary laws [i.e., keeping kosher], regularly attending synagogue, and observing a range of prohibitions against working, driving, lighting fires, and many other activities on the Sabbath [Saturday]).¹⁰

Historians note that conditions in North America, such as expectations regarding Saturday labour and, in some contexts, the lack of kosher food, pushed many immigrants to move away from Orthodox norms. They also document frequent conflicts over religious practice between immigrant parents and more acculturated North American children.¹¹ My evidence, gleaned from the extensive collection of interviews conducted by the Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia (beginning in the early 1970s) and interviews conducted for the BC Sound Heritage Strathcona Project in the 1970s reveals a more complex and contingent story.¹²

These interviews were conducted primarily with Jews who came to Canada from Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or who were born in Canada to Eastern European immigrants after their parents' arrival. I also include interviews conducted with people of German or British Jewish background, most of whose families had been in British Columbia since the 1860s. For this study I was able to use interviews with those born between the 1890s and the 1920s, although in the case of those born after 1920 I was primarily interested in eliciting information about the religious/irreligious worldview, practices, and sense of Jewishness of their parents' generation, while attending to the interviewee's own sense of Jewishness, particularly in his/her youth.

Most of the scholarship on North American Jews focuses on cities with very large Jewish communities. Two important exceptions are the work of Lee Shai Weissbach, who provides a valuable overview of patterns of

¹⁰ See, for example, Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

¹¹ For a discussion of the impact of North America on Orthodox norms, see, for example, Howe, *World of Our Fathers*; and Polland, *Emerging Metropolis*. For relationships between immigrant Jewish parents and their children, see Howe, *World of Our Fathers*; Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*; and Moore, *At Home in America*.

¹² Other sources used for this article include the Victoria synagogue records and manuscript census databases for the 1901 BC census. The census databases from the 1901 census were developed as part of the Canadian Families Project (CFP). For further discussion of the CFP, see P. Baskerville and E.W. Sager, *Household Counts: Canadian Households and Families in 1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

small-town Jewish life across the United States, and Ewa Moraska, who presents an in-depth, culturally nuanced examination of Jewish life in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.¹³ The Jews considered here lived in Vancouver, Victoria, or one of several small towns in which there were very few Jews. The Jewish population of Victoria ranged from 148 individuals in 1891 to a high of 170 in 1901 and then gradually declined to 102 in 1931. Over the same forty-year period Vancouver's Jewish population grew from 83 people to almost 2,400 in 1931. By comparison there were over 45,000 Jews in Toronto in 1931 and over 17,000 in Winnipeg.¹⁴ As a result, Jews in British Columbia faced challenges that were often quite different from those of Jews in larger US and Canadian cities.

The oral histories at the core of this study reveal that some BC Jews fit well with the Orthodox and socialist categories common in the literature. Myer Freedman, who was born in Poland in 1910 and immigrated to Vancouver as a young child, exemplifies the Orthodox position. He described how his immigrant father closed his business on Saturday, although "Saturday was the busiest day on the street." Every Saturday he and his father went to the synagogue to pray, walking there and back, and then went home to study religious texts together. As was the norm in Orthodox families, his sisters were not included in such study. In keeping with Jewish law his family could not light the stove on the Sabbath, so they would pay a young non-Jewish neighbour to come and do it for them.¹⁵ Other interviews suggest that Myer's family was far from being alone in their observant ways.¹⁶ The first successful synagogue in Vancouver was an Orthodox one, founded primarily by Eastern European immigrants, and in the 1920s there was enough business in Vancouver to sustain three kosher butcher shops.¹⁷

¹³ Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and Moraska, *Insecure Prosperity*. Neither of them uses the concept of "lived religion," although Moraska does look at shifting patterns of religiosity in these communities.

¹⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Census of Canada, 1890-91* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1893-97); Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *7th Census of Canada, 1931* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, King's Printer, 1933-1942).

¹⁵ Abraham Myer Freedman, interviewed by Carole Itter and Daphne Marlatt, 19 July 1977. This interview is part of the Strathcona Project, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), T2683:0002.

¹⁶ See, for example, Myer and Flori Brown, interviewed by Ann Kreiger, 6 July 1974, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0004; Kiva Katznelson, interviewed by Myer Freedman, 30 April 1975, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0003; and Isaac Lipovsky, interviewed by Irene S. Dodek and Sally Tobe, 4 February 1974, JHSBC Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0020.

¹⁷ Leonoff, "Rise of Jewish Life"; Charles Davis, interviewed by Myer Freedman, 6 March 1975, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:65.

