
ABRAHAM (ADOLPH) FRIEDMAN

Winnipeg's First Jewish Officer (Detective Interpreter)

Written by John Burchill, President
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As the Jewish community celebrates Tu Bishvat today, the day that marks the beginning of a “new year” for trees, when the earliest-blooming trees in the Land of Israel emerge from their winter sleep and begin a new fruit-bearing cycle, I look back at the first Jewish officers hired by the Winnipeg Police.

The first Jewish officer hired by the Winnipeg Police was Abraham (Adolph) Friedman, born on April 14, 1891, in Zloczow, Galacia (Ukraine). He was hired on September 24, 1913, as a Plain Clothes Constable and Interpreter. He identified as Hebrew and his religion Jewish. He was married and had previously worked as a Conductor for the Winnipeg Street Railway Company. His starting salary was \$75/month, or \$900/year, which would have been standard.

Little else is known about Friedman or his background as only a single application page remains of his employment. His name may have been anglicized when his family arrived in Canada or he may have changed it afterwards due to legal troubles. ¹

While the Jewish policeman has not been studied in Winnipeg, in London, England, Jewish men and women were involved in the policing of the city in official, quasi-official, and unofficial capacities. There were practical reasons for having Jewish constables. There was a select number of occupations that brought Jewish men and women into association with their gentile neighbours. Jewish peddlers, porters, and dealers naturally came in contact with a variety of people. Importantly, there was another vocation that similarly allowed Jewish men to participate in the wider London world: policing. Jewish and gentile peace officers co-operated and worked together in companionship not seen in other trades. ²

According to the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, the first Jews to settle permanently in Winnipeg were three brothers in 1877-1878. By 1881 the Manitoba census indicated that there were twenty-one Jewish families in Winnipeg. They had established themselves in numerous trades and enterprises, including jewelers, tobacconists, peddlers, dry goods merchants, tailors, clothing merchants, a clergyman and a physician. ³

¹ Although Friedman's application shows his first (and only) name as Abraham, he was often referred to as Adolph in both the newspapers and the City Directory.

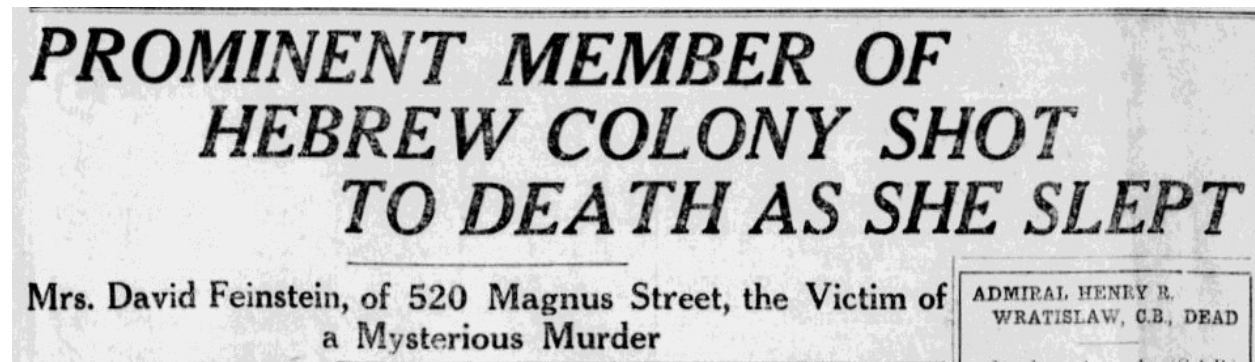
² Karen A. Macfarlane (2011): *The Jewish Policemen of Eighteenth-Century London*, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 10:2, 223-244.

³ Jewish Heritage Centre. “The Origins of Winnipeg's Jewish Community”. Online: <https://www.jhcwc.org/origins-of-winnipegs-jewish-community/>.

By June 10, 1882, some three hundred and forty new Jewish immigrants had arrived, escaping from the Russian pogroms of 1881 and 1882. This influx permanently altered the socio-economic and cultural life of Winnipeg Jewry. However, like so many other immigrants they were confronted with numerous difficulties such as adapting to a different and challenging socio-economic, political, cultural and linguistic environment, and confronted living and working conditions that would tax their moral fortitude and resolve.⁴

By 1911 the overwhelming majority of the approximately 9,000 Jews in Winnipeg, largely working and lower middle class, lived in the North End with a small number of wealthier Jews residing in the central and southern parts of the city. Many were Yidish speaking. In his book “Winnipeg 1912”, Jim Blanchard noted that the highest concentration of Jews was north of the CPR in an area bounded by Selkirk and Jarvis avenues and Main and Robinson streets. Among non-Jews it was known as the New Jerusalem or the more pejorative “Jew Town” while Jews referred to it as Mitzraim, the Hebrew word for Egypt, also meaning “narrow places,” in other words—a place from which to escape.⁵

By 1914, a total of 180,000 immigrants from provinces in the Austro-Hungarian Empire had left their homeland for Canada. Most settled in Manitoba and areas of the Northwest that later became the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Fluency in a foreign language would create opportunities for Friedman and others to assist the police with translation, interpretation and investigations in the growing immigrant communities.



