

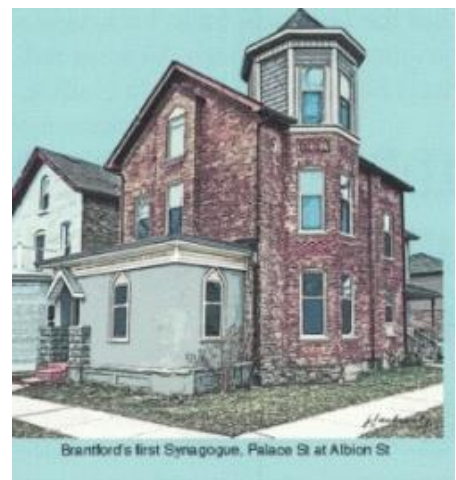
MEMORIES OF BRANTFORD'S JEWISH COMMUNITY – THE AMAZINGLY SUCCESSFUL EVENT HELD BY HERITAGE PARTNERS!

“The results have been amazing!” exclaimed Bill Darfler. “Beyond all our expectations!” declared Christina Han. On November 26th, 2019, some of Brantford’s innovative, talented people representing several organizations came together in downtown Brantford to create cooperatively a program of events, inspired by a collection of vibrant stories, *SHTETL ON THE GRAND*, written by the late Gerald Tulchinsky, retired professor and leading scholar of Canadian Jewish history at Queen’s University. “Shtetl” translates as community and refers to the Jewish community in Brantford.

Interestingly, the theme of the annual convention of the Ontario Museum Association held in Brantford in October, 2019, (sponsored by the City of Brantford and the Brant Museum and Galleries Association, which brings together its local heritage organizations), was **Net[works] Benefit**, stressing that collaboration can produce the most effective benefits for its participants. This successful collaborative partnership applied the theme exactly.

The idea for the event began when eminent local historian Bill Darfler discovered this important, wonderful book of stories and obtained copies from Tulchinsky’s widow to sell them locally. She gave permission for the group to use the stories in a performance created by members of **Brant Theatre Workshops** – Peter Muir and others (with whom **CIHC** is partnering, hoping to build an interpretive centre and outdoor amphitheatre). An ad hoc committee was formed and began brainstorming and planning the event and looking for funding and support and the innovative talents of a few people representing various organizations. It culminated in an amazing event centred at Brantford’s Laurier campus. The committee included Bill Darfler, Associate History Professor Christina Han (Brantford Campus), dramatist Peter Muir, tour organizer Brian Moore, and artist/historian Jack Jackowitz. They represented **Laurier University, Brant Theatre Workshops, Canadian Industrial Heritage Centre (CIHC), Brant County Museum and Archives, and Brantford Public Library**. Donors included Brantford’s downtown **BIA, the Brant Community Foundation, Laurier University Brantford Campus, CIHC**, and some private donors.

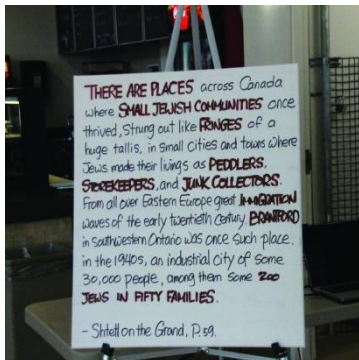
The stories in *SHTETL ON THE GRAND* are based on Gerald (Jerry) Tulchinsky’s observations while growing up in Brantford in the 1940s. Jewish immigrants began coming to Brantford during the various pogroms beginning in the late 1800s, to escape the horrors occurring in Eastern Europe. The vitality and survival skills of these people are wonderfully demonstrated in the sketches created by Tulchinsky. They started their lives in Brantford with very little, borrowing a few dollars from friends or the bank to open up small businesses – junk, scrap metal, a corner store, etc. Over



generations, the families built up their businesses downtown, mostly clothing stores, a hardware business, a movie theatre. As they flourished, they educated their children to become professionals, many who moved out of town to practice elsewhere. The Jewish population peaked in the 1960s with 150 families. With the economic crash upon the closing of the huge Massey and Cockshutt plants, downtown Brantford died and the families closed up their businesses and followed their children to larger cities, mainly Hamilton and Toronto. The synagogue closed without families to serve any more. Now there are about 25 families left.