Yet the building of the Orthodox synagogue in 1920 reflected some of the compromises required of Jews in smaller communities. Some of the earliest Jewish arrivals to Vancouver adhered to a Reform version of Judaism that ignored the rigid religious laws relating to the Sabbath, to kosher food, and to other matters that remained important to Orthodox Jews. English predominated in Reform services, while Orthodox services were held in Hebrew. Although there had been a Reform congregation in Vancouver since the 1890s, during the First World War it was acknowledged that there were not enough Jews in Vancouver to sustain two synagogues and that, because of increasing immigration from Eastern Europe, the Orthodox community was growing more quickly than the Reform community. As a result, Reform congregational leaders joined with their Orthodox co-religionists to build one viable synagogue, Schara Tzedeck, an Orthodox institution.¹⁸ Cyril Leonoff notes that “the forced union was never a happy one,” but it demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of Orthodox synagogues in smaller communities.¹⁹ That the majority of members of this Orthodox synagogue only attended Passover and High Holidays (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) services, and that many did not keep kosher, also points to the complex nature of this supposedly Orthodox congregation.²⁰

This heterogeneity was heightened by the presence of socialists. Among the Vancouver Jews who defined themselves thus, few fit the “irreligious socialists” archetype of the general historical literature. There were certainly fewer socialists in Vancouver than in Winnipeg, Toronto, and many larger American cities in the early twentieth century. Yet, as Christine Wisenthal notes, there was a significant working-class Jewish community in the city, living primarily in the immigrant-reception area of Strathcona; many of them worked in clothing factories owned by other Jews, and some regarded themselves as socialists.²¹ The city had a socialist organization, the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen’s Circle) founded in 1910, and other socialist organizations formed in the 1920s, as well as the strong Labour Zionist organizations preferred by some left-wing

¹⁸ Leonoff, “Rise of Jewish Life,” 85. The Orthodox congregation had built a smaller synagogue in 1911, the Sons of Israel, which was replaced by Schara Tzedeck in 1920. See Leonoff, “Rise of Jewish Life,” 100-7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁰ Benjamin Pastinsky (son of the Orthodox rabbi of Vancouver) – born 1908, interviewer unidentified, 27 May 1972, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0082; Dora Roseman, interviewed by Sandy Fuchs and M. Katz, 1972, part of Reynoldston Research and Studies, Oral History Collection, BCA, T0053:0001.

²¹ Wisenthal, “Insiders and Outsiders,” 82-83.

Jews.²² Several Vancouver interviewees described themselves or their parents as socialists during this period. For most, this did not seem to have precluded following at least some of the tenets of Orthodoxy.

Betty Averbach, who came to Vancouver in 1921 as a baby with her Russian immigrant parents, regularly marched with her mother in the annual Vancouver May Day parades. Her parents were active in Vancouver's Shalom Aleichem Society, a socialist Yiddish organization founded in the 1920s. Betty's mother also received the *Forward*, the Yiddish socialist newspaper from New York. At the same time, according to Betty, her socialist mother was "very observant," and they celebrated all of the Jewish holidays. Both of her parents were also very active in the Orthodox synagogue. Betty noted with pride that, when her parents died, the doors of the synagogue were opened in their honour, apparently reflecting the major roles they had played there.

Of course, "very observant" is a subjective and relative assessment. When asked if her mother wore a wig (as very Orthodox women did), Betty replied that she was "not like that." Unlike the Freedmans, Betty's family rarely attended Sabbath services. Generally, they attended synagogue only on major Jewish holidays, and they drove there at a time when the more observant Jews still made this journey on foot.²³

Gloria Harris's father was also a socialist from Russia, and her family also went to synagogue, although not weekly. The Harrises went to synagogue on the High Holidays and Gloria's parents fasted on Yom Kippur. Gloria's brother had a bar mitzvah, another indication of religious practice. Gloria's interview reveals that Judaism was very important in her family's home. She spoke of how her mother cleaned the house every Friday, had a clean white tablecloth, and lighted the Sabbath candles. Gloria noted that, Friday night, no matter how hard up they were, "was a beautiful time." She paints a very traditional religious image of a Friday night experience.²⁴

The Averbach and Harris interviews, and others, point to the dangers of setting up too clear a distinction between socialist freethinkers and the Orthodox. They show how these families were able to combine synagogue involvement and domestic Judaism with socialism. These socialists saw no contradictions between their politics and some level

²² Menkis and Tessler, "History of the Jews of British Columbia," available at <http://www.jewishmuseum.ca/timeline/Pages/main.html>.

²³ Betty Averbach, interviewed by Leora Raivich, 11 August 2004, JHSBC, Oral History Project, tape 20:04:20, Jewish Museum and Archives of BC (hereafter JMACBC).

