RESPONSA

Zachary M. Baker
Jewish Public Library
Montreal, Quebec

Q. How many Jewish families are there in Canada?

This sounds like a perfectly simple "ready-reference" question, and one might assume that a quick and easy answer is available. Alas, in the world of reference librarianship nothing is to be taken for granted, and this recent telephone query is a case in point.

While fairly accurate statistics on the number of *Jews* in Canada exist, it would take the skills of an accomplished demographer to ascertain precisely how many Jewish *families* there are in that country. Here are a few questions to be considered, while pondering this inquiry:

1) In an age of high divorce rates, late marriages, one-person households, single-parent families, and low fertility (yielding zero—or even negative—population growth), how might one quantify the concept of "family"? (These general population trends, characteristic of advanced, urbanized, post-industrial societies, affect Jews even more profoundly, as numerous studies attest.)

2) In the same vein, what, statistically speaking, constitutes a "Jewish family"? Are we able to extrapolate the number of Jewish families in a given country from the available, overall Jewish population estimates?

3) Our reader was evidently familiar with the common use of the family unit as a yardstick for measuring synagogue membership; did he then assume that the entire Jewish community of Canada (affiliated and unaffiliated alike) could be neatly subdivided and measured by the same index? Or rather, was he merely interested in obtaining a reasonably accurate and current population estimate for Canadian Jewry as a whole?

As far as Canada's overall Jewish population is concerned, census practices yield an ambiguous result. Canadian census-takers offer respondents two options for declaring themselves Jews: by ethnicity and by religion. Most Jewish respondents—*though not all*—choose to define themselves as Jews both religiously and ethnically. (By contrast, an Italian-Canadian Catholic would likely define him- or herself as Italian by ethnicity and Catholic by religion. U. S. census forms omit any reference to religion, and questions regarding national origin refer to the country of one's birth, or of one's ancestors' birth, and not necessarily to one's ethnic origin.[1])

Thus, the 1981 Canadian census reveals that 264,020 individuals declared themselves to be ethnically Jewish, while 296,425 stated that they were adherents of the Jewish religion. One can probably assume that a number of "ethnic Jews" declined to identify themselves as Jewish by religion, and it is obvious that a sizable proportion of those designating themselves as Jews according to religion declined to declare themselves ethnically Jewish. Moreover, it can be assumed that a small number of nominally Jewish respondents (however defined) declined to identify themselves as Jewish under either classification. Beyond that, we won't even attempt to delve into the question of "who is a Jew."

The overall Jewish population figure for Canada, therefore, amounts to approximately 304,000, according to the 1985 *American Jewish Year Book* (AJYB). Is it possible to derive the number of Jewish families from this figure? Unfortunately, while the most extensive treatments of Jewish demography appearing in the *AJYB* in recent years contain detailed tables on various fertility measures, mixed marriages, divorce and remarriage rates, mortality, and age composition of the Jewish communities of various countries (including Canada), they give no comparable figures for average *household* size—which would constitute the closest approximation of family size that one would be likely to obtain. Thus we were left up in the air regarding our reader's question, and were able to provide only the overall estimate of Canadian Jewish population, as based on the figure reported in the 1985 *AJYB*. That may, indeed, have been what he had in mind to begin with.

Reference Tools for Jewish Demography

The *American Jewish Year Book* has long been distinguished for its current estimates of Jewish population in the U. S. and worldwide (albeit, on a country-by-country basis only). Beyond that, readers of this column might not be aware of the in-depth background articles on Jewish demography that regularly appear within the *AJYB*'s pages. Here is a list of the major contributions to Jewish demographic research published in the *AJYB* since 1980:

- V. 81 (1981): "Jews in the United States: Perspectives from Demography," by Sidney Goldstein (pp. 3–59); and "Jewish Survival: the Demographic Factors," by U. O. Schmelz (pp. 61–117).
- V. 83 (1983): "The Demographic Consequences of U. S. Jewish Population Trends," by U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola (pp. 141–187).
- V. 84 (1984): "The Social Characteristics of the New York Area Jewish Community, 1981," by Paul Ritterband and Steven M. Cohen (pp. 128–161).
- V. 85 (1985): "The Demography of Latin American Jewry," by U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola (pp. 51–102); "Recent Jewish Community Population Studies: a Roundup," by Gary A. Tobin and Alvin Chenkin (pp. 154–178); and "Canadian Jewry: Some Recent Census Findings," by Leo Davids (pp. 191–201).

It may surprise readers to learn that while the *AJYB* is an excellent source of current population estimates for all major and minor Jewish settlements in every state of the Union, it does not provide annual population estimates for local Jewish communities elsewhere in the world. Had our reader wished to learn how many Jews live in Win-

nipeg, Strasbourg, or Ramat Gan he would *not* have found these figures in the *American Jewish Year Book*—though he *would* have encountered overall Jewish population estimates for Canada, France, and Israel respectively.

The best and handiest—if highly selective—reference source for current population estimates of individual Jewish communities worldwide is *The Jewish Yearbook*, published by the London *Jewish Chronicle*. In the 1985 edition, for example, we learn that there are an estimated 18,000 Jews in Winnipeg (an over-estimate, according to the 1981 Canadian census, which gives a figure of only 15,350 Jews residing in that city); 8,000 Jews in Strasbourg; and 117,600 Jews in Ramat Gan. *The Jewish Yearbook* provides especially comprehensive coverage for British Jewish communities—just as its U. S. counterpart does for American Jewry.[2]

One other helpful source for population estimates of individual Jewish centers is *The Jewish Communities of the World*, published by the World Jewish Congress in several editions. This handy reference book presents, in capsule form, useful information on the demography, organizations, educational institutions, and religious and cultural life of Jewish communities the world over. The arrangement is alphabetical by country, and under each country, population estimates are provided for the major Jewish communities. The most recent edition of *The Jewish Communities of the World* that I have seen dates from 1971 (3rd edition), though a Hebrew-language version (*Ha-Kehilot ha-yehudiyot ba-'olam*) is known to have appeared two years later. The population figures contained in this work may be somewhat dated.

On a retrospective basis, there are a number of useful sources providing reasonably accurate estimates of the Jewish population of various countries, cities, towns, and even villages.

The most inclusive such source for prewar European Jewish communities is the Yad Vashem *Blackbook of Localities*, which contains population figures for 30,000 Jewish settlements in all countries later occupied by the Nazis. One caveat: where the available pre-World War II census data is ample—as is the case with Poland—the listings are equally detailed; where census coverage is spotty—as is the case with the Soviet Union—population data is given only for the major centers. In other cases, only certain regions within particular countries are included. One example of this is Romania, for which the *Blackbook* lists communities in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania, but not in the "Regat," i.e., those sections of Romania that belonged to that country before World War I. (Mass deportations of Jews from Old Romania did not occur during the Holocaust). Finally, an additional problem with this reference work is that in order to look up a particular Jewish community's population, it is often necessary to know in which province of a country it was located between the two world wars, as well as the official spelling of the locale in question.[3]

Several Jewish encyclopedias are also excellent sources of information on the population of Jewish communities worldwide. The Israeli *Encyclopaedia Judaica* is the most recent such source, and is tolerably good for Western, Central and much of Eastern Europe—as well as for Asia, Africa, Australia, Israel, and the Americas. Use of the index volume is strongly recommended, since the text volumes proper do not employ cross-references for variant spellings of proper names. The *EJ's* German-language namesake, which ceased publication at volume 10, in mid-alphabet—upon the accession to power of Adolf Hitler—has superior coverage of Central and Eastern European Jewish communities, though the information is, of course, dated.

> ***The best . . . reference source for current population estimates of individual Jewish communities worldwide is* The Jewish Yearbook, *. . . London. . . .***

For the population of Jewish communities in the old Russian Empire, the best source is the pre-revolutionary, 16-volume, Russian-language *Evreĭskaîa Entsiklopediîa*. Though broadly based on the English-language *Jewish Encyclopedia*, the *EE* diverges from its model in providing copious entries for individual Jewish communities, not only in Russia proper, but in neighboring countries as well (especially Galicia and Bukovina, which were then in the Austro-Hungarian Empire).

Finally, readers with access to complete runs of both the *American Jewish Year Book* and *The Jewish Yearbook* will find these to be excellent sources of population estimates over the decades for Jewish communities in the United States, Great Britain and the Commonwealth, and elsewhere.

Notes

[1]Readers may be interested to learn that raw U. S. census data is much more readily accessible to researchers than is Canadian data. At present, social historians, demographers, and genealogists have full and unrestricted access to all existing U. S. census files up to and including 1910, while Canadian census files are open only through 1881. From the standpoint of Jewish demographic research, the difference between these two cut-off dates is profound; in 1910 there were already approximately 2.3 *million* Jews scattered throughout the United States, while in 1881 there were a mere 2,443 Jews in all of Canada (by religion, that is; only 667 respondents identified themselves as Jews by ethnicity in that census year).

[2]Since the *American Jewish Year Book* includes extensive lists of both American and Canadian Jewish periodicals, as well as of U. S. and Canadian Jewish federations and national organizations, its editors might be well advised to consider extending their annual population estimates to include provincial and city-by-city figures for Canadian Jewish communities and for sizable Jewish communities the world over.

[3]Readers interested in search strategies for Eastern European geographic names may consult my two articles, "Eastern European Jewish Geography': Some Problems and Suggestions," and "More Eastern European Jewish Geography'," in *Toledot: the Journal of Jewish Genealogy*, vol. 2, nos. 3 and 4 (Winter 1978–79 and Spring 1979).

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Zachary M. Baker is the Head of the Yiddish Department and Technical Services at the Jewish Public Library of Montreal and an authority on Jewish geography and genealogy.