

History of the Congregation

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONGREGATION SHAAR HASHOMAYIM

Gleaned from the pages of "The Gate of Heaven",
by Rabbi Dr. Wilfred Shuchat

Volume I - 1846-1967
1760-1810 Jews first settled in Quebec. 1767 Lazarus David and Simon Levy were the first Jewish land-owners in Montreal. 1768 The first Jewish congregation in Canada was established on St. James Street in Montreal and was named the Shearith Israel-Sephardic. 1777 The Spanish and Portuguese, the very first synagogue in Canada, was constructed on St. James and Notre Dame. It remained the only synagogue in Canada for the next 70 years. 1831 1107 Jews in Canada, 50 in Montreal. 1846 Congregation Shaar Hashomayim was founded by English, German and Polish Jews. The Congregation rented a room on St. James Street for \$10. 1851 There were 351 Jews in Canada: 181 in Montreal, 77 in Toronto and 40 in Quebec City. 1859 On July 12, the cornerstone of the first Ashkenazic synagogue in British North America, Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, was laid at 41 St. Constant (now de Bullion Street), just below de la Gauchetière. It accommodated 150 men and 50 women. The building was 48 by 111 feet. The services were modeled after the Bayswater Synagogue in London, England. First permanent premises of what is now Congregation Shaar Hashomayim

1885 On October 21, the cornerstone for a new synagogue was laid on McGill College Avenue by president John Edward Moss. 1886 Shaar Hashomayim Synagogue on McGill College Avenue was consecrated. Final cost was approximately \$40,000. At this time, the Shaar still had ties with the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation.

1886 5000 Jews were reported to reside in Canada. Persecutions in Russia had triggered the influx. 1890 Four synagogues existed in Montreal. 1900 7000 Jews in Canada. 1902 Rabbi Herman Abramowitz became spiritual leader of the Shaar, a position he kept until his death in 1947.

1907 10,000 Jews in Montreal. 1910 28,000 Jews in Montreal. 1914 40,000 Jews in Montreal. 1915 Rabbi Abramowitz reported that Shaar Hashomayim had 300 member families and 900 members. 1918

The name Congregation Shaar Hashomayim was incorporated. The Shaar separated from the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation.

It is interesting to note that Shaar Hashomayim once owned the land where the Montreal Forum was located (now the AMC Forum). During the First World War, the land was sold.

This was also the time of increased Jewish immigration to Canada and Montreal in particular. The McGill College Avenue Synagogue was becoming too small and the Jewish population was shifting westward.

1919 46,000 Jews in Montreal. 1920 In June, Shaar Hashomayim procured land at Kensington Avenue and Côte St. Antoine in Westmount. 1921 The cornerstone of the current synagogue, from Israel, was laid by the president, Lyon Cohen. Furnishings from the McGill College location were sold to Beth Shlomo on Bagg Street for \$1,500. The furnishings consisted of the ark, the marble staircase, the benches and the chandeliers. 1922 Dedication of the new synagogue took place on September 17.

1933 The Depression. One in three people were out of work. 1939 – 45 The Second World War. Jewish enlistment: Jewish casualties:

Jews killed:

Jews missing in action:

16,559

703

201

65 1945

Rabbi Wilfred Shuchat came to the Congregation.

1948 Rabbi Shuchat was appointed Rabbi of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, a position he kept for 47 years.

1952 85,000 Jews were reported in Montreal. 1965 The membership of Shaar Hashomayim grew to 1,750 families, 4,000 individuals. The synagogue was only designed to serve 300 families. On the High Holy Days, there was no room for children. An expansion to the Shaar was needed. 1967

On October 1, the cornerstone was laid for the expansion project.

The Library-Museum opened.

Volume II - 1967- present : coming soon

Includes the following highlights:

- 1967 - Expo and Pavilion of Judaism 1971 - 125th Anniversary Banquet
- 1985 - 140th Anniversary
- 1990 - 145th Anniversary
- 1995 - Coat of Arms Ceremony, 150th Anniversary Year
- 1998 - Israel at 50 Concert
- 2003 - Renovation project commenced
- 2006 - 160th Anniversary Year
- 2007 - Capital Campaign Lead Donor Wall dedicated
- 2008 - Dedication of facilities and renaming of Metcalfe and Kensington Halls
to Lande and Victor Halls respectively
- 2008 - Israel @ 60 Gala Concert
- 2008 - Westmount Eruv established
- 2008 - Zomet Institute certifies sound system