²⁴ Gloria Harris, interviewed by Carole Itter and Daphne Marlatt, 1977, part of Strathcona Project, BCA, T2800:0001.

of orthodoxy. Even socialists who were much less keen on organized Jewish religion could not always stay away from it in small communities such as Vancouver.

This was clearly revealed in an interview with Dora Roseman, who was born in Poland in 1895 and arrived in Vancouver in 1913.²⁵ She was very active in the Mutter Fareyn, a socialist women's group that developed the Sholom Aleichem school in the 1920s. This later became the Peretz school, a socialist, Yiddish school, that taught Jewish history but not Jewish religion. Dora was often negative about religiously observant Jews. She was dismayed at the increasing number of young people attending synagogue in the 1970s, stating dismissively that she did not "know what they'[d] find in that religion." She also suggested that young people went to the Talmud Torah (the religious Jewish school) instead of to the socialist Peretz school for socio-economic reasons: "[because they] think they get better boyfriends if they belong to the religious school."

When asked whether she and her husband were Orthodox when they first immigrated to Vancouver, Dora seemed somewhat embarrassed:

We had just come, there was no place to go, nothing to do so we just went occasionally, you know, High Holidays – met [Jewish] people there, the people even if they [preferred] somewhere else – still had to go there [because] there wasn't anything else.

She seemed to suggest that she was not alone in this approach and that, certainly in the earlier decades of the century, most of "the Jewish people went only the High Holidays to the shul [synagogue]" and that only a few old people went regularly every Sabbath.²⁶

Another socialist, the father of interviewee Fred Schwartz, was similarly uninterested in religion. He emigrated from Russia in 1904, where he had been part of an irreligious socialist movement. By the early 1920s, he was a member of the only (Orthodox) synagogue in Vancouver, although his wife was much more interested in synagogue involvement than he was. As Fred noted of his father's relationship to the synagogue: "It was not sort of active necessarily, but he was there."²⁷ Again, finding a sense of Jewish community seems to have overcome socialist scruples.

²⁵ Roseman interview.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Fred Swartz, interviewed by Leora Raivich, 2004, JHSBC, Oral History Project, tape 20-04:24, JMABC.

The centrality of a synagogue to a sense of Jewish belonging was even more evident in the very small Jewish community of Victoria. Victoria had a synagogue long before Vancouver. The handsome brick building had been built in the gold rush era of the early 1860s. By the turn of the century, Victoria's Jewish community included a mix of German, British, and Polish immigrants who had arrived in British Columbia via the United States during the gold rush and Jews who had immigrated more recently, primarily from Eastern Europe but also from Britain, the United States, and other parts of Europe.²⁸ This diverse community included a mix of Orthodox and Reform families but, during its early decades, was an Orthodox congregation. Religious differences apparently created tensions over the years. For example, in the early 1890s the Orthodox members were unhappy with their newly appointed rabbi, Solomon Philo, who led prayers and used rituals from the Reform tradition and delivered his sermons in English. This so upset his Orthodox congregants that Philo was dismissed after three years. Despite recurrent tensions over these and other differences the synagogue was clearly the hub of Victoria's Jewish social life.²⁹

A comparison of synagogue and census records for Victoria in 1901 reveals the complexities of synagogue involvement. One of the forty-seven Jews listed as a member or contributor to the synagogue in its records appeared in the census as an atheist. Assuming both records are accurate it would seem that, for this man at least, the synagogue was more important for a sense of ethnic belonging than for belief.³⁰ A large majority of Jewish families in Victoria appear to have sought affiliation with the synagogue; 74 per cent (twenty-six out of thirty five) of Jewish household heads in Victoria were listed either as members of or as contributors to the synagogue.³¹ This is a much higher level of involvement than was common in Protestant churches at the time. In central Canada fewer than half of those claiming adherence to a particular denomination were church members. In British Columbia, long

²⁸ Wisenthal, "Insiders and Outsiders," 16 and 24; McDonnell, "Company of Gentiles," 78.

²⁹ Leonoff, "Rise of Jewish Life," 87; Josephine Lancaster and Daisy Salmon Minchin, interviewed by Cyril Leonoff, 23 July 1972, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0075.

³⁰ It is, of course, also possible that he found it easier to tell the census taker that he was an atheist rather than a Jew. However, in Victoria, where Jews appeared to be fairly well integrated into the larger community, this seems unlikely.

