

## **Immigrant Jews and Indian Curios: Four Expansions in the Canadian West**

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Like dozens of young Jewish entrepreneurs who migrated to the burgeoning towns that sprung up between the farms, homesteads, mines, First Nations reserves, or the in-between trading territories in the shifting zone known as the western frontier in the second half of the nineteenth century, John Jacob Hart forged a life, and made a living by engaging with Aboriginal traders.<sup>2</sup> As a teenager, Hart had sailed from his native England apparently to join the American-born lawyer, journalist, and adventurer William Walker in his private military exploit aimed to establish a private colony in Nicaragua. Escaping Nicaragua in the wake of the filibusters' defeat in 1857, Hart moved to San Francisco, and soon after was lured north to the British Fort Victoria, to capitalize on the commercial opportunities that accompanied mining and settlement in the wake of the Fraser Valley gold rush the following year.<sup>3</sup> Until his death at the turn of the century, Hart was a career "Indian trader;" he learned at least two native languages, became an amateur expert on Pacific Northwest coast Indian lore, cosmology, medicine, ritual and theology, and engaged in the buying and selling of countless – and often exceedingly rare and valuable – Indian artifacts. He built one of the largest Indian curio businesses on the continent, centred in

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<sup>2</sup> This lecture is a revised and adapted version of my article "Jews, American Indian Curios and the Westward Expansion of American Capitalism," in Rebecca Kobrin (ed.) *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012. Pp.168-186.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah H. Tobe, "J.J. Hart on the Map," and "Victoria's Curio Dealers," in *The Scribe. The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of B.C.*. Vol. XIX, No.1, 1999, pp.3-9, 9-18.

Victoria, B.C., one that would help shape the imaginations of countless whites about “Indians” across the continent and wider European world. For a half-century, Hart’s fate would be wrapped up in virtually all of the significant industries that sat at the threshold between European expansion and Native subjugation on the Canadian Pacific Northwest: land speculation, natural resource extraction, and the commodification of Aboriginal culture.

Hart was among the thousands of Jews who rushed west to exploit the commercial opportunities that accompanied homesteading, mining, and the newly inter-connecting trade routes. The contours of his relationships with Aboriginal people provide a colorful example of Jewish economic agency in the emerging Canadian West during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, and the extent to which Jewish mobility rode, in part, on their interactions with First Nations.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, Hart was emblematic of westward migrant Jews more generally on the whole continent. His migration experience was characterized by tremendous motility, a degree of itinerancy, national border crossing (in his case 4) and colonial expansion. His commercial success, like the meteoric success of Jews on the North American Pacific coast writ large, was made possible by the collusion of capitalism and colonialism.<sup>5</sup> My lecture this afternoon aims to elucidate this collusion, and its respective impacts on both Jewish and First Nations minorities, by focusing on the Jewish cultural and economic entanglements in the “Indian trades,” and the curio industry in particular.

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<sup>4</sup> Peddling and post trading became sites not just of commercial exchange, but of inter-ethnic encounter. Jewish merchants understood their interactions with Indians in frontier towns as fundamental to their immigration-integration narratives. In the retellings of personal and communal Jewish history, trading with Indians became a mark of privileged status. Jews made use of Indians as practical tools as well as cultural foils for their vision of themselves as civic builders, owning-class whites, and masculine frontiersmen. The subject is taken up in greater detail in Koffman, David S. “The Jews’ Indian: Native Americans in the Jewish Imagination and Experience, 1850-1950.” PhD Dissertation. New York University, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Eisenberg, Ava Kahn and William Toll. *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America’s Edge*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009.

