

demotion of the Berlin liberal seminary from the status of Hochschule to that of Lehranstalt in 1934. On this basis, as well, it claimed that Spanier did not qualify: the Lehranstalt, as a mere "institute" not of university rank, was clearly inferior academically to the Hebrew Union College, and the immigration law was understood to exclude the grant of a nonquota visa to a scholar coming from an institution of lesser status abroad to one of higher status in the United States.

(Meyer, 1976, p. 364)

Conclusions

These being the facts, what are we to make of them? Librarians who see academic research and publication as complementing their professional duties as bibliographers or administrators may be inclined to identify with Spanier, projecting themselves into the cruel situation in which he was trapped, trying to feel the crushing disappointment and sense of abandonment he must have experienced. Indeed, some might be tempted to hear a parody on the words of the Passover Haggadah. Where the text relates regarding the evil son, *Ilu hayah sham, lo hayah nig'al* ("Had he been there, he would not have been saved"), some might hear, *Ilu hayinu sham, he-hayinu nig'alim*? ("Had we been there, would we have been saved?")

Nowhere in this piece have I used the word "tragic," because to my mind the word brings up the classical definition which implies a fatal flaw in the individual involved. What was Spanier's flaw? That he was a Jew? That he was a librarian? Being a Jew was an accident of birth. And as for the choice of his profession, are we to consider ourselves equally "flawed?" This discussion leads to another word, "hero," one who, according to classical definition, demonstrates courage and nobility in the face of adversity. Was Spanier courageous? Was he noble? I do not actually know, but I would like to think he was.

We, the generations following the *Shoah* (Holocaust), recognize that we have an obligation to remember. But how difficult it is for us to "remember" names we will never know and recognize faces we will never see. When I began to prepare this sketch, it was my intention that a photograph of Arthur Spanier accompany it, for, I believed, to be able to put the features of his face to his name would enhance his humanity. So far, however, I have been unsuccessful in locating a photograph of him. But never mind. We know who Arthur

(Continued in col. 2)

The Jewish Public Library of Montreal: a Portrait of the Founders

Naomi Caruso

*Jewish Public Library
Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

The Jewish Public Library of Montreal began celebrating its 75th anniversary starting in May, 1989. This unique institution is both a lending library open to the general public and a specialized Judaica Resource Center serving academics and researchers who are drawn by such special collections as the Jewish Canadiana and the Library Archives. There is no other library quite like it in all of North America.

To commemorate the 75th birthday, the Library has published an update of its history (Caruso, 1989). The following article is based on one of the chapters that appears in it.

There were several attempts to establish a Jewish library in Montreal in the early 1900s, all of them ending in failure. It was probably because of the fortuitous meeting of two intellectual giants, Reuven Brainin and Yehuda Kaufmann, that the attempt in 1913 finally bore fruit; on May 1, 1914, the Jewish Public Library opened its doors. Neither Brainin nor Kaufmann stayed long in Montreal, yet during the short time that they lived there, they transformed the face of the Jewish community. Almost every educational and cultural institution that exists today in the city can trace its origins to these two men.

Yehuda Kaufmann

Yehuda Kaufmann (1886–1976) came to Montreal in 1913 to join relatives who were living here. He came from a wealthy, well-educated family in Balta, Podolia, that had lost everything after the pogroms. While in Montreal he studied at McGill University, from which he received a Bachelor of Arts in 1915. His proposal for a graduate thesis in Jewish Studies was rejected by McGill, however, so he was forced to leave Montreal in 1916 for Dropsie College (Philadelphia), where in 1918 he obtained his doctorate. His dissertation was on the great Bohemian Rabbi Yom Tov Lippman Muelhausen, who lived in Prague in the 14th century.

