

# THE IVANSK PROJECT e-NEWSLETTER

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Arthur (Artie) Lipton lived a long, productive life. He left behind a loving family and an enviable record of service to his community. His children, Carol and Michael, pay tribute to their Father. His nephew, Gary Lipton tells us that Artie was the “heart and soul” of the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society.

- **An Ivansker Child Looking For Answers**    *by Raymond Rosenberg*

Raymond summarizes the history of his family. Like many of us, he knows relatively little about his ancestral roots. He seeks our help in learning more about his family, especially his Father, Sam (Zelig) Rosenberg who was born in Ivansk and immigrated to Toronto in the 1920s.

- **Tumultuous Time. A panoramic history of Russian and Polish Jewry focuses on the key period between 1881 and 1914.**    *by Adam Kirsch*

Adam Kirsch is a contributing editor to *Tablet*, an on-line magazine featuring material on Jewish life and civilization. His article is intended as a review of Antony Polonsky's, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, Volume II: 1881 to 1914*, But Kirsch has done more than just critique the book. He's written a thought-provoking essay about the period when most of our ancestors left Poland for distant lands.

- **“The Right Road to Pontypool”**    *reviewed by Gary Lipton*

“The Right Road to Pontypool” is a play about Moishe Yukel Bernstein, an Ivansker who settled in Pontypool, Ontario in the early 1900s. There, Moishe Yukel began an unpretentious summer retreat for Toronto's Jewish immigrants. Soon, many hotels and resorts sprang up in the town, which became a popular destination for hundreds of Jewish families seeking relief from the city's heat and humidity. But by the 1960s Pontypool was no longer fashionable and its Jewish character withered and little is left to remind of us of the past.

- **Do You Remember Pontypool?** The e-Newsletter would like to publish a history of the Jewish experience in Pontypool focusing on the Ivanskers who earned their livelihood or vacationed in the area. We need your help to write the story.

*In Memoriam:*

**Arthur Lipton, z"l (July 25, 1914 – July 29, 2010)**



**Arthur (Artie) Lipton  
Toronto, 1950s**

My uncle, Arthur Lipton passed away on Thursday July 29, 2010, just days after his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday. For the better part of 80 years Artie, as he was known to family and friends, tirelessly served the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society acting as president on numerous occasions. Artie was there at the inception of the Society in 1932 and for the rest of his life he remained dedicated to the organization. To many members Artie was the heart and soul of the Society.

During the 1930s Artie was already active when the Society was engaged in caring for our relatives in Ivansk, sending money and packages to families during the interwar years. In the 50s and 60s the Society flourished. In those days it meant something to be a landsman. Ivanskers came together to *daven* (pray), *fres* (eat) either in the hall at 3425 Bathurst Street or at a *banket* (banquet), at picnics and informal gatherings. Artie was a prominent figure at all these events. Just weeks before he suffered a heart attack Artie attended an Ivansker executive meeting in which he enthusiastically participated in discussions and offered sage advice on important issues.

Artie was born in London Ontario in 1914. He had an older sister Pearl (b. 1910) and a younger brother Hushy (b. 1920). The family moved to Toronto in 1926 and a younger brother Marty was born in 1930. Artie was predeceased by all his siblings. In 1938 he married Evalyn Lerman and together they had 60 wonderful years. They had two children, Carole and Michael who provided their parents with many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Three years after Evalyn died in 1997, Artie met Rhoda Ehrlich and she rejuvenated him. Their close relationship lasted until his death. Members of the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society came to know Evalyn, Carole, Michael, and Rhoda...they sat at "Artie's table" at all Ivansker brunches and other events.

Uncle Artie will be missed by my entire family and by his many friends. Our Society mourns the loss of its longest serving member. Toronto Jewry shares in our loss because of Artie's tireless work on behalf of the community.

Gary Lipton (Toronto)

## **Carole (Lipton) Kerbel, Arthur Lipton's Daughter**

Many years ago, forty to be exact, a rabbi came to Toronto to speak at the Beth Sholom Synagogue. His name was Bernard Mandelbaum. He had written a book entitled, "Choose Life", quoting many of the world's great writers, philosophers and thinkers. My Father met and spent time with the rabbi, who gave him a signed copy of his book.

I tell you about this today because my Father, Arthur Lipton chose life...long before the book was given to him. He was life, and he will always be in the hearts and minds of those who knew him.

Arthur Lipton was my Father. I loved him dearly. He was also my friend and my mentor. I am who I am because of him. And my children and grandchildren have a bit of Artie Lipton in them too.

Born in London, Ontario on July 25, 1914 my Dad and his family moved to Toronto when he was very young. He went to Central Commerce and learned math and typing so he could earn a living. He left school early and went to work with his father in the soda pop and seltzer business. He became an entrepreneur at a very young age.