As members of a merchant minority, Jews were on the front lines of four expansions. First, Jewish immigrant merchants helped expand *capitalism* by engaging new players, First Nations, in Canada's evolving commercial system. Second, these merchants helped connect economic networks of rural geographies that had yet to be included in Canada's nation-wide capitalist purview to those urban metropolises at their centres. Third, Jewish traders helped create a new market for a new kind of commodity, namely, Indian heritage objects or "curios," objects that originally had no concrete value outside of their Aboriginal communities. In inventing this new market, Jewish merchants played active parts in the expansion of not just capitalism, but – and this is the fourth expansion - of colonial expansion as well.<sup>6</sup> Immigrants and laborers migrated to the geographic margins of Canadian economic life where they incorporated the marginal peoples who inhabited them into larger capitalist structures. Jewish peddlers on the cutting edge of commerce, reached into new territories and helped bring First Nations into the nation's developing market economy and thereby helped spread empire.<sup>7</sup> My comments today focus on Victoria but the study of capitalism's expansion in western Canada had porous boundaries between itself and the US. It owed more to the economics of the Pacific coast more than the politics of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>8</sup>

By focusing on the Jewish merchants who pioneered the curio industry, I will offer some comments on the significance of rural, western economic interactions with First Nations for Jewish modernity, placing Canadian Pacific coast Jewry into the broad context of colonial enterprise – a context that has as much cultural significance as economic. This is my main claim

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<sup>6</sup> Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Hasia Diner, "With Packs on their Backs: Jewish Peddlers, Immigrants, and the Discovery of New Worlds," Paper presented at the *Jews & American Capitalism* Conference, Columbia University and New York University, March 3, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> John M. Findlay and Kenneth Coates, *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*. Montreal: Queens-McGill University Press, 2002.

today: the broad story of **the** great transformation of modern Jewry, namely, the long nineteenth century of migration, can be recast as a story of colonialism, not just one of mobility and motility. The metanarrative of Jewish mass-migration that professional scholars and popular writers of Canadian Jewry most often tell, is a heroic tale of immigrant ascent. The political and social conditions of New World liberal democracies, so the story goes, provided unique opportunities for Europe's *wretched refuse, those poor, tired, huddled masses yearning to breathe free*, as the Jewish poet Emma Lazarus famously described them on the Statue of Liberty. These opportunities simply weren't possible under the weight of European nationalism, its overtaxed land, and its sluggish debates about the extent to which its Jewish populations ought to receive the full benefits of citizenship.

While this metanarrative is not inaccurate, it is too narrow. It forecloses a subtler, richer, and more morally and politically ambiguous history of multiple peoples meeting and influencing one another on the margins of Canadian life (indeed, on life at the margins of any empire) on a frontier, understood here, following the cultural historian of modern Jewry Sander Gilman as "the conceptual and physical space where groups in motion meet, confront, alter, destroy, and build."<sup>9</sup> Building on Gilman's definition, I hope to provide enough evidence to suggest that the fundamental relocation of world Jewry from Europe to its peripheries, ought to be seen as a story of conflict and contest, of the politics and possibilities of colonial encounters.

Jews enjoyed speedy upward mobility from their first arrival in British Columbia in the 1860s, after the discovery of gold in the Fraser Valley. Though plenty of Jewish migrants, like other whites in the West, considered Aboriginal people a barrier to their immigrant aspirations

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<sup>9</sup> Sander Gilman, "Introduction: The Frontier as a Model for Jewish History," in *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories and Identities*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p.15.

for settlement and integration, enterprising merchants among them saw opportunities for productive exchange with Native peoples. Indeed, many of the essential trades that made settlement possible, desirable and lucrative were trades that relied on First Nations labour and expertise, including fishing, timber, skins and furs. The feasibility of successful Indian industries formed a key prong in the western settlement, its financial success, and its settlers' sense of developing and defining a Canadian identity.

Generally, Jewish men came to a Canadian frontier alone – wherever and whenever it developed, along the St. Lawrence River in the late eighteenth century, around the Great Lakes in the early nineteenth, or on the Pacific coast toward the end of the nineteenth. They sought places and found people to trade with based on their material needs. Many western Jewish peddlers traded with First Nations traders for a short time in their fledgling business careers. Indian trade had attracted Jewish merchants from the earliest arrival of Jews elsewhere in both Canada. The founding figures of Canadian Jewish life, like the families of Aaron Hart, Samuel Jacobs or Myer Michaels were merchants who moved into Lower Canada in the wake of the British defeat of the New France in 1760 along side soldiers and traders eager to expand business enterprises in the fur- and pelt-rich lands south of James Bay, and subsequently, west and north toward what would eventually be called Manitoba and beyond. Alexander Henry, Ezekiel Solomons, Chapman Abraham, Gershon Levy, Benjamin Lyon, and Levy Solomons were among the Montreal based Indian traders, incorporated as the Northwest Company in 1779, who apportioned fur regions in the north, west and interiors of Quebec and Ontario. These men brought with them both financing and goods supplied by their filial connections in London and