³¹ Congregation Emmanuel Records, BCA, MS-0059; and 1901 manuscript census for Victoria (computerized version made available by CFP). McDonnell also notes that a high proportion of Victoria Jews sought affiliation with the synagogue. See McDonnell, "Company of Gentiles," 75-76.

the least religious province in Canada, Protestant church membership levels were considerably lower.³²

Ewa Moraska's study of Jews in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, finds high levels of synagogue involvement among local Jews. She argues that very high levels of religious affiliation within the surrounding Christian community helped to explain why synagogue affiliation and religious practice in both home and synagogue were so important among Johnstown Jews. By comparison, Jews in larger early twentieth-century cities were much less likely to belong to synagogues, both because the surrounding non-Jewish communities were also less religious and because of the array of alternative, more secular, Jewish organizations available to big city Jews.³³

Morawska also notes that the Johnstown Jewish community was fairly inward looking, with little interaction between the local Jews and the larger Christian community.³⁴ This was not the case in Victoria, where representatives of the entire community, including the major fraternal orders and ethnic associations, turned out to lay the cornerstone of the synagogue in 1863, reflecting considerable Jewish involvement in community-wide organizations.³⁵ These and other relationships between Jews and others in racially and religiously diverse Victoria remained significant into the twentieth century.³⁶

Victoria Jews both resembled and differed from their Johnstown counterparts. In Victoria relatively high levels of synagogue affiliation did not necessarily reflect higher levels of religious belief among Jews than among their Christian counterparts. Rather, they reflected the importance of at least some level of synagogue affiliation to a sense of ethnic and religious belonging in a community in which the synagogue was the only available organized Jewish option. Complaints from both rabbis and synagogue leaders around the turn of the century suggested the limits of Jewish religious commitment in Victoria. Reform Rabbi Philo wrote to his mentor at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1894 complaining that the Jews in Victoria worshipped "the golden calf" (money) and had little interest in attending services or paying for a rabbi.³⁷ Philo, who was dismissed for his overly Reform ways, may have had

³² Marks, "Leaving God Behind." For the Pacific Northwest as a whole, see, for example, Block, "Everyday Infidels."

³³ Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity*, 135-37.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

³⁵ Wisenthal, *Insiders and Outsiders*, chap. 4.

³⁶ McDonnell, "Company of Gentiles," 86-87.

³⁷ S. Philo, Vancouver, to Dr. G. [Gotthard] Deutsch, Prof. Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, 17 June 1894, reprinted in *Jewish Western Bulletin*, 27 November 1970, 16, 18, cited in Leonoff, "The Rise of Jewish Life," 78.

particular reason to be critical. However, letters and appeals for funds in 1912 and 1914 from congregational leaders, complaining of “the lack of interest displayed in congregational affairs and low levels of attendance at regular services,” suggest that there may have been some legitimacy to such concerns and that they remained real twenty years after Rabbi Philo’s departure.³⁸

The testimonies of the few interviewees from Victoria point to more robust levels of synagogue attendance, reminding us that rabbis and synagogue leaders are rarely satisfied with levels of synagogue involvement. Yet they also suggest that the synagogue was more a centre of social life than of religious faith for many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Victoria Jews. Rena Phillips, whose mother was very hostile to Judaism as a religion, noted that, when they were in Victoria, they belonged to the synagogue and that “the community was very small but very close knit.” Every Friday night they had services, attended, she recalled, by everybody, including her family.³⁹ This point was reiterated by Josephine Lancaster and Daisy Minchin, who had British parents, were born in Victoria in the early 1890s, and grew up there. Both women stated that, while they certainly had non-Jewish friends, synagogue participation was important: “[You] wouldn’t dare accept an invitation to a school party on a Friday night – God Forbid.”⁴⁰ Some women whose families were active in the synagogue also organized regular dances and other social events for local Jews, which were apparently much enjoyed.⁴¹

Concern for ethnic cohesion can reflect a desire to avoid intermarriage among the next generation, and for many parents strong fears of intermarriage may have motivated their involvement in the synagogue and other Jewish activities. Intermarriage appears to have been a particular concern in the small community of Victoria, where interviewees often mentioned having been the only Jewish child in their class, or even their school. They also mentioned a number of young Jewish women who had intermarried and assimilated into the Christian community.⁴²

³⁸ “Response to M.L. Platneauer,” Congregation Emmanuel of Victoria Fonds, BCA, MS0059, box 1, file 1, item 33; and Appeal from Trustees of Temple Emmanuel, Congregation Emmanuel of Victoria Fonds, BCA, MS0059, August 1914, box 1, file 1, item 38.

³⁹ Rena Robinson Phillips, interviewed by Cyril Leonoff, 1983, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, JMABC.

⁴⁰ Lancaster and Minchin interviews.

⁴¹ Phillips interview.

⁴² Phillips interview; and Lancaster and Minchin interviews. McDonnell also mentions the intermarriage of three young women in a Jewish family that was involved with the synagogue and also fairly integrated into the larger Victoria community. See McDonnell, “Company of Gentiles,” 105.