My Dad lived through some very difficult times but always came out ahead with money in his pocket and a smile on his face. He provided for his family, his parents and his siblings. He was generous to a fault, expecting nothing in return.

He worked hard and he also played hard. But my Father always found time to travel with our family. He was a master at gin rummy and taught me my card sense. I still love to play the game exactly as he taught me.

I was a spoiled child, but I was worth it. After all I was his first born, even if I was a girl. And in the family I was also the first grandchild, the first niece and number one especially in my Father's eyes. Mind you, it did change somewhat after my brother Michael was born two years later.

Artie became my hero. When I was a teenager he anticipated my every need. If I had a special date, he would take me clothes shopping. Or as a surprise he'd come home with cashmere sweater sets for my Mom and me. Later when I learned to drive I had a different car every 6 months.

We never argued and rarely had a disagreement. We often spoke 2 or 3 times a day, right up to the day he went into hospital. He took pleasure hearing about and watching my public relations business grow. He gave advice, taught me how to make money, and much to the chagrin of my husband, Harvey, how to spend it. He was the ultimate salesman of his day.

My Dad had the ability to attract people wherever he went...everyone remembered Artie Lipton. He was smart, dapper, loved to party and exciting to be with. He knew everybody and could get in any door. I always wanted to grow up to be like him, an entrepreneur with a fan club.

Today, Artie's biggest fan club is his 10 grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren. They loved to see him. How many young kids do you know who want to spend time with a 96-year-old man? Yet, he had their undivided attention: to them he showed no age and always managed to slip them some cash. Artie was Artie to them whether he was conducting the seder or saying the Friday night blessings.

My Father had a talent for storytelling. He could talk about the 1930s and the '40s as it were yesterday. He could tell who stole third base in a World Series game even it happened 40 years ago.

My Mother, Evalyn, was his life mate. He doted on her and cared for her. Family was family to Artie no matter which side they were on.

After my Mother passed away, my Father met Rhoda Ehrlich when he was 85. They were an inspiration to each other. They enjoyed life together and today Rhoda is very is very much part of our lives...thank you Rhoda!

We are very fortunate. We knew Artie Lipton.

I am the most fortunate because he was my Father.

## **Michael Lipton, Arthur Lipton's Son**

My name is Michael Lipton. I am extremely proud to be the son of Arthur (Artie) Lipton.

My Dad was born on July 25, 1914, a few weeks before the outbreak of World War I. His life spanned over 9 decades.

It was just a few short days ago that we gathered in his hospital room to celebrate his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday. With 25 people in the room you can imagine the noise we were making. He was under medication and resting comfortably in his bed. During the tumult I asked him if the noise bothered him and if he wanted to rest. With his eyes closed I barely heard him say that he was enjoying himself and wanted everyone to continue having a good time at his birthday party.

This was vintage Artie Lipton... a man with a great zest for life who enjoyed it to the fullest.

My Dad had a number of great qualities.

Apart from his good nature and kindness, he was a great friend and role model to many. In my mind he was just a sweet guy who always wanted to reach out and touch people and be part of their lives.

I would be remiss in not mentioning how generous, loving and compassionate he was towards my Mother, his brothers and sister, as well as his brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law (many of whom have passed on). In turn, each of them loved and respected him dearly.

My Dad was also a strong believer in our Jewish community, giving much of his time and talents in serving on the Board of Governors of the Beth Sholom Synagogue for several years, including 2 consecutive terms as president of the synagogue during some very tumultuous times. As well, he served many years as president of the Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society. He was proud to carry on the tradition started by his father, Jacob Lipovich, who became the first president of the Society in 1932. My Dad even became the President of the Arlen House Condominium Association in Miami giving his time and helping his friends and neighbors. It's quite a remarkable feat to be elected as president of 3 different organizations over the course of 40-odd years. But that was my Dad...he

never stopped giving or caring about others...his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren as well as friends and employees. I can honestly say that whenever people learned that my Dad was Artie Lipton, they would invariably tell me an interesting anecdote about him and say what a great fun-loving guy he was.

One of my Dad's greatest attributes was his positive attitude towards life. Whenever he was knocked down, he always picked himself up, dusted himself off and started afresh. I saw him do this on many occasions. For instance, in 1962 he left a position he enjoyed with Al Siegel, with whom he worked for over 20 years, to begin working with his brothers-in-law, Harry and Art Lerman in "Crawford Sand and Gravel". He told me how difficult it was to transition to another job and another industry at this time in his life. But he did it with great success and aplomb.

My Mom and Dad were happily married for 60 years. They had wonderful years together enjoying their children, many grandchildren and great grandchildren. He was devastated after my mother's death in 1997. But with his positive attitude he again had the strength of character to pick himself up and move on.

Then he met Rhoda and they were together for almost 11 years. Thanks to Rhoda these years were filled with much love and happiness. They were devoted and cared for each other, and I might add that Rhoda is a most welcome addition to our family. In his final days in hospital my Dad admitted to me that he was extremely fortunate to be with Rhoda.