Kaufmann's connection with Montreal continued beyond 1916, because of his ongoing ties with the Folks Shule's Teachers Seminary, where he regularly gave lectures. In 1926 he was invited by Haim Nahman Bialik, at that time the editor of The Dvir Publishing House in Tel Aviv, to come to Palestine and compile a Hebrew-English dictionary. He worked at Dvir until 1947, when he left to conduct his own research. His studies on Moses ben Maimon (Even Shmuel, 1935) and Judah Halevi (Even Shmuel, 1973), whose lives he often thought paralleled his own, are well-known and still in print, as is his dictionary.

Even in his twenties, Yehuda Kaufmann signed his name Ibn Shmuel, meaning the son of Shmuel. But in 1947, when his own

MILLER (Continued)

Spanier was, and we know what he stood for in life. We refuse to deny him the immortality that is memory. By our choosing to be Judaica librarians, we tie ourselves to him We become his legatees We are his *kaddish*.

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Reuven Brainin

Credit: Jewish Public Library Archives

son Shmuel met with a tragic end, he formally changed his name from Kaufmann to *Even* Shmuel, meaning a stone for his son. Even Shmuel lived to the ripe age of 90, by all accounts a wonderful man. He was considered a great conciliator, always seeking to find common ground between different factions, such as secular Jews and Orthodox, Zionists and anti-Zionists, Hassidim and Mithnagdim. He was a brilliant speaker, an inspired teacher, and a tireless researcher. In retrospect, the three years that he spent in Montreal were but a short episode in his long and productive life.

Reuven Brainin

Reuven Brainin (1862–1939) was born in Liady, White Russia, to a very poor and religious family. He was 17 years old before he read his first secular book, beginning his long journey away from his traditional roots. He left Russia in his twenties, settling first in Vienna and then in Berlin. He was a journalist by profession, who churned out words for a living, but his true love was the Hebrew language. He spent all his spare time and effort at reviving the old sacred language and transforming it into a modern communication tool. In the Hebrew journals of his time, he wrote about art and music, about love and travel—becoming the hero for thousands of young shtetl dwellers, who read his articles voraciously. He came to represent the model of the new Jew, someone who could remain Jewish at home and adopt Western culture outside.

Brainin first came to Montreal in 1909, during a lecture tour of North America. When he returned in 1912, to assume the editorship of the *Kanader Adler*, the Yiddish daily newspaper, he was fifty years old—a man already on the decline. Unlike Kaufmann, for whom Montreal represented the stepping stone to a long and productive career, Brainin's best years were behind him. The golden years of promise were over. The potential for fame and greatness were exhausted, yet in the "backwoods" of Montreal in the 1910s, the impact of his presence was tremendous.

The Jewish population of Montreal in 1912 numbered 28,000, representing a growth of 20,000 in just ten years. This huge influx of immigrants fundamentally changed the fabric of the community. In contrast to the first Jewish settlers, the newcomers were from Eastern Europe, primarily Yiddish speaking. They were an unruly group, unskilled and self-educated, who brought with them their pronounced ideological and religious differences. They became known as the Downtown Jews. The *Kanader Adler* was their mouthpiece, and the Jewish Public Library was their second home.

This was the environment in which Brainin—he of the fastidious nature and of the impeccable clothes who used to summer in Marienbad and winter in Merano—found himself when he arrived. Brainin became the spokesman of the Downtown Jews. He "endured" the relationship for four years.

In 1916 he left for New York, hoping to recapture some of his former reputation by becoming the editor of the Hebrew journal *Hatoren*. Yet while he was in Montreal, he dedicated himself to his job fully. It was his vision and enthusiasm that kept the Library going in those first two years. At the first annual meeting, Brainin excoriated Jews who stood aside and did not actively participate in their institutions. During a tag-day in February, 1915, when more than 100 girls stood on street corners in the cold, and collected pennies for the Library, it was Brainin and his wife who served them warm drinks when they were done.