Synagogues in Vancouver and Victoria did provide a meeting place for young people, as parents had hoped. In Vancouver, Gloria Harris noted that her parents went inside the synagogue to pray during the High Holidays but that teenagers did not; instead, they walked around the block for hours, and in this way met other Jewish boys and girls. She found it all very exciting and romantic, and, as she noted: “This was my connection to the Jewish religion.”⁴³ Similarly, Anne Goldbloom talked about how she had met her future husband when she went to High Holiday services in Vancouver. She said that she had gone “not from any religious impulse at all, but social, you know. We’d meet some boys then, maybe get a date, you know.”⁴⁴

Socializing among youth was important, but synagogue involvement was about more than just fear of intermarriage. Religious faith, and following the traditional practices of one’s parents, seems to have been important to many. And in small communities like Victoria and Vancouver synagogues were very important institutions for bringing people of differing traditions, and of no religious faith, together as Jews to share some sense of ethnic belonging. Anti-Semitism would have strengthened Jews’ desire to come together, but a proper assessment of this factor awaits further work on the subject of anti-Semitism in British Columbia. A few of the interviewees, recalling turn-of-the-century circumstances, claim to have experienced no anti-Semitism.⁴⁵ A number of others noted specific incidents of anti-Semitism, particularly from one or two students at school, but most said it was not very bad.⁴⁶ It does appear, from this limited evidence, that the small size of the BC Jewish community, and the white community’s penchant for virulent anti-Asian sentiment, may have limited anti-Semitism in this period, although it certainly existed and appeared to increase in the 1920s, as it did elsewhere in Canada.⁴⁷

⁴³ Harris interview.

⁴⁴ Anne Goldbloom, interviewed by Ann Kreiger, 23 October 1973, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0021 track 1.

⁴⁵ Lancaster and Minchin interviews; Gertrude Weinrobe and Violet Franklin, interviewed by Clare Auerbach and Cyril Leonoff, 25 July 1972, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:II.

⁴⁶ Phillips interview; Harris interview; Anne and Jack Black, interviewed by Irene Dodek and Sally Tobe, 24 October 1989, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T4384:5, side one. See also McDonnell, “Company of Gentiles,” 86.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of anti-Asian sentiment in British Columbia, see, for example, Kay Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875–1980*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991); and Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1885–1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989). For a discussion of anti-Semitism in early twentieth-century Canada, see Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*; and Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998).

Thus far I have focused primarily on Jews in family groups. However, early British Columbia had a far lower proportion of families among the non-Aboriginal population than did the rest of Canada. As a resource frontier, British Columbia attracted many single men, and men without their wives, to work in mining and lumber camps or in other occupations related to resource industries. This is most starkly demonstrated by the fact that, in 1901 and 1911, just over a third of British Columbia's population was female.⁴⁸ While Jews were more likely than most to migrate with their families, some Jewish men fit into the "rootless-men-of-the-frontier" pattern. Almost a fifth of Jewish men were listed as lodgers or boarders in the 1901 census, fewer than the overall provincial average of 25 percent, but nonetheless suggesting that a sizeable proportion of Jews were far from home and family.⁴⁹

Single Christian men in British Columbia were of great concern to church leaders as most appear to have stayed far away from the churches.⁵⁰ This led to much clerical hand-wringing and accusations about the un-Christian immoral "roughness" of local men.⁵¹ Adele Perry documents similar middle-class concerns about the immorality of the rough homosocial culture and interracial relationships with First Nations women among white male migrants before 1871, and she notes that these men were often considered to be as pagan and "savage" as the women with whom they cohabited.⁵² There are certainly echoes of such concerns in the Jewish evidence. Rabbi Philo, who was not happy with the materialism of Victoria Jews, went to minister to the Vancouver Reform congregation and was no happier there. In his report to his mentor he states: "The religious standing of the Jews in BC is very mournful ...

⁴⁸ In 1901, only 36.1 percent of the total population of British Columbia was female, while in 1911 that proportion had in fact marginally decreased to 35.9 percent. See Census of Canada, 1901, vol. 1, Table 7; and Census of Canada, 1911, vol. 1, Table 4. The gender ratio gradually evened up later in the century so that, by 1941, it was approximately even.

⁴⁹ Data from CFP databases, based on data input from the 1901 Canadian manuscript census. For stories about single Jewish men making a living on the resource frontier in late nineteenth-century British Columbia, see also Esmond Lando, interviewed by Irene Dodek, 30 April 1986, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T4376:0016-0017.