In sum, and to use his words, my Dad lived a good and full life for 96 years. Many people strive to be so fortunate. My Dad was indeed lucky to have so many good and rewarding years.



**Happy and ever-vibrant,  
Artie at a family gathering**

**Summer of 2000**

## AN IVANSKER CHILD LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

by **Raymond Rosenberg** (Toronto, Canada)

I know that I'm long overdue in starting to search into my family's past, but as they say, "It's Never Too Late to Begin". I personally want to know and I believe that my children need to know their family's history. There are many wide gaps in my story. Relatives who had the answers are long gone. I discovered The Ivansk Project just a few months ago and it has encouraged me to get started on my quest. I would be most grateful if any Ivanskers who knew my parents (or other members of my family), could help fill some of the voids.



**My Dad  
Sam (Zelig) Rosenberg**

Toronto, circa late '20s/early '30s

My name is Raymond Rosenberg from Toronto, Canada. I'm from a relatively small family with parental origins in Poland. My father, Sam (also known as Zelig) was born in Ivansk and my mother, Rose (Rivka Berman) came from Warsaw. My father and mother died in 1985 and 1986 respectively.

My siblings and I were born in Canada: my sister, Helen around 1930 and my brother Norman in 1934. I appeared in 1948, 14 years after Norman. So, I will go on record to say that I was not a planned baby. All of us were delivered at the "old" Mount Sinai Hospital on Yorkville Avenue, which is now in the heart of high-fashion, trendy downtown Toronto. Helen died 4 years ago.

My parents arrived in Canada between the World Wars, sometime in the 1920s. I have not been able to narrow this down more accurately but working the math the '20s seem to make sense. I'm grateful that they did not fall into the hands of the Nazis. My mother came to Canada from Warsaw, together with her sisters, Gertrude (Gertie) and Norma. I have a picture of them taken in Canada when they were in their teens (see next page).

My dad's 2 brothers and sister arrived in Canada from Poland before him. He was the youngest child and stayed behind to work with his mother on the family farm. Their home must have been close to Ivansk because they were able to walk to town. In the cold and snowy winters they hooked up the horse to a sleigh, which made things easier to get around. As a boy I imagined what it would have been like to ride in a horse-drawn sleigh over a fresh bed of snow. I still get a sense of peace and comfort thinking about it.

My dad often spoke of his work in the fields and how his mother would bring freshly cooked potatoes with sour cream for him to eat. Potatoes were a big part of the diet back then. I believe my grandmother's name was Chana but I don't know her maiden name or anything else about her.



My father never mentioned his father. I don't know why. Perhaps his dad passed away at a young age or left the family for greener pastures in the old country or possibly North America. In The Ivansk Project e-Newsletter I was able to find only one Rosenberg family listed as living in Ivansk prior to WWII. But I do not know whether this family is related to mine.

Eventually, my father decided that it was time to leave Poland for a brighter future in Canada. His mother remained behind. If she was still alive during WWII, I can only imagine the worst. My dad must have been in his '20's when he made his way to Toronto.

Like most immigrants my father held various jobs and worked hard to survive. I remember him speaking about a job at a soda pop company. I've been trying to remember the name of the company but have not found any that sound familiar. He said that they even produced chocolate-flavored pop that was great when it was really cold.

It wasn't long before my father got a small truck and began collecting things people discarded. He'd buy anything and everything that he could resell. The business gradually grew to include several steady clients in the scrap metal and automobile parts business. This would become the core of his livelihood. He was a one-man operation and his truck displayed, "S. Rosenberg, SCRAP METAL, Lennox 6-9468".



**My Mother and her Sisters  
(L-R) Gertie, Rose (my mother) and Norma  
Toronto, 1920s**



**My Mother  
Toronto, early 1930s**

My dad loved to go out dancing and could really kick it up on the dance floor. My aunt said that he was quite a ladies' man. On Saturday nights he headed for the old Palace Pier down by Lake Ontario to hear live music and dance with all the pretty girls. I believe that this is where he met my mother, Rose (Rivka); she was just a teenager and he was probably in his early twenties.

It wasn't long before they were married and started their lives together in Toronto. My mother was really good with needle and thread and found work in the garment business, which was located along Spadina Avenue, at that time the heart of "Jewish Toronto". Eventually they were able to buy their first home on Markham Street (near Dundas Street) in a Jewish neighborhood where my sister and brother were raised. My sister graduated from Eastern Commerce High School and was a secretary for Braemore Furniture. She continued to work there until after she was married and

looked to start a family. My brother graduated from Bloor Collegiate and went on to Sir George Williams University in Montreal. He completed his post graduate work in the USA and eventually became a high school teacher here in Toronto.

