

'Little synagogue on the prairie' moves to Heritage Park

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The Montefiore Institute served as a synagogue, Hebrew school and community centre for Jewish farmers. (Provincial Archives of Alberta)

One of Alberta's oldest synagogues will be moved to its new home in Calgary's Heritage Park Historical Village in the early hours Wednesday morning.

The Montefiore Institute is a small, but historic building, said Irena Karshenbaum, president of the Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society.

"This is one of the only ones that has survived in Alberta," she said. "Heritage Park, I think, is ready to tell a broader story about how the West was won. And that includes the Jewish chapter.... The Jewish people were among the province's first settlers."

The wood-frame building was built in 1913 on a family farm near Sibbald, east of Calgary, on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. It served as a synagogue, Hebrew school and community centre for Jewish families in the area until drought forced many of the area's Jewish farmers to move away, the society says on its website.

In 1937, the building was moved to a nearby town and has since been a private residence.

The building will be moved to Heritage Park after midnight so traffic isn't disrupted. Visitors will be able to see the exterior of the building, but it won't be fully restored and opened until next summer.

The society says that while Jewish people came to the Prairies as early as 1860 with the fur trade, Jacob and Rachel Diamond were the first family to settle permanently in Calgary, arriving in 1889.

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