⁵⁰ This pattern was not that different elsewhere in Canada, but, although single men were generally reluctant churchgoers, in other parts of Canada they often lived with their families, who could impose some moral oversight. See Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Small Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

⁵¹ Marks, "Leaving God Behind."

⁵² Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

They live ... among the Siwashes [First Nations] and they are little better than they are."⁵³

Like the majority of single Christian men in the province, many single Jews appear to have had very little to do with religious institutions. Vancouver's first secular organization for Jewish people, the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), founded in 1909, was intended to provide the young men in the community with educational, social, athletic, and recreational services. Most of the fifty-eight paid-up members had no connections with Jewish religious organizations. The *Canadian Jewish Times* reported that, at the first meeting of the YMHA: "It seemed almost incredible to the young men themselves, that there are so many of them in Vancouver, and they regarded each other with astonishment, most of them having met for the first time."⁵⁴ The popularity of more secular activities was also evident at the Channukah Ball, the first social affair put on by the YMHA, held in Vancouver in December 1909, which "was attended by the largest number of Jews congregated in the city at any prior event."⁵⁵ Young Jewish men in other BC communities also demonstrated a liking for non-religious activities. At the height of its early twentieth-century prosperity in 1910, Prince Rupert, a northern port town and the terminus of a new railway, had twenty Jews, both men and women, participate in Rosh Hashanah services (the Jewish New Year). Tellingly, just two months later, almost forty Jewish men enrolled as members of the more secular local YMHA, which aimed to "cater to the physical, social, and intellectual welfare of the young men of Prince Rupert."⁵⁶

Single Jewish men were also drawn into Jewish community life through informal family-based activity. Those interviewed made occasional references to single Jewish men being invited to Sabbath or holiday dinners by Jewish families. Some of these young men had obviously wandered far from Jewish practices. Ben Pastinsky, the son of Vancouver's long-serving Rabbi Pastinsky, recalled that his father always invited single Jews home for meals, and he spoke in particular of a young Jewish man who worked in the carnival. According to Ben Pastinsky, this person "had been born Jewish and raised Jewish," but he had "drifted from home, many, many

⁵³ S. Philo, Vancouver, to Dr. G. [Gotthard] Deutsch, Prof. Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, 17 June 1894, cited in Leonoff, "The Rise of Jewish Life," 78.

⁵⁴ *Canadian Jewish Times*, 10 September 1909, 12, 39, cited in Leonoff, "The Rise of Jewish Life," 84-85.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁶ *Canadian Jewish News*, 25 November 1910, 2, 14, cited in Leonoff, "The Rise of Jewish Life," 31.

years this man,” and could not remember any of the Jewish songs that they sang as part of the Passover Seder (ritual meal).⁵⁷

Jewish families living in very small communities often welcomed such young men into their homes for Passover Seders or Friday-night meals.⁵⁸ In these places, where Jewish homes were often the only Jewish institutions, parents maintained such forms of Judaism as they could. It was usually very difficult, if not impossible, to keep a fully kosher home as meat prepared in a fully kosher way required a ritual slaughterer and rabbinical oversight, both of which were only available in Vancouver. Unable to gain access to kosher meat, some gave up meat altogether; more commonly, households eschewed pork, demonstrating a continued commitment to keeping some religious laws and traditions. Some families lit candles and said prayers every Friday night, and many celebrated the major Jewish holidays either in their homes or by travelling to Vancouver or Victoria to attend synagogue. They generally kept their children out of school on these days.⁵⁹

In smaller towns Jewish homes provided a space for the maintenance of Jewish identity and of links to other Jews. Yet some interviewees sought more organized community beyond the few Jewish families available. Two mentioned that they attended a Christian church as children, although one of them became involved in the synagogue when her family moved from the small town of Ladysmith to Vancouver, and the other continued to identify as a Jew throughout his life. Neither said much about her/his church attendance (perhaps a fear of disapproval by their Jewish interviewers made them reticent), but it seems likely that they attended church in an effort to find community and did not abandon Jewish belief or ethnicity.⁶⁰

In smaller communities, where domestic religion was particularly important, Jewish women's roles were central. Historians Paula Hyman and Rickie Burman note that, in Eastern Europe, Jewish men were the primary carriers of religious faith. Men are the only ones required

⁵⁷ Pastinsky interview, BCA, 3883:82. For other references to inviting young men for dinners, see, for example, Judy Zaitzow, interviewed by Jean Gerber, 15 October 1999, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, tape 19-99:31, JMABC.

⁵⁸ Rosalie Gorosh, interviewed by Cyril Leonoff, 15 July 1977, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:0069; Horace Ripstein, interviewed by Myer Freedman, 3 February 1975, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T3883:84.

