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Pini's

Kosher Cholov Israel

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HAPPY PASSOVER FROM SABRA

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Re-open 9am, Monday, April 28**

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**PINI'S will be OPEN during Passover
for sale of groceries on April 22-25**

729 West 16th Ave. (betw. Heather & Willow), Vanc.

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Canada

A synagogue lost then found

Calgary's new Heritage Park will display a restored pioneer shul.

RHONDA SPIVAK

Calgary's Heritage Park is soon to be the only historical park in Canada that will have a restored pioneer synagogue on display to teach visitors about Jewish religion and culture.

"The only other synagogue I know of that exists in an historic park in North America is in San Diego," said Irena Karshenbaum, who proposed the idea of a pioneer synagogue to the board of directors of the park.

"The proposal was to build a replica of a synagogue that we knew had

Right: Irena Karshenbaum with a model of the Montefiore colony synagogue.

Below: Canada's little synagogue on the Prairies.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF IRENA KARSHENBAUM

to this one but they have been lost."

She continued, "Calgary is a city of a million people and has only about 8,000 Jews. Heritage Park has approximately half a million visitors a year. Most of the people who will go inside this synagogue will be non-Jewish and, for many, it will be their first time ever setting foot inside a synagogue."

The society, which Karshenbaum formed, has launched a \$1 million fundraising campaign to move, restore and equip the Montefiore synagogue.

"We have already raised about \$400,000 and need the remaining funding to be in place by the time we move the building this spring to Heritage Park. We are hoping that



the Jewish community in Canada will support this unique project, which is such a positive way to educate people about the beauty of Judaism," said Karshenbaum.

Trudy Cowan, an experienced heritage and museum consultant, will oversee the restoration of the synagogue, which is expected to take a year.

"The building has an impressive amount of original historical content intact," said Cowan.

"We have been able to access the original ceiling behind the drop ceiling that was added. The tops of the original windows are still there. We can even see they had a separate little library and we have a copy of two books stamped Montefiore Hebrew Free Public Library," she added.

"The front of the synagogue had a Magen David, which is gone, but the amazing thing is that the nail holes for it are still there," said Cohen.

The restored synagogue will be able to host small-scale weddings and b'nai mitzvah ceremonies. Trained guides in costume will explain Jewish religion and culture to visitors who tour the shul.

"We anticipate that the synagogue will be open to the public in the spring of 2009, which will be the 120th anniversary of the first Jewish family to settle permanently in Calgary, Rachel and Jacob Diamond. Their great-grandson, Bobby Libin, is the chair of our fundraising committee," said Karshenbaum. ■

existed in the Montefiore colony of Jewish immigrants who had settled in Alberta in 1910. We had a photo of the Montefiore synagogue, but assumed the building itself no longer actually existed," said Karshenbaum, who is the president of the volunteer group she founded, called the Little Synagogue on the Prairie Project Society.

"After the project was approved by Heritage Park, one of our board members, Emanuel Cohen, who was born on a ranch in eastern Alberta, did a lot of research and actually found the Montefiore synagogue that we were proposing to replicate," she said.

The synagogue, which is approximately 800 square feet, was built in 1913 by Jewish immigrants from Russia and eastern Europe, who had come to Alberta fleeing persecution. It served about 30 Jewish families, not only as a house of prayer, but as a school and community centre and was built near the present-day village of Sibbald, just west of the Alber-

ta-Saskatchewan border. Due to harsh farming conditions, including drought, hail and pestilence, most of the Jewish settlers abandoned the colony by the 1920s. Some settlers moved to Calgary and Edmonton but most moved to southern California where they became chicken farmers.

"The synagogue was abandoned and, during the Great Depression, the government sold it to a family for \$200. It was moved to a small town in eastern Alberta and lived in as a house and kept in the same family for almost 70 years.

"The shul remained there until Emanuel Cohen tracked it down last year. Our society bought it for \$55,000. The non-Jewish family living in it didn't know it had once been a synagogue," explained Karshenbaum.

Cohen, a 77-year-old real estate appraiser, said that to find the synagogue, he searched exhaustively through local school maps, museums and provincial archives, and spoke to many local residents.

"I had been on the trail of that synagogue for the last 15 years – ever since I wrote my first paper on the Montefiore colony for the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta," said Cohen.

According to Karshenbaum, there apparently "were lots of little synagogues on the Prairies similar