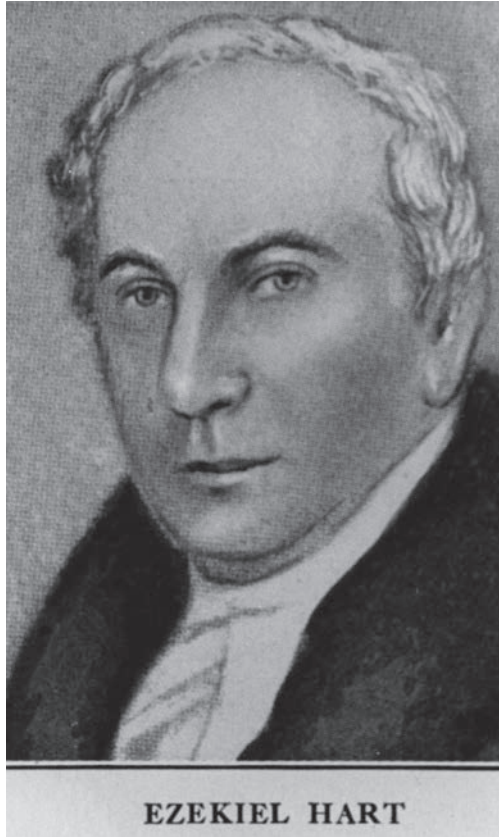


Preface

The Hart Memorial Trophy is awarded annually to the “player judged most valuable to his team” in the National Hockey League. It was donated by Cecil Hart, the coach of the Montreal Canadiens in 1923, in honour of his father, Dr. David Hart. The Hart family descended from Aaron Hart (1724–1800), who was among the first English settlers in British North America. Hart was born either in Bavaria or in London to where his parents had immigrated. He has been described as an officer of the British Army that defeated the French forces in Montreal in 1760, terminating their colony of New France and founding British North America. More likely Hart was a provisioner to the British. The British commander became the administrator of Trois-Rivieres in 1762, and Hart’s patron. Hart bought land from French seigneurs in the Thirteen Colonies, became involved with the fur trade that dominated the colony’s economy, and in establishing retail trade along the St. Lawrence River. In 1768 he went to London to marry Dorothy Judah, cementing a commercial connection with her family. Further, he was associated with other Jewish merchants who had arrived from the Thirteen Colonies to Quebec in the wake of the British victory. At his death he was reputed to be the wealthiest person in the colony. Hart was survived by his four daughters and four sons. During the nineteenth century, while there was some measure of assimilation, the trophy is evidence that a portion of the family line remained intact. Historian Denis Vaugeois concludes that some immigrants kept their past secret while others simply didn’t know their origins.



Ezekiel Hart

Source: Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives

Hart and his Montreal compatriots were exceptional among immigrants to British North America as they were English speakers and self-employed with commercial connections abroad. Nevertheless, a century after the arrival of this small group of entrepreneurs, there were scarcely one thousand Jews in British North America. Of those who followed, few had the advantages of the Harts and their cronies.

There are three interrelated phases with respect to the immigrant experience. The first is settlement which requires understanding the environment from which emigration occurred and the reasons for the choice of a new home (so-called push and pull factors) as well as where settlement was established. The second is adaptation to the physical environment of the adopted country, to its laws, language(s), customs,

bigotry, establishing ethno-cultural/religious institutions, and establishing a livelihood. Third is heterogeneity of the immigrant community that is not necessarily uniform. Within the context of the community's experience historical experience, there is a measure of internal diversity that may disrupt, prolong, or accentuate adaptation.

The interplay of settlement, adaptation and diversity is uneven among immigrant communities and more so among individuals. The story of the Jews of Canada is unique on three fronts. First, until the arrival of immigrants from South and East Asia in the late nineteenth century, Jews were the only religious minority. Second, due to their expulsion from Israel by the Roman Empire in 70 CE, they were the only immigrant community in Canada that did not arrive from a homeland. Third, living in a Diaspora necessitated ongoing adaptation to the whims and vicissitudes of the dominant society, in which ostracization, expulsion, or devastation were ever present threats. Adaptation was an acquired trait as it was a central component of survival.

In the main, Jewish adaptation over two millennia has been a by-product of *being* Jewish. The constant in this process has been its portable scroll, the *Torah*, compiled in the first millennium CE, a compendium of Jewish history, faith, laws, (individual and communal), and responsibilities, written in Hebrew by scribes on parchment, which was installed in places of worship (synagogues) as Jews moved, by force or choice, to a new location. Being Jewish requires literacy which was rare among non-Jews until the nineteenth century. Adaptation has been an essential, but fluid requiring the adoption of native language (s), cultures, and abiding by their laws. One product of this historical experience has been internal diversity, most notably socio-economic stratification.

The history of the Jews of Canada is integrated with Jewish history, Canadian history, and international developments. These themes are interwoven in this account.

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