⁵⁹ Weinrobe and Franklin interview; Sarah H. Tobe, “The Adelbergs: Homesteading the Peace British Columbia, 1906-1919,” in *Pioneer Jews of British Columbia*, ed. Cyril Leonoff, 228-32 (Calabas, CA: Western States Jewish History, 2005), cited in McDonnell, “Company of Gentiles,” 123.

⁶⁰ Weinrobe and Franklin interview; Lando interview. See also McDonnell, “Company of Gentiles,” 122.

by Orthodox religious law to attend synagogue and to study religious texts. But, as Hyman and Burman note, after immigrating to the United States or Britain economic pressures made it very difficult for men to continue to spend most of their time in the synagogue praying and poring over texts. As a result, women, who had always focused on the domestic elements of Judaism, such as keeping a kosher home and lighting candles on Friday night, became central carriers of Jewish faith and tradition by continuing these practices.⁶¹

The interviews suggest that many men in British Columbia rejected Jewish beliefs for other than economic reasons and that many had done so before immigrating to North America. Betty Averbach's socialist mother was observant and kept up Jewish traditions in the home. Her husband was not very interested in religious practice and "did it more for her." Other women faced more serious opposition. For example, Elaine Charkow spoke of how her mother wanted the children to be very Jewish and kept a kosher home, despite her "absolutely irreligious" husband. He was a more typical Jewish atheist socialist than many discussed here. He had been involved in the revolution in Russia and had no interest in religious practice. Elaine's mother was able to have some impact, however, and the family celebrated Jewish holidays, although Elaine's mother would get very annoyed when her husband skipped over pages in the Passover Seder.⁶²

Anne Goldbloom's father had been raised to be very religious, but, as she told the story, when he was a boy in Europe he discovered that God would not strike him dead if he failed to pray, and then "it all went." However, abandoning belief did not and does not necessarily mean abandoning all Jewish practice. Goldbloom's father went to synagogue on Yom Kippur, but he never fasted, as religious law dictated: "He would always leave and go and eat." In the face of his indifference his wife tried to keep up some domestic religious traditions, particularly the lighting of candles on Friday night.⁶³

Rosalie Gorosh's mother also tried to keep up Jewish traditions in the home in the face of a husband whose father had been a rabbi but who

⁶¹ Rickie Burman, "Women in Jewish Religious Life: Manchester 1880-1930," in *Disciplines of Faith*, ed. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) 37-55; and Paula E. Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

⁶² Averbach interview; Elaine Charkow, interviewed 5 February 1986, JHSBC, Oral History Collection, BCA, T2666:004. For another example of a religious wife and a less religious husband who "went along with her although not so observant," see Mitch Snider, interviewed by Cyril Leonoff and Sally Tobe, 24 September 2001, JHSBC, Oral History Project, tape 20-01:59, JMABC.

⁶³ Goldbloom interview.

had lost his faith to new ideas. Rosalie's mother had more than just an irreligious husband with which to contend. When they moved to Prince Rupert they were among the few Jews there, but her mother retained her strong religiosity, buying kosher meat from Vancouver and having it shipped up the coast. However, "it got to be too much of a problem" and her mother "got away from it entirely." Still, it seems that it was Jewish religious practice, not Jewish community, that was sacrificed. When her family moved from Prince Rupert to Vancouver, Rosalie's mother became very involved in Jewish women's organizations such as Hadassah and the Council of Jewish Women. In Rosalie's view, her parents' lack of religious practice "didn't take away from their Jewishness."⁶⁴

If the literature suggests that the common pattern was an irreligious husband and an observant wife, this was not always so. Consider Flori and Myer Brown. Flori was raised with an agnostic father, so when she married Myer, a very religious man, she had to learn domestic religious traditions from his mother. She notes: "I was a typical 1920s flapper with the bleached hair and the long elephant earrings ... and I'd never been to a Seder [religious dinner at Passover] in my life and here I'd married in March and in April there's a Seder and I didn't know what they were saying or anything else and I was giggling." Flori explained how her mother-in-law made her learn about keeping kosher. Every Friday morning Flori had to "open up the chickens and clean the chickens, get them Sabbath ready."⁶⁵

Other women were more negative towards at least some religious practices. Booba Harowitz talked about how her "father would have liked to have been more religious than we were," but her mother was "more modern." "We always said she was born about 50 years ahead of her time," and so she refused to keep kosher. But, at the same time, Booba noted that they went to synagogue on all the Jewish holidays and stayed home from school on those days. By her account: "Our home was very Jewish, our friends and all their friends were Jewish, but not a religious Jewishness." For Booba, a Jewishness that incorporated considerable observance of Jewish holidays is still defined as "not a religious Jewishness," apparently because she equated "a religious Jewishness" with adherence to all the tenets of Orthodoxy.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Gorosh interview. For more about the Directors (Gorosh's parents), see McDonnell, "Company of Gentiles," 148-52.