At every opportunity, he tried to convey to the people his love for books and what they meant for him. Here are some of his own words on the subject:

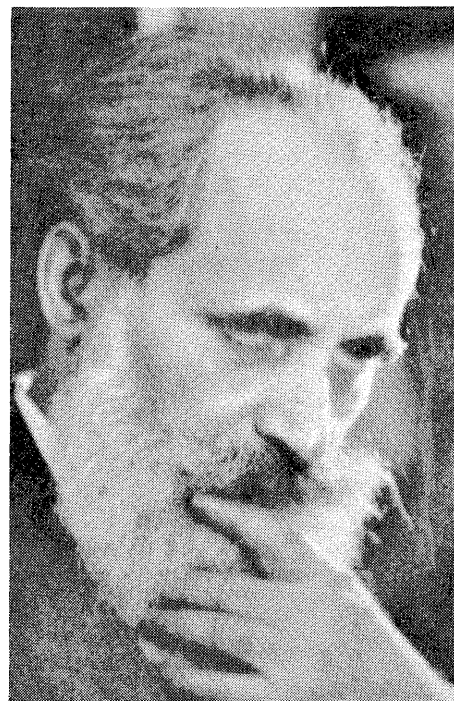
I love people but I love books more . . .
Not everyone has the means to buy books, that is why the Public Library intends to make it possible for everyone to enjoy the cultural treasures of our

people as well as other people's. Our People's Library is the only Jewish democratic cultural institution in the whole of Canada that has no affiliation and therefore has the support and sympathy of all classes and all movements within Judaism.

Further information on Brainin is found in an article published in a prior issue of this journal (Caruso, 1987).

The Kaufmann-Brainin Relationship

It is difficult to imagine two men more different than Brainin and Kaufmann. They differed in age, temperament, and lifestyle. Kaufmann admired Brainin greatly. Though Kaufmann was 24 years younger, he knew Brainin by reputation. During 1912–1913, when various attempts were made to amalgamate the Poalei Zion Library with the Baron de Hirsch Reading Room, Kaufmann—through sheer force of personality—convinced the membership to invite Brainin to be the President of a Jewish People's Library and University, a brand new enterprise, rather than reorganize an old one. According to Sam Belkin, a contemporary of both men, Kaufmann was the real force behind the founding of the JPL—and yet he is the one who is remembered the least. Brainin himself did not mention Kaufmann once in the published portions



Yehuda Kaufmann

Credit: Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives

of his diaries. In an unpublished portion of Brainin's diaries, however (which Belkin found in the archives of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem), there is an entry for June 22, 1915, which reads as follows:

I have here in Montreal only one true friend, Yehuda Kaufmann, a friend whom I like and who likes me in return. He is capable of sharing my grief and remaining loyal even if he thought I didn't have a penny in my pocket. But my friend is under pressure too, so if I would confide in him my real situation it would cause him great suffering. That is why I refrain from telling even this dear man about my worries and troubles. (Jewish Public Library, 1964, p. 52)

This may help to explain why Kaufmann did not harbor any resentment against Brainin.

The impression one gets from the little that has been written about Kaufmann's years in Montreal is that he was a highly disciplined and task-oriented person, who applied himself earnestly to whatever he undertook and saw it through to its completion. Brainin, on the other hand, while always highly motivated and goal-oriented, lacked the will-power and perseverance to see things through. His diary and a vast, multilingual correspondence easily distracted him from his tasks. For two years in Montreal, however, the two men formed a powerful alliance.

By the time the Library's second annual meeting came around in 1916, neither Brainin nor Kaufmann was there. A disheartened Library Committee, headed by Leib Zuker, contemplated a bleak future. It was feared that the Library would have to close. But the Library did not close its doors, then or later. The vision that the two men had projected proved to be so powerful that enough people, in every succeeding generation, dedicated themselves to carrying it on and continuing the enterprise. And so it is that the Jewish Public Library is now celebrating its 75th anniversary. It is interesting to note that it is the only enterprise with which Brainin associated himself, that has endured.

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