This event drew back many of the descendants from as far away as Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton, and Port Dover. It was like old home week! Over 150 people registered for the day's events.

The program began mid-afternoon with a walking tour bringing Colborne St. back to life by showing locations of downtown Jewish businesses, led by veteran tour guide Brian Moore from the Brant County Museum. With the support of the museum's Programming and Community Coordinator, Nathan Etherington, Laurier's Associate Professor Christina Han curated a display on the theme which will be available until March 2020. Popular beyond all expectations, the walking tour drew over 100 people and had to be broken into two groups. Moore went out and purchased a megaphone for the occasion when he saw the large crowd gathering. The Museum has never had so many people register for an event in one day!



Christina Han also arranged with Laurier to donate space for the event. The lobby in Laurier's Research and Academic Centre was set aside for the day for several displays prepared by Dr. Han, including an interactive map showing the locations of all the Jewish businesses in downtown Brantford and the homes of the Jewish families. Quotations from the book were displayed. Old photos of people and events projected on a screen stimulated many excited home comers to reminisce. Prof. Han was available to chat with interested people about the display and the wonderful artifact collection she curated.

People registered and gathered together in the lobby to meet and visit together, overflowing the table spaces that were set up for the occasion. At 5 p.m. delectable light refreshments were set out for all attendees of this free event, with musicians performing in the background. The hubbub and happy smiles indicated that visitors were taking advantage of the occasion to reacquaint themselves with relatives and school chums they recognized. The event was publicized not only locally but in *Hamilton Jewish News* and *Canadian Jewish News* and announced on CBC radio.

At 6 p.m., the crowd moved downstairs into the Kun Theatre, where Bill Darfler served as Master of Ceremonies. The Rabbi from Hamilton Synagogue blessed the event. Kate Carter, Dean of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Laurier Brantford, greeted the audience on behalf of the university. The main speaker, University of Toronto Professor of Jewish History Frank Bialystok, spoke about his friend, "Jerry", and the research and literature available on Canada's Jewish History. Ruth Tulchinsky, Jerry's widow, also spoke. Introducers were retired MPP and Speaker of the House Dave Levac, retired mayor, MPP and History teacher Dave Neumann and Brantford's Town Crier, David McKie.

McKie also introduced the humorous and heart-rending sketches performed by members of Brant Theatre Workshops by reading Tulchinsky's introduction to the book, which explained that the names were changed but the stories are based on factual people and events, including himself and his father.

Our guests also included the descendant of a Sudetan Jewish farmer, David Loewith, who recounted the story about his family of 39 members who had migrated to Canada from Czechoslovakia in 1938 to escape the Nazis - before Jews were allowed into Canada. Somehow the family made it through immigration by claiming they were farmers, although they weren't! The government was then looking for farmers and miners to settle in Canada. The Loewith family learned farming quickly and are still very successful dairy farmers situated near Lynden. This family was included in the book with a sketch about Boris (Jerry's father in real life) collecting donations for the Zionist cause from the Loewith family.

Highlighting the day, several other sketches adapted from the book by Peter Muir were magnificently performed, and delighted the audience. They ranged from a Bar Mitzvah with Scottish pipers as guests, to a visit by the police to a home looking for a man's son whom they believe is evading enlistment. The father volubly protests the invasion of his privacy and the accusation against his son's honour, and orders the policeman out. He is mourning the fact that his son's life is in danger because his boy is already a prisoner of war! The Police chief comes to calm him down and to apologize, having lost his own son.

The Brantford stories tell what was happening all across Canada as people emigrated from many lands to find homes and employment and contributed to our country's growth, industry and culture. Bill Darfler commented that before World War I, Brantford had the largest proportion of foreign-born residents of any other city in Canada. These families contributed in many ways to its industry, economic life and culture. Every July, a week has been set aside for many years for the Brantford's International Villages Festival. It is hoped that other local organizations such as Canadian Ancestors (OGS) may participate in the future in joint projects. The committee hopes that this event is the first of many to be held regularly, and that it will serve as a template for future cooperative projects.

Jean Farquharson, Newsletter Editor and Director, CIHC