Based on the timing of Friedman’s appointment, it was likely the result of the murder of Sarah Feinstein on August 1, 1913, in her home at 520 Magnus Street. Mrs. Feinstein, a prominent member of the Jewish community, had been shot in the head at close range as she lay in her bed at about 2:15a.m. in the morning. The working theory of the police, according to the Winnipeg Tribune, was “*the culmination of certain anti-semitic feeling which is more or less rampant amongst certain of the foreign element in the district*”. The murder remains unsolved to this day and is the subject of a book by her great grandson.⁶

⁴ *Ibid.* See Jim Blanchard. *Winnipeg 1912*. University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg, 2005 at page 198.

⁵ *Ibid.* Louis Rosenberg report there were 9023 Jews living in Winnipeg in 1911, or 6.3% of the population. See “The Jewish Community of Winnipeg”. Montreal: Research Bureau of the Canadian Jewish Congress, 1946, at p 10.

⁶ Wayne Hoffman. *The End of Her*. Heliotrop Books: New York, 2022.

Friedman's career was uneventful until 1918. He investigated thefts, robberies, stabbings, burglaries, murder and bigamy. In one interesting case, he observed and arrested Sam Korpas at 2a.m. on November 3, 1916, after he saw him leave 98 Hallet Street in the North Point Douglas area. His suspicions were drawn to Korpas, who was white, as he stood out in an area known as "Coloured Row" (we will look at this area in another article). As it transpired, Korpas had just broken into the residence and stole the wallets and cash of the occupants – Zygmund Spermik and John Monaxter. Korpas pled guilty five days later and was sentenced to two years in jail.

Friedman's policing career ended abruptly on October 22, 1918, after being bound over for trial on charges of obstruction. Allegedly Friedman had induced Mike Kohut to leave Winnipeg rather than appear as a witness against Mike Ancon and Isodore Sadowski for pickpocketing him of \$330. Kohut reported the matter to the Winnipeg Police and Friedman was arrested on October 15 by Detective Sergeant Jack Bishop. On October 22 Friedman was committed to trial by Police Magistrate Hugh John MacDonald and he was summarily dismissed by the Winnipeg Police Commission.

On January 4, 1919, Kings Bench Judge John Philpot Curran found Friedman not guilty of the charge. Although Friedman had testified on his own behalf that the whole matter was a frame-up by the police because he was Jewish – alleging "favoratism, petty hatred, prejudice and unfairness", stating that "all the men concerned, including Kohut, the man whose pockets had been picked, were in league together and that the Inspector of Detectives [George Smith] was at the head of the plot" – Judge Curran simply found that the witnesses were not credible and there was no motive for the alleged offence according to the Winnipeg Tribune.

Notwithstanding his acquittal, Friedman was not taken back on the police force. However, his legal troubles were far from over.

**FRIEDMAN AND SEGAL
ATTEMPTED TO BRIBE**

**Found Guilty of Trying to
Induce J. J. Samson to
Withdraw From Contest**

On November 27, 1919, Friedman and Nathan Segal appeared in court for trying to dissuade John J. Samson from running in the civic election as a labour candidate in Ward 3. At the time, Segal was a candidate in Ward 5 and Friedman was the secretary of his nominating committee. It is unknown what benefit Friedman and Segal would derive from trying to dissuade Samson (who had been a Winnipeg police officer until he was dismissed during the 1919 Strike) from running for civic office. However, they were both convicted by Police Magistrate Robert Moore Noble and fined \$50 plus costs. In addition they were disqualified as voters for the next seven years and prohibited from holding public office for the same time.

Magistrate Noble, in finding against both Friedman and Segal, felt that they had lied during their testimony before the court. As a result they were both arrested and charged with perjury after the trial concluded. Friedman was tried before Chief Justice Thomas Graham Mathers sitting with a

jury on March 29, 1920. He was convicted and sentenced to 30 days in jail. Leave to appeal to the Manitoba Court of Appeal was dismissed on May 1, 1920.⁷

It is unknown what happened to Friedman after his last arrest. There is at least one other Abraham Friedman/Freedman who lived in Winnipeg at the same time that was the same age. They are distinguished based on their occupation and date of marriage.⁸ Anyone with confirmed information about what happened with Abraham (Adolph) Friedman is asked to contact the Winnipeg Police Museum.

The next Jewish officer hired by the Winnipeg Police as a Detective Interpreter was Michael Goldstein. Born on June 9, 1894, Goldstein was born in London, England. According to the 1911 Census he immigrated from England in 1906. He identified both his race and religion as Hebrew.

At the time of the 1911 Census, Goldstein was a clerk living at 560 Selkirk Avenue with Nathan and Rebecca Goldstein, possibly a brother and sister-in-law, as they were only 4 years apart in age. He would later move with them to 400 Atlantic Avenue.

