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Happy 150th Canada! 1867-2017



*Jewish Canadian Involvement*



by Rochelle Burns, PhD ©

The history of Jewish Canadians in Canada's legal profession is star-studded.

A notable 'star' was the ever-refined Bora Laskin (1912-1984). In 1970, he was the first Jew to be appointed to the Supreme Court. As a young lawyer, though, anti-semitism in Canadian legal firms blocked his path, despite his stellar academic record from the University of Toronto and Harvard Law School. Nevertheless, he persisted and went on to become Chief Justice in 1973.

In a roundabout way, one must add to this list Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, a leader in Reform Judaism, and admired by all communities for his diplomacy. He graduated from law school in Germany just as Jews were denied the right to practice law there. He told this writer, otherwise, he would have gone on to a diplomatic career there. His legal/diplomatic skills would eventually become Canada's gain.

Then there was Tillie Taylor (1922-2011), LLB, 1956, and only female in her class. Firms wouldn't hire her. So, she became deputy registrar in Saskatoon's Land Titles Office. She persevered and, in 1960, became the first woman (and possibly first Jewish) Provincial Magistrate, paving the way for others like Rosalie Abella who, in 2004, became the first Jewish female Judge on Canada's Supreme Court.

And then there was the remarkably kind and wise, always-with-a-twinkle-in-his-eye, lawyer David Lewis, né Losh (1909 Russia - 1981 Ottawa). He attended McGill, won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, and became a key architect of the New Democratic Party in 1961. As an MP, he was one of Parliament's most devastating debaters, coining the term "corporate welfare bums".

The never ending quest for justice inherent in Judaism was extended to all Canadians by these Jewish Canadian breaking-the-glass-ceiling lawmakers.

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Tillie Taylor: Globe and Mail



Bora Laskin Law Library: University of Toronto