As mentioned my father had 3 siblings: his sister Fanny (Chaiya), and brother Louis (Leibish) lived in Toronto while brother Abe resided in Niagara Falls, New York. As a child I visited Abe and his family several times. He married a wonderful woman, Esther who had a kind and warm heart. She couldn't do enough to make us feel welcome and part of the family. Esther and Abe had a son, Alex. Alex eventually married a girl named Fay and both continued to live in the USA.

My father's brother, Louis was a businessman and owned several successful companies over the years; I think most were located in Windsor, Ontario. Louis married Betty and they had 2 daughters, Gloria and Naomi. Both girls were close to my sister but they moved to California and I've lost touch with them. Gloria married William Shatner, the famous actor, but they divorced before he really made a name for himself in show business.

Fanny, my father's sister, married Zelig Baker and they had 2 children, May and Norman.

My mother's eldest sister, Gertie, married Louis Schwartz and they had a son Earl. Her other sister, Norma married Abe Pearl and they had 2 children, Pauline and Sonny. Pauline moved to California but kept close ties with my sister. It seems that California had a special calling for my cousins.

When I was born, my parents decided to move to a house on Rusholme Drive near Dundas and Dufferin Streets. It was a multiethnic neighborhood with plenty of Jewish families. I grew up in that house, and when I was around 20 years old I wanted to head out on my own. All of our Jewish neighbours had moved to North York, a suburb of Toronto. But my parents lived out their years in the same house on Rusholme Drive.



**My Parents, 1974**

My family went to the orthodox "Dovercourt Road Shul" (*Mackzikei Bnei Yisroel*), just a few blocks from our home. But we weren't very religious. Nevertheless, we felt comfortable there. As a boy I remember running around the basement playing with the other kids while services continued upstairs.

When the time came, my dad arranged for Bar Mitzvah lessons with Rabbi Steinwortzel (I apologize if that's not the correct spelling of his name) who worked out of his home on Coolmine Road, just a short walk from our home. I attended classes 3 days a week for a couple of years at best. He coached other students as well as me, and we sat at old fashion student desks with fold-up seats. The room was dingy and the walls were stained yellow from cigarette smoke. Hundreds of books were stacked on the rabbi's desk, window ledges and the shelves that stood against the walls. He knew every book line by line. It did not matter what volume he asked us to read aloud...he always knew if we made a mistake and corrected us without ever opening the book.



As I progressed in my studies the rabbi encouraged me to read Yiddish stories and the Yiddish newspaper. This, plus the Yiddish my parents spoke at home, extended my vocabulary. I never really spoke Yiddish but I understand quite a bit.

I haven't thought about the rabbi in almost 50 years. He was an incredibly knowledgeable man. He made sure that I was well prepared for my Bar Mitzvah. Standing on the *bima* facing the *Aron Kodesh* (Torah Ark) I was surrounded by several old men who made me very nervous. My palms were sweating. It's like they were there to pounce on me if I made the smallest mistake. I'm pleased to say that I did a perfect job and made my parents very proud.

My father was a member of The Ivansker Mutual Benefit Society. And on Sunday mornings he dressed neatly in a suit or sport jacket to attend the IMBS meetings held on Bathurst St. (The IMBS building is still there and I live only about ten minutes away by car.) He'd tell me who was at the meetings, what was discussed and always raved about the sumptuous breakfasts that were served at the end of the meetings. At the beginning of every Jewish New Year (Rosh Ha Shanah) he brought home an IMBS calendar that was hung on the frame of the kitchen door. In my mind the calendars were printed in black text on shiny white stock and featured pictures of the top executives, Lederman and Lipton on the front page. The calendar was an indispensable reference for all the Jewish holidays.

The aroma of my mother's "Jewish cooking" filled the entire house and will always stay with me. Amongst other dishes she excelled in preparing chicken soup, matzoh balls, beef and liver kreplach, cabbage borsht, sweet gefilte fish and sponge cake. Kishka was also one of her specialties but what a job it was to get this to the table. Most of all I loved the matzoh balls she made at Pesach time. They were the old fashion variety, not too large and hard as baseballs. They were incredible in chicken soup or even sliced and fried in a pan with a little schmaltz. My mother made those matzoh balls throughout the year. Waiting for them until Pesach time would have been torture. My father did the shopping for freshly baked bread and desserts on his way home from work. And on Fridays he'd always picked up the *challah*.

I must have been around 5 years old when my sister Helen married and went on to raise a family with her husband Murray (Morris Verman). Murray was from Saskatchewan and had been an air force pilot in WW II. He was a wonderful person, a doting father and husband, friend to everyone; it was such a great loss when he passed away around 1977. Like my father Murray was a caring man, a "*Gutte Neshuma*". We were lucky to have him in our family. Helen and Murray had two children, Robin and Richard. I did a lot of the baby sitting, and the kids and I loved each other. That bond remains very strong today and has extended to their children.