⁶⁵ Brown interview.

⁶⁶ Booba Harowitz, interviewed by Jackie Berger, 17 July 2002, JHSBC, Oral History Project, tape 20.02-03, JMABC.

Other women were actively hostile to religion but, again, not necessarily to Jewishness. When Rena Robinson Phillips was growing up in Dawson City in the first years of the twentieth century her parents just “let everything [Jewish] drop” because her mother had had such negative experiences with Judaism as a child. Her father had been a rabbi and had been extremely patriarchal. According to Rena, the daughters were “just servants to them,” they “were nothing in the family, only the boys were of importance.” This experience left her mother with no interest in Jewish religious practice. At least when they lived isolated from other Jews in Dawson City her mother appeared to have no interest in trying to create a Jewish home through domestic rituals. However, when they moved to Victoria when Rena was eight they got involved in the Jewish community – which, in that town, meant attending synagogue and other Jewish social events. Her parents also sent Rena to Vancouver when she was sixteen, in part to give her more of a chance to meet a Jewish husband. For this family, religious practice may not have mattered, but a sense of Jewish ethnic belonging clearly did.⁶⁷

The patriarchal nature of traditional Judaism not only alienated some women but also caused some men to reject religious practice. This was true of Esmond Lando’s father. Esmond’s grandfather, like many Orthodox Jews, studied the Bible all day, and his wife both kept the home and made a living. Esmond’s father apparently saw his father doing nothing but sit and study all day long, while his mother worked very hard, and he grew up “hating religion in any way shape or form.” Lando’s parents seemed to have similar values around Judaism. His mother was the daughter of a rabbi, but his father was apparently attracted to her because “she was the first Jewish woman he’d met who would ride a bus with him on Shabbes [the Sabbath].”⁶⁸

Among Jews in British Columbia, Jewish practice and belief varied enormously, as did perceptions about Judaism and the meaning of “religious Judaism.” What might seem like rejection of Judaism to some – for example, no longer keeping kosher or no longer attending Sabbath services – often occurred alongside other forms of Jewish practice, such as attending services on the High Holidays or lighting Sabbath candles, or not eating pork. The interviews reveal the complexity of lived religion and ethnicity in the lives of these Jewish immigrants and their children. Some equated Jewishness with remaining observant or semi-observant believers; others considered attending synagogue only for High Holiday

⁶⁷ Phillips interview.

⁶⁸ Lando interview.

services as “not a religious Jewishness” but as an assertion of Jewishness nonetheless. It is also evident that even those interviewees who most fully rejected Jewish practices and belief did not entirely reject the Jewish community or a sense of Jewishness. The phrases, “they were still very Jewish,” or “not being religious didn’t take away from their Jewishness,” reappear in slightly different form in a number of interviews.⁶⁹ The young men of Vancouver and Prince Rupert, many of whom apparently never went near a synagogue or a religious service yet eagerly joined the local Young Men’s Hebrew Associations, reveal a particularly secular way of asserting Jewish belonging.

There has been, and there remains, a complex relationship between religion and a sense of ethnic belonging among Jews. Although binary models of Jewish belief and practice (Orthodox versus socialist) may serve some purposes, we need to recognize that the pressures and patterns created by small (or tiny) Jewish communities often undermine such binaries. Certainly the Jews of British Columbia, adapting to life in the far western province in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, altered many of the religious patterns and practices they brought with them. They did this partly in response to the realities of forming a tiny minority within larger Christian communities. This led some committed irreligious socialists to attend synagogue to find other Jews and some Orthodox Jews to give up on kosher food in small BC communities. Moving to a more secular society in British Columbia enabled many young Jewish men to abandon traditional religious practices (as it did for many of their Christian counterparts). But few of these young men fully jettisoned their Jewishness.

The BC environment influenced the practice and understanding of Judaism, but these findings also have significance beyond the BC context. Explaining the Jewish immigrant experience in binary terms obscures the richer and more complex lived religion of many immigrants and their children, for whom religious practices and observances varied widely – between and among socialists and the Orthodox, and within families. Such lived religion intersected in a range of ways with more secular practices, with the personal and family meanings ascribed to such practices in terms of Jewish belief, non-belief, and identity varying more widely still. However far it strayed from perceived norms, a sense of Jewishness, and the need to assert it in some form or another, appears to be a common thread uniting divergent beliefs and practices.

⁶⁹ See McDonnell, “Company of Gentiles,” 122, for a similar point about the Jews of northern British Columbia in this period.