Goldstein joined the Winnipeg Police on May 19, 1914. His career was uneventful and he resigned from the Force on July 4, 1917. He would leave Winnipeg and enlist with the United States Navy for service in World War 1 on April 12, 1918.

It is possible Goldstein joined the U.S. Navy to gain citizenship through military service. To encourage immigrant enlistments and to naturalize servicemen, Congress passed laws to expedite military naturalizations. As of May 9, 1918, service members only needed proof of enlistment and testimony from two witnesses to naturalize. The law exempted them from meeting the five years of U.S. residency requirement.

Goldstein returned to Winnipeg on October 1, 1918, where he married Tilly Goldman. They had a son, Howard, born in Winnipeg on June 27, 1919. The family subsequently moved to the United States. The family next appears living in Los Angeles, California, at the time of the 1930 and 1940 Censuses. He indicated his parents were both born in Russia.

Goldstein died in Los Angeles on July 24, 1973. He was buried at Eden Memorial Park Cemetery, Mission Hills, California. The U.S. Military paid for his marker with the Star of David affixed to it, denoting his religious affiliation (Hebrew).

⁷ Segal, who was also convicted at a separate trial before Hugh John MacDonald, was granted an appeal. On April 13, 1920, the Manitoba Court of Appeal quashed Segal's conviction as lacking corroboration.

⁸ For example there was an Abe Freedman, Russian Jew born in 1891, who came to Canada in 1911 that appears in the 1916 Census. He lived at 532 Redwood with his wife Annie. However his occupation was Salesman. This will likely be the same Abraham Freedman that married "Enie Burshtein" in Winnipeg in 1915, and the same Annie and Abraham Friedman that lived at 749 Flora in 1921 (and worked as a driver for a bakery shop). As Friedman (the detective) was already married when he joined the police force in 1913, it is believed these are two different people. Furthermore, the Henderson City Directory shows an Abraham Freedman who worked at the Shragge Co living on Flora and an Adolph Freedman, City Detective, who lived on McIntosh. However, there is no Friedman/Freedman listed in the Census who was a police officer, making tracing difficult.

With Goldstein's resignation in 1917 and Friedman's dismissal in 1918, the next Jewish officer hired by the Winnipeg Police was Elyah (Elijah) Rubenstein. Born in Russia on April 17, 1883, Rubenstein listed his nationality as "British" Hebrew. On the passenger manifest for the British ship the Victorian, arriving in Montreal from Liverpool on July 14, 1906, 23-year old Elijah Rubenstein indicated he was a Russian Jew, but had lived in England for 16 years and was a British Citizen. He indicated he was traveling to Winnipeg.

According to the 1920 Census, Rubenstein could speak Hebrew and his religion was Jewish. He indicated he was Russian born and immigrated to Canada in 1906. He was naturalized in 1910.

Rubenstein was hired as a Plain Clothes Constable and Interpreter by the Winnipeg Police on June 20, 1919, and resigned on August 31, 1925. Prior to joining the Winnipeg Police he worked as an Immigration Inspector for the Government of Canada. He listed his address as 114 Charles Street.

Rubenstein's career was unremarkable. However, his whereabouts after leaving the Winnipeg Police are unknown. He does not appear in the 1926 or 1931 Census anywhere in Canada and may have left the country.

Shortly before Rubenstein's departure, the Winnipeg Police hired Leon Elfenson on July 8, 1925. He was born in Romania on October 31, 1901. He arrived in Canada in 1912 and became a naturalized citizen in 1920. Leon listed his religion as Hebrew when he was hired. In both the 1926 and 1931 Census he identified as Jewish. On November 19, 1924, Leon married Pauline Walker in St. Boniface. Pauline passed away on October 22, 1947 and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery.



Cst. Leon Elfenson, 1932

Leon was promoted to Patrol Sergeant on February 1, 1945, and retired to pension on July 15, 1963.

Leon passed away on October 30, 1974. He was survived by his second wife, Pearl, and four children. He was buried at Elmwood Cemetery alongside his first wife, plot 13-G0383A.

A single undated note in his employment file that states Leon was, for many years, "*one of the athletic noteables of the force, being one of the better wrestlers in the province, and one of the most powerful men on the force ... During the "dirty thirties", when safebreakers ran rife throughout this area, he was a member of one of the cruiser cars that set the pace*".

Any of our readers that have information regarding what became of Abraham (Adolph) Friedman and Elyah (Elijah) Rubenstein is asked to send the writer an email care of the Winnipeg Police Museum at wps-museum@winnipeg.ca

NOTE: In 2024 the Winnipeg Police celebrates its 150th anniversary as well as the 50th Anniversary of the metro amalgamation. Anyone wishing to recognize a police member who made a substantial contribution to policing in Winnipeg or its surrounding municipalities during the past 150 years is asked to send me their name and (if known) a brief description of their accomplishments.