On weekends our family usually gathered at Helen and Murray's house. Their dining room could accommodate more people than ours and holiday dinners were usually celebrated there. Helen and my mom cooked up mounds of food, enough to feed an army. It was wonderful.

My dad was a good man, a real *mensch*. He could always be depended upon to help whenever he was needed. His love and dedication to my mother were admirable, especially when she was ill during her final days. He would schlep by streetcar to the hospital everyday despite a sore leg, a heart condition and bad weather. He wanted to be with her and to feed her as she wasn't able to do so herself. No matter how tough it was for him, he was always there for my mother.

I've always lived in Toronto and attended Alexander Muir and Old Orchard public schools before heading to Bloor Collegiate. After high school I decided to get into the music business. I started as a junior salesman at A&M Records, owned by Jerry Moss and Herb Alpert, and within no time I was the branch manager and then division manager for the company.



**My Family. Toronto, 1974**  
**(L-R) My Brother Norman, Niece Robin Verman, Me, my Mother, my Father, my Sister Helen and her Husband Morris Verman, my Nephew Richard Verman**

After 16 years with A&M I went on to manage an independent music company from the USA for almost 10 years. After this I did various things and some years later began working with a colleague from A&M Records. He was in an expanding DVD distribution business and I joined him and have been with him for over 7 years.



**My Brother Norman, Sister Helen and Me Toronto. 2000**

In between all of this I put down roots and started my own family. I was married to Shelley Betsy Pearl in 1974 and we had a beautiful son, Brett Jonathan who is 30 now and still lives in the city. He is a music producer and his dreams are finally starting to pay off. Shelley and I were divorced in 1984. My second wife, Elaine Martyn and I were married in 1988 and divorced in 1994. We have a beautiful daughter, Samantha Remy, who is attending University at this time. I have a close and loving relationship with both my children. They have enriched my life beyond words.

I have some great memories growing up in Toronto but now I'm searching for my ancestral roots to find out where I really come from. As you can see the hunt is going to be difficult since I have little information to work with. I have named the important family members and perhaps one of you may recall a name of someone in my family. In this context, a member of the IMBS might remember my dad and tell me more about him. Also, if you know of any Rosenbergs from the Ivansk area, perhaps they're related to my family. My puzzle is missing a lot of pieces and any information that you can offer may be very helpful.

Please come forward with any bit of information that you think may be helpful. Nothing is too small. I would be most grateful if you'd telephone me in Toronto (416-638-1551) or email at [ray.rosenberg@yahoo.ca](mailto:ray.rosenberg@yahoo.ca).

Wishing you all good health and long life,

Ray Rosenberg



**With My Children, Toronto, 2006  
Brett Jonathan and Samantha Remy**

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## **Tumultuous Time.**

**A panoramic history of Russian and Polish Jewry focuses on the key period between 1881 and 1914.**

**by Adam Kirsch**

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Every so often, Americans wring their hands over the historical ignorance of their fellow citizens, as yet another poll shows that most of us don't know the date of the American Revolution or the reasons why the Civil War was fought. Yet it's possible that this historical ignorance is just the flip side of one of the best things about being an American: the right to let go of the past. What brings immigrants to this country from so many war-torn, poverty-wracked places if not the promise of oblivion—that their children, born in American ignorance and confidence, will no longer have to hate the people they hate, fear the people they fear? Without this kind of amnesty from the past, American life wouldn't be possible at all: You couldn't have descendants of the English and the Irish, or the Koreans and the Japanese, or other traditional foes, living together as Americans if they still cherished the old antagonisms. It's not surprising that, in a country founded on letting go of the past, so many people live entirely in the present.

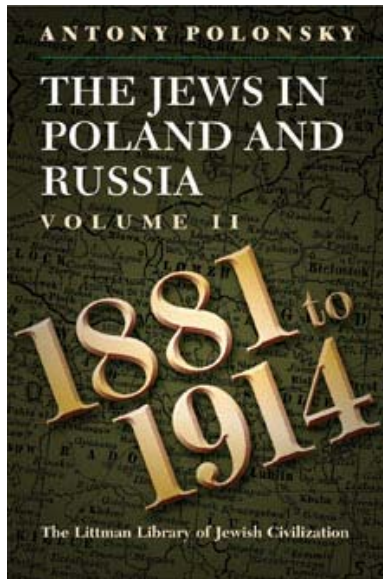
American Jews are, for the most part, quite happy to share in this present-mindedness. Yet, as so often happens, the Jewish case is not quite the same as that of other groups. Jewishness is not only an ethnicity, it is a religion, which means that practicing Jews automatically maintain a connection to the whole of Jewish history, as it is recorded in scripture, the liturgy, and the calendar. Perhaps even more important in dictating American Jewish attitudes toward Jewish history, however, is the way the Holocaust profoundly altered the course of that history.