New York.<sup>10</sup> When they had accrued enough capital, Jewish entrepreneurs tended to move on to larger enterprises and establish themselves in the larger towns and cities that had sprung up in their wakes. Jews enjoyed not just staggering economic mobility in the West, but speedy social integration and a significant voice in civic and political life.<sup>11</sup> During the first segment of the male immigrant experience in the West, Indian-related commercial activity formed a seedling stage in career mobility.

A small portion of these businessmen entered the curio industry, a sub-set of Indian trading that involved the buying and selling of moccasins, totem poles, shaman masks, head dresses, baskets, rugs, medical utensils, musical instruments, and the like - objects that symbolized Indians themselves. A market for these Indian heritage objects exploded in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, after Aboriginal people ceased to pose a serious threat to the colonial settlement project.<sup>12</sup> The period of the most intense collecting of Native artifacts on the rural periphery coincided with the tremendous growth of museums of all kinds in urban centers in the late nineteenth century, as museum and collections scholars have well noted, when “national, civic, and academic pride had combined with governmental aid to science and culture, and more particularly with an enormous outpouring of capitalist philanthropy, to bring about the

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques Langlais and David Rome, *Jews and French Quebecers: Two Hundred Years of Shared History*. Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2010; Denis Vaugeois, *The First Jews of North America: The Extraordinary Story of the Hart Family of Quebec*. Montreal: Baraka Books, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Abella, Irving, *A Coat of Many Colours: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada*. Toronto: Lester & Opren Denny's, 1990; Libo, Kenneth, and Irving Howe. *We Lived there, Too: In their Own Words and Pictures--Pioneer Jews and the Westward Movement of America, 1630-1930*. 1st ed. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984; Kahn, Ava Fran, *Jewish Life in the American West: Perspectives on Migration, Settlement, and Community*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002; Abrams, Jeanne E., *Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail: A History in the American West*. New York: New York University Press, 2006; Eisenberg, Ellen, Ava Fran Kahn and William Toll. *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Hart, Michael, *A Trading Nation: Canadian Trade Policy from Colonialism to Globalization*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002; Anne E. Coombes (ed.), *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2006.

foundation or expansion of an incredible number of institutions devoted to the exhibiting of scientific and artistic objects.”<sup>13</sup>

The Indian heritage market bundled all of the material objects that indexed “Indianness” as an essential ingredient to their value, financial, social and otherwise.<sup>14</sup> It included ethnological specimens for anthropological museums sprouting up across Canada, the United States and Europe, “relics” for the antiquities trade, sculptures and crafts for the emerging fine art market for Native works, and a wide swath of objects sold in the booming tourist market.<sup>15</sup> The industry was, according to the scholar and director of the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Jonathan Batkin, “the public aspect of a lopsided barter system in which dealers mined Native communities for artifacts that were later converted into cash.”<sup>16</sup> Stimulated by widely held