The Irish and the Italians and the Chinese have an "old country," which can be visited and nostalgized over. But for most American Jews, most of whose ancestors came to this country from Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the old country was destroyed in the Holocaust. For a Jewish tourist, going to Poland means a tour of concentration camp sites, not a visit to distant relatives. And the destruction of that Jewish civilization means, paradoxically, that its American descendants cannot let it go, the way other immigrant groups can let their history go, knowing that the mother country is pursuing its own story in parallel to the American story. Because there is no more old country, it is up to us to keep it alive in memory, or else it will totally cease to exist.

This predicament helps to explain why American Jewish historical consciousness proceeds on two tracks. On the one hand, Jewish history is constantly being written and investigated, with great ingenuity and passion: Not only is there a thriving field of academic Jewish studies, there is a robust lay readership that buys large numbers of books on Jewish history. On the other hand, most of us take our images of the lives our great-grandparents led from the lyrics of *Fiddler on the Roof*, the photographs of Roman Vishniac, and movies like *Schindler's List*: the whole doomed romance of the shtetl, conceived as a sepia-tinged world of simple piety and lost authenticity. (Alana Newhouse, the editor of Tablet, wrote about how the Vishniac photos, in particular, help to construct a mythic past.) And that synthetic image, because it seems so totally different from the



world we live in now, only increases our sense of alienation and guilt toward the East European Jewish past. This guilt—the guilt of the survivors, of those who flourished toward those who perished—is responsible for much of our sentimentality about “the world of our fathers.”



It is for this reason that a book like *The Jews in Poland and Russia, Volume II: 1881 to 1914*, by Antony Polonsky (Littman Library), is so important. It is a big, dense survey, reading at times like a textbook, and it makes up the middle third of an even bigger work. (Polonsky’s first volume covered the years 1350 to 1881, and his third will cover 1914 to the present.) For these reasons—and because of its hefty cover price, \$59.50 for the hardcover edition—it would ordinarily be read only by specialists or students. But any reader who invests the time and money to read the book, or read in it, will find it very rewarding—and not just because of the wealth of information it contains.

What Polonsky’s book brings home, in a way that a narrower study could not, is the sheer complexity and vitality of Jewish life in that time and place. Far from inhabiting a slower, simpler “old world,” the Jews of Eastern Europe, in the period Polonsky discusses, were feeling the full force of modernity—politically, culturally, socially, and economically—and were struggling urgently to cope with it.

The period 1881-1914 is especially interesting to American Jewish readers because it was in exactly these years that most of our ancestors came to this country. Starting in 1880, Polonsky writes, some 2.2 million Jews left the Russian Empire, which included most of the Polish Jewish heartland, and 1.75 million of them ended up in the United States. The exodus of Jews was so massive that, by 1920, by far the largest Ashkenazi Jewish city in the world was New York, with 1.8 million Jews, compared to just 350,000 in Warsaw, the next largest.

Naturally, millions of people do not flee a country where they are happy, and the scale of Jewish emigration offers a sense of how desperate the Jews of Russia and Poland were becoming. Indeed, the first paragraph of Polonsky’s book offers a grim summary of its whole story: “During this period the crisis caused by the deteriorating position of Russian Jewry was the motor which drove world Jewry.” That crisis began abruptly in 1881, when the relatively liberal Czar Alexander II was assassinated by a revolutionary group. His successor, Alexander III, was a reactionary with a particular animus toward Jews, and the beginning of his reign was marked by a wave of deadly pogroms—more than 250 over three years, which took 45 lives and caused much material damage.

At the same time, the new czar approved the infamous May Laws, which prohibited Jews from living in villages or buying land. This “legislative pogrom,” in the words of the pioneering Russian Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, had the effect of concentrating the Jewish population in desperately poor towns and cities, causing an economic crisis. It also marked an end to the previous Russian policy of trying to assimilate the Jews into the Russian empire. From now on, the Jews were treated more or less openly as enemies by the Czarist government. Polonsky writes that “when advised to end the repression of the Jews, [the Czar] had observed, ‘But we must never forget that the Jews crucified our Lord and shed his precious blood.’ ”

Things were somewhat better in Austrian Poland, where millions of Jews lived in the province of Galicia, and even better in the small Prussian-ruled section of Poland, where Jews achieved the greatest degree of equality. (Indeed, reading Polonsky brings home the terrible irony of the fact that it would be Germany that ended up committing a genocide of the Jews, while Russia, under



Soviet rule, was effectively their best defender; from the vantage point of 1900, exactly the opposite might have been predicted.) But in each territory, Polonsky shows, the Jews energetically debated the best ways to adapt to the pressures of the modern world.

The biggest change in this period was the eclipse of the old-fashioned, assimilationist liberals, who had hoped that the Jews—by learning Russian or Polish and joining the surrounding culture—might lose their outsider status. This idealistic view ran up against the evident persistence of anti-Semitism and the seeming impossibility of finding any political allies among Russians or Poles. As a result, many Jews turned in these years to Zionism or Communism, or one of the many offshoots or hybrids of these movements. Polonsky shows that Jewish life in these years was thoroughly politicized, to a much greater degree than it is in America today. In fact, the major effect of the Zionist movement, up to 1914, was not felt in Palestine but in Poland, where the emergence of Jewish nationalism transformed the ways Jews thought about themselves and their fate.

Not surprisingly, however, this new assertiveness, provoked by anti-Semitism, spurred even more anti-Semitism. One of the most famous Hebrew poems, “In the City of Slaughter” by Chaim Nachman Bialik, was a ferocious rebuke to the Jews of Kishinev for failing to fight back during the pogrom of 1903. Bialik imagined “the heirs of Hasmoneans” hiding from their attackers in outhouses and allowing their wives to be raped. But later that year, Polonsky shows, when 200 members of the Bund, the Jewish socialist party, took up arms in self-defense during a pogrom in Gomel, the Czarist government accused them of organizing an “anti-Russian pogrom,” and the army ended up firing on them. In the ensuing trials, 12 non-Jews, and 18 Jews, were sent to jail. The notion that the Jews were enemies of the state went on to become a staple of government and right-wing propaganda, especially after the abortive revolution of 1905.

The first half of Polonsky’s book deals with this kind of political history. But the second half, where he turns to internal Jewish developments in the areas of family life and religion, literature and theater, is perhaps more important and rewarding. Here, too, the conflicts were very intense, sometimes even bloody: When some Jews in Lvov established a “progressive” synagogue in the 1840s, its first rabbi was poisoned, along with his family, by an “Orthodox fanatic.” As this story shows, Polonsky is happy to violate the chronological bounds of his subtitle when necessary, and sometimes—as in his detailed discussion of the spread of Hasidism—he goes back as far as the 18th century.

But this broader picture is needed to make sense of the social changes that were accelerating by the late 19th century—above all, in the situation of women, the subject of one of Polonsky’s best chapters. He notes the irony that the most advanced Jewish reformers, the *maskilim*, were usually the most misogynistic, blaming Jewish backwardness on superstitious and aggressive women (many *maskilim*, Polonsky writes, had a lot of trouble with their mothers-in-law). On the other hand, the fact that Jewish girls were forbidden to study Hebrew and Talmud left them freer than the boys to learn secular languages and literature, resulting in frequent culture clashes. The “cultured” girl forced to marry an unworldly yeshiva *bocher* became a favorite plot for novels and plays.

And it was in this period that secular Jewish literature began to thrive. In addition to examining the mass-circulation newspapers (*Haynt*, the Warsaw Yiddish paper, sold 150,000 copies daily) and the Yiddish theater, Polonsky offers an excellent survey of the classic Jewish literature of the period, from the Yiddish populist Sholem Aleichem to the Hebrew poet Saul Tchernichowsky, who used the language of the Bible to praise the pagan god Apollo: “I am the Jew: your adversary of old!/I come to you, before your statue kneeling,/your image—symbol of life’s brightness.” No picture of our ancestors that doesn’t have room for this kind of paradox can be true to life. Polonsky’s panoramic book, which packs so much vivid detail and statistical information into its 500 pages, helps to show just how rich, and how difficult, that life really was.

## “The Right Road to Pontypool”

A play written by Alex Poch-Goldin and directed by Kim Blackwell  
A Production of the 4<sup>th</sup> Line Theatre

reviewed by **Gary Lipton, Toronto, Canada**



A poster advertising the play

“The Right Road to Pontypool” is a play about Moishe Yukel Bernstein (or Bornstein), a Jewish immigrant from Ivansk who arrived in Canada at the beginning of the 20th century. Moishe Yukel and his family initially settled in Toronto where thousands of other Polish Jews were also starting new lives. A few years later the family moved to Pontypool, Ontario. Pontypool lies between Peterborough and Toronto in Victoria County. Moishe Yukel intended to be a farmer but instead established a summer retreat in Pontypool. There, he rented rooms and cottages catering primarily to poor Jewish immigrants who wanted to escape the heat and humidity of Toronto.

The play is a production of the “4<sup>th</sup> Line Theatre” located in the town of Millbrook amongst the farms, forests and lakes of southern Ontario’s Kawartha District. The company focuses on material about the cultural heritage of the region. With over 300 characters in the script and a cast of 100 actors, “The Right Road to Pontypool” is no small production. It is staged outdoors with the pastoral landscape as a backdrop. The play opens with Moishe Yukel, his wife and children, arriving in Pontypool in a horse-drawn cart. In the early 1900s this was a common sight in Pontypool, but in this instance the new arrivals were not British Protestants, but Polish Jews.

“The Right Road to Pontypool” was written by Montreal Jewish playwright, Alex Poch-Goldin and much of the story was derived from conversations he held with Doris Manetta, Moishe Yukel’s granddaughter. This is the story of a resourceful Ivansker who left the poverty of Poland and came to Canada at a time when overt anti-Semitism was the norm. Nevertheless, Moishe Yukel did well. He bought 200 acres near a spring-fed cow-pond in Pontypool, and by 1910 he and his family were renting rooms to vacationing Toronto Jews. In 1916 the first “resort” in Pontypool opened and between 1910 and 1960 the area was a popular destination for summer vacationers arriving by rail or by car. In the

heyday of the 1940s and 50s, numerous hotels and cottages in the area were run by Jewish entrepreneurs including the Bernsteins, Manettas, Crystals, Lofchiks, Pearlsteins and Whites. Even a shul was erected to serve the religious needs of both the resident and the tourist communities. A mini Catskills emerged.

The accommodations were modest, the food was kosher and there was the “pool” or pond in which to swim. As well, most hotels later had their own swimming pools, and Canadian Jewish comics, such as Louis Weingarten, provided entertainment. (Weingarten eventually changed his name to Johnny Wayne and teamed up with Frank Shuster. Together, “Wayne and Shuster” were celebrated Canadian radio and TV comics in the 1940s through the 1960s,)

But things began to slow down in Pontypool in the late 1950s when the economic status of Toronto’s Jews improved significantly. Now they frequented more up-scale resorts in the Muskoka and Haliburton regions. And in the 1960s Pontypool’s Jewish character collapsed and perhaps only a few Jews still live in the town.

In the play, it is specifically noted that Moishe Yukel employed Jews who arrived in Canada under the so-called “Farm Quota”. The Canadian Immigration Act of 1906 encouraged immigration of people who could work the land because the cities were overpopulated with unemployed people. In those times most Jewish immigrants actually lived and worked in Toronto even though they entered the country under the Farm Quota. Interestingly, many of them turned up at Moishe Yukel’s “farm” whenever there was word that a farm inspector was due to arrive.

Arthur Zimmerman, a member of the Ivansk Project Action Committee and professional historian, has done some research on this subject and will shed additional light on those times in a future e-Newsletter (see below).

Like Ivansk, the story of the Jewish presence in Pontypool is fading from living memory. Not long ago several Jewish families lived year-round in the town. The town’s Jewish personality, its cottages, hotels and shul are gone and like Iwaniska no physical evidence of its Jewish past remains. “The Right Road to Pontypool” does a wonderful job preserving this memory.

In Ivansk the Jewish cemetery has been reclaimed with the support of the readers of our e-Newsletter. That raises the question: did the Jewish residents of Pontypool bury their people in a section of the local Protestant cemetery or in a local Jewish cemetery? And where was Moishe Yukel buried? Can anyone offer any information?

On a personal note, my father’s maternal grandmother, Hana Mandorf came from Bashkewitz, a small shtetl next to Ivansk. She married Moishe Yukel in the early 1930s after his first wife died. Moishe Yukel died in 1937 and Hana outlived him and married again. Doris Manetta recalls that her grandfather made moonshine. Indeed, a legend told in my family states that “Bubba Hana” ran a still during the American prohibition years. The two independent accounts add credibility that the stories are true.



**Arrival of Moishe Yukel & his family by horse and wagon, as seen by the audience attending “The Right Road to Pontypool”**

## **DO YOU REMEMBER PONTYPOOL?**

If you were born before 1960 and grew up in Toronto there's a good chance you've heard of Pontypool.

Many of you may have spent the summer there with family and friends. Perhaps you may also know more about Moishe Yukel and other Jews who lived in the town.

The e-Newsletter would like to publish a history of the Jewish experience in Pontypool focusing on the Ivanskers who earned their livelihood or vacationed in the area.

So, think back and share your memories about Pontypool with us.

Even if you've never been there, you may have heard stories about Pontypool.

Tell us about that time and place and the people who gave it such a special flavor.

Send us an e-mail describing your memories and any other information that gives a sense of what Pontypool was like in its prime.

For example, tell us when you/your family vacationed in Pontypool; where you stayed; the facilities; entertainment; amusements; humorous incidents. Anything that helps to paint a picture of what life was like in Pontypool is appropriate. Photographs taken in Pontypool would be most welcome.

There are no limitations on the size of your material...nothing is too small or too large.

Unless you indicate otherwise, your contribution will be included in the story that will be published in the November - December 2010 issue of the Ivansk Project e-Newsletter.

Send your material by November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 to one us:

- Gary Lipton [glipton@LNDSales.com](mailto:glipton@LNDSales.com)
- Norton Taichman [nstaichman@comcast.net](mailto:nstaichman@comcast.net)
- Arthur Zimmerman [arthurz@look.ca](mailto:arthurz@look.ca)

**YOUR RECOLLECTIONS WILL MAKE THE STORY OF PONTYPOOL  
COME ALIVE**

**PLEASE HELP US PRESERVE THE WORLD OF OUR ANCESTORS**