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<sup>13</sup> Hawker, Roland W. “The Johnson Street Gang: British Columbia’s Early Indian Art Dealers” *British Columbia Historical News*. Vol. 22, no. 1, 1989, pp.11. See also Dilworth, Leah. *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003; See also, Guyer, Jane I. *Peripheral Markets and the Purchase of Museum Collections in Early Colonial Equatorial Africa* Boston, Mass.: African Studies Center, 1992; Price, Sally. *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989; and Schildkrout, Enid.. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Art historians, anthropologists and *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa* historians of Native America have understood the production and sale of Indian cultural commodities in various ways. Critics of capitalism have bemoaned the commodification of everyday goods and ceremonial artifacts, with particular emphasis on the loss of cultural meaning during this transformation. The curio trade has been examined from the perspective of the collectors, focusing in some cases on the accumulation of wealth by Americans, increased leisure time and Victorian sensibilities – that is, on the cultural changes brought about by advancing industrial capitalism. Others have focused on the colonial aspects of the trade in which curios or “grotesques” contributed to the discourses of power and control between the strange and the familiar, and the systems of belief which “projected the American anti-self onto Indian tribes” Patricia Fogelman Lange, “Nineteenth Century Cochiti Figurines: Commodity Fetishes,” *Museum Anthropology*. 19 (1): 39-44, 1995. Still other scholars have attended to the economic processes that transformed Indian culture. Some of this work emphasizes the experiences and consequences of exploitation, and some emphasizes Native people’s agency in the operations (Ruth Phillips in her introduction to B. Phillips, and Christopher B. Steiner, (eds.) *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, p.4. Finally, scholars have also considered the curio from the perspective of the invention of the tourist “Indian” and the invention of place-bound tourism. See, for example, McFeely, Eliza *Zuni and the American Imagination*. New York: Hill and Wang. 2001; Rothman, Hal K. *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West*. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press. 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Though these are different markets with different distribution networks, different final consumer destinations, and are ultimately made up of objects with meanings that differ on account of the various discursive worlds to which they belong, for my broader purposes in this argument I am treating them as one bundled market, irrespective of market segmentation. For a similar use of these objects bundled together, see Duncan, Kate C. *1001 Curious Things. Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. “Some Early Curio Dealers of New Mexico,” *American Indian Art Magazine*. (1998) Vol. 23, No. 3, p.69.

romantic notions of a vast, untamed wilderness, it was built upon the subjugation of indigenous peoples of the West and their internment on reserves. Jewish participation in the curio trade, and in western commercial growth more generally, clearly benefited Jewish immigrants themselves, but the role they played as agents of economic expansion had a more ambiguous impact.

The occupational profile of Jews in the West during the last third of the nineteenth century served expansion's end, and contributed to the particular articulation expansion would have there, that is, one closely linked with the championing of capitalism as a strategy to stave off the perceived threat of a US invasion in the name of Manifest Destiny.<sup>17</sup> Simply doing what Jews often did to make a living, namely, peddling and engaging in merchant exchange, gave a positive valence to small scale enterprising and helped Jews feel a part of a larger story of civilizing the natives, or unifying a vast nation of mostly unsettled land with its aboriginal inhabitants. Commercial intercourse provided Jews not just a vehicle for settling in a new land, but a seismic shift in Jews' position within their new national context. As the historian of Pacific Coast Jewry William Toll has noted, "for Jewish men, the merchant role [...] enabled them and their families in a single generation to move from medieval artisanship and itinerant merchandising to the highest civil status."<sup>18</sup> Pursuing their material betterment harmonized with the essence of the expansion project.

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<sup>17</sup> Rennie Warburton and David Coburn, *Workers, Capital and the State in British Columbia: Selected Papers*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011; Philip Resnick, "B.C. Capitalism and the Empire of the Pacific," *BC Studies*. No.67, 1985: 29-47; Rennie Warburton and Stephen Scott, "The Fur Trade and Early Capitalist Development in BC," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*. Vol. V, 1985: 27-46. For the US, also see Robbins, William G. *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994; and Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1991; Cronon, William, George Miles and Jay Gitlin (eds.) *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*. New York: Norton, 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Toll, William. "The Jewish Merchant and Civic Order in the Urban West," in Kahn, Ava F. (ed.) *Jewish Life in the American West: Perspectives on Migration, Settlement and Community*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002, p.83.



A number of historical and economic forces positioned Jews to pioneer and participate in the Indian trade generally, and the curio business specifically. The lure of the pioneer spirit that figured romance, adventure, and an exoticism unknown to Jews in the places from which they emigrated, motivated some to seek business and settlement opportunities in the West.<sup>19</sup> More prosaically, having migrated from England, the German provinces, or later from Eastern Europe for the promise of plenty the West offered, many Jews had been pushed out of seaboard cities by limited or limiting employment opportunities, and found themselves on the margins of trade.<sup>20</sup> Many Jewish traders became involved in Indian trading, and in the curio business in particular, due to prior participation in complementary markets such as provisions sales, furs, hides, gold dust, land and oil speculation, small crafts, and hotels.

The Canadian government had enabled this commercializing and settling process, having declared British Columbia its colony the same year that J. J. Hart arrived in Victoria, 1858. The Canadian Commissioner of Land and Works denied Aboriginal title and set forth a policy of prohibiting rights of pre-emption of Aboriginal people in the wake of a small pox epidemic that decimated approximately one third of First Nations by 1862. By 1867, the government instated policies that focused on the assimilation of Aboriginals. The Hudson's Bay Company transferred the vast territories of its fur trading monopoly to Canada in 1870, just a year before British Columbia joined Confederation; the fur trade played a singular role in the development of Canada, providing the motive for the exploration of much of the country and remained the

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Fierman, Floyd S. *Guts and Ruts: The Jewish Pioneer on the Trail in the American Southwest*. New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1985; Kahn, Ava Fran, and Autry Museum of Western Heritage. *Jewish Life in the American West: Perspectives on Migration, Settlement, and Community*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage in association with University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Diner, Hasia, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001; Diner, Hasia. *The Jews of the United States, 1654-2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2004.

economic foundation for western Canada until about 1870.<sup>21</sup> The 1876 Indian Act consolidated all previous Indian legislation, defined Indian status, and gave the Superintendent General administrative powers over many aspects of Indian life. The Crown brokered land exchanges that granted the aboriginal societies reserves and other compensation, such as livestock, ammunition, education, health care, and certain rights to hunt and fish.<sup>22</sup> The more and more land was used for settlement, farming, logging and mining; it became increasingly hard for First Nations to maintain their traditional life based upon subsistence use of the land. In 1876, “a Joint Commission on Indian Land was established by the federal and provincial governments to allocate land to each band. For the next fourteen years the Commission travelled throughout the province meeting with First Nations groups to establish reserve lands. In many cases the land allotted to the First Nations was simply the only remaining land in the area that had not been claimed by settlers.”<sup>23</sup>

Jewish curio dealers provide a particularly rich sub-set of Jewish-Indian commercial encounters because they not only worked as economic integrators of First Nations, they also acted as cultural mediators, translators, and “middlemen” in white consumptions of “Indianness.” They sold physical proxies of their Indian clients to white buyers. Quite consciously, Jewish curio dealers branded themselves, alternatively, as Indians’ custodians, Indian fighters, Indians’ friends, and sometimes even as near-Indians themselves in order to increase the visibility and desirability of the items they aimed to sell. The Jewish traders who helped invent the curio market made profitable livings from the Indian heritage trade as new economic agents in a

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Francis, *Battle for the West: Fur Traders and the Birth of Western Canada*. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1982; E.E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Celia Haig-Brown and David Noch (eds.) *With Good Intentions: Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal Relations in Colonial Canada*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> From the British Columbia Archives’ Exhibit on First Nations from Confederation, <http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/exhibits/timemach/galler07/frames/confed.htm>. Accessed March 14, 2014.

national economy, which had an increasing number of non-functional cultural products available for purchase. Indian sellers and manufactures, white buyers, and Jewish middlemen helped create the category and context for things-Indian as commodities, consumable by non-natives.

On the Canadian Pacific coast centered in Victoria B.C., Jewish merchants dominated the curio trade from its boom in the 1870s through the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> J.J. Hart was not alone. A.A. Aaronson, Jacob Isaac, Samuel Kirschenberg and his partner Fredrick Landsberg, all Jews, owned and operated almost all of the major companies active in the curio business on Johnson Street in Victoria.<sup>25</sup> At least seventeen Jews listed themselves as “Indian traders” in Victoria business registers.<sup>26</sup> By the 1860s, Jewish tobacconist and fur trader Meyer Malowanski, along with his Croatian partner Vincent Charles Baranovich had developed one of the largest fur trading businesses on the coast by establishing a chain of posts from Bella Bella to the northern tip of B.C.<sup>27</sup> The fur boom busted in the 1880s, and in its wake, money migrated to the tourist market. Businessmen like Malowanski and Baranovich refitted ships and shifted laborers that had once served the fur trade to the tourism industry, as companies like the Alaska Commercial Company, itself a significant part of western Canadian Jewish social and economic history, arranged and promoted this new form of business.<sup>28</sup> Entrepreneurs such as the brothers Levy, the brothers Shirpser, David Hart, and Mike Cohen helped grow the nascent curio and

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<sup>24</sup> Akrigg, Helen and G.P.V. Akrigg, *British Columbia Chronicle: Gold & Colonists*. Vancouver: Discovery Press, Vancouver, 1977; Leonoff, Cyril Edel. *Pioneers, Pedlars, and Prayer Shawls: The Jewish Communities in British Columbia and the Yukon*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Hawker, Roland W. “The Johnson Street Gang: British Columbia’s Early Indian Art Dealers,” *B.C. Historical News*. Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 1989, pp.10-14.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis Levy, W. Cohn, Joseph Boscowitz, Morris Dobrin, Abraham Martin and Abraham Israel of the firm “Martin and Israel – Indian Traders,” Abraham Frankel, Hyman Copperman, Julius Seitz, Nathan Solomon, owner of “The Indian Store,” Aaron Oldenburg, Leopold Blum, Lewis Goldstone, Samuel Myers, Henry Nathan, and Jules Friedman.

<sup>27</sup> Hanna, Christopher, J.P. “The Early Jewish Coastal Fur Traders,” *The Scribe: The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of B.C.*, Vol. XIX, No. 1 Pp.9-14.

<sup>28</sup> *Victoria Evening Express* 9<sup>th</sup> September, 1864, p.3.

tourist industries.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the hub of the southwest curio business, and in Omaha, Nebraska, the centre of the Plains curio trade, the first generations of dealers included a significant number of Jews, including Wolf Kalisher, Samuel Snow, Caspar Behrendt, Marcus Katz, Isadore Meyerowitz, Abe Cohn, Emil Strauss, Albert Rose, Elias and Henry Laupheimer, Mark Cohn, Bernard Wolf, Isaac Isaacson, Samuel Strauss, and Joseph Sondheimer. Scores of other Jewish merchants dotted the west coast and the western territories in Oklahoma and Nebraska, Utah and Nevada, Arizona and Wyoming.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to see these Jewish curio traders in Victoria as just one hub in an interconnected circuit whereby cash, ideas and artifacts circulated, almost irrespective of the national border that separated them. The goods regularly crossed over this border. The kinds of cultural demands and economic conditions, plus mail order and railways at least in this industry, linked Victoria with Santa Fe and Omaha even more than to Calgary or Winnipeg. The trade belongs to the wider context of the Wests, plural. So as I drill down into some specifics of the curio trade, I'll be presenting cases not just from Victoria, but from Omaha and Santa Fe as well, as a way of foregrounding the larger point I wish to make, rather than tying this particular history to its intensely local context, even though, of course, all particular histories are intensely tied to local contexts.

These Jewish Indian traders helped invent their respective regional curio industries, encouraging commodity manufacturing from Indian territories. They provided access to Indian objects for non-Natives buyers and markets across the continent by cultivating demand for such

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<sup>29</sup> Hanna, Christopher J.P. "Mike Cohen: 'King John of the Red House,'" *The Scribe. The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia*. Vol. XIX, No.1, 1999. pp.29-34.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Stone, Eileen Hallett. *A Homeland in the West: Utah Jews Remember*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001; Kelsen, Benjamin. "The Jews of Montana, Parts II-V." *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 3.4 (1971): 227-242; Kelson, Benjamin. "The Jews of Montana, Part I." *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 3.2 (1971): 113-120.

objects and erecting channels for their distribution, primarily tourist shops and mail order catalogues. Dealers spread Indian artifacts into the homes and the imaginations of thousands of non-Indians, as indicated by the business registers from trader's shops, like Frederick Landsberg's Victoria "Free Museum" or Jake Gold's Santa Fe "Free Museum" from the 1890s, which recorded the names and addresses of the tourists who bought souvenirs.<sup>31</sup> Dealers leveraged enthusiasm for things-Indian and the concomitant increase in demand for tangible objects that might embody the figure of the Indian and distributed them into fashionable city homes in urban centers as decoration, tourist souvenirs, adventure memorabilia, and as objects suited for playing Indian. Whether as home décor or props for children's play, the objects themselves fed whites' appetites for the imaginary Indian.<sup>32</sup> Once in the hands of white consumers, curios inevitably embodied more of the imagined than the real Indian.<sup>33</sup>

Merchants sold Indian artifacts not just to domestic consumers and tourists, but to natural history and ethnology museums across the country and ocean, widening the scale of the curio market to international scope. Large institutions purchased collections, and presented them as objects of visual and educational consumption, further incorporating previously marginal people and places into a national and international marketplace. Moving these objects from trading posts to museums transformed curios into specimens of science displayed alongside exhibits of other so-called primitive peoples, or exhibitions of New World natural history, its geology, flora and fauna. It also collapsed the geographic and cultural distance between the frontier and the western world's largest urban centers. Victoria, British Columbia's J.J. Hart, for example, sold

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<sup>31</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. "Some Early Curio Dealers of New Mexico," *American Indian Art Magazine*. (1998) Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 68-81

<sup>32</sup> Deloria, Philip, J. *Playing Indian*, New Haven: Yale University Press. 1998; Green, Rayna, "The Tribe Called Wannabee: Playing Indian in America and Europe," *Folklore*, Vol. 99, no. 1. (1988), pp.30-55; and Mechling, Jay, "'Playing Indian' and the Search for Authenticity in Modern White America," *Prospects* 5:17-33.

<sup>33</sup> Here I am using the language of Berkofer, Jr., Robert F., *The White Man's Indian. Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Knopf, 1978.

curios not just to middle class tourists and mail order consumers in small towns across Canada and the US, but to the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. He also sold a significant collection to the German Jewish immigrant anthropologist Franz Boas.<sup>34</sup> A.A. Aaronson likewise sold artifacts to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Ottawa Field Museum, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.<sup>35</sup> Aaronson sold eighty-five carvings to collector Leigh Morgan Pearsall, whose collection eventually made it to the University of Florida.<sup>36</sup> Frederick Landsberg sold collections to the University of Pennsylvania in 1900, the Field Museum in Chicago in 1903 and 1904, the Milwaukee Public Museum, and in 1904 and 1905, the New York Museum of the American Indian. The Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto acquired his remaining stock when his curio shop closed in 1908. Jacob Isaac arranged a shipment of West Coast Tsimshian and Nisga articles from the Nass and Skeena Rivers to the Indian Commissioner Israel W. Powell, who had acted as a collector for the American Museum of Natural History, and helped assemble the American centennial exhibition in Philadelphia. Finally, Jake Gold sold curios to Adolph Bandelier, the early twentieth century scholar of the southwest, who acquired a portion of Gold's "magnificent collection of Indian goods," for the folk art museum in Berlin.<sup>37</sup>

Jewish curio merchants expanded capitalism not just by including new players in it or providing access to Indian commodities for buyers far from Indian territories. They helped

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<sup>34</sup> Boas's Jewishness is subject to a growing scholarly discussion. See Cole, Douglass. *Franz Boas. The Early Years, 1858-1906*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 1999; Darnell, Regna. *And Along Came Boas. Continuity and Revolution in Americanist Anthropology*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 1998; Feldman, Jeffrey David. "The Jewish Roots and Routes of Anthropology" *Anthropological Quarterly*. Vol.77, No.1. 2004:107-125; Frank, Gelya "Jews, Multiculturalism and Boasian Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* Vol. 99, No.4. 1997:731-745; Glick, Leonard. "Types Distinct from Our Own: Franz Boas on Jewish Identity and Assimilation." *American Anthropologist*. (1982) 84:545-565.

<sup>35</sup> Cole, Douglas. *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985.

<sup>36</sup> Tobe, Sarah H. "Victoria's Curio Dealers," *The Scribe: The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of B.C.* Vol. XIX, no. 2, 1999, pp.15-18.

<sup>37</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. "Mail-Order Catalogs as Artifacts of the Early Native American Curio Trade," *American Indian Art Magazine*. (2004) Vol. 29. No. 2, pp. 40-49.

create new demand; they created a new market for things that had not had commercial value prior. Merchants used several marketing strategies in their catalogues, shops, print advertisements, and in the photographs they arranged, in order to sell the curio objects themselves, and to nurture the development of this new market. Accounting for these marketing strategies goes some distance in explaining, specifically, how dealers invented these commodities and created demand for them by tapping into the broader social imagination that figured Indians into its national consciousness.

Merchants developed alternate personae for presentation to white customers, reflecting competing ideas of the Indian that might sell. The dealer dressed himself as an antique curator, an ethnologist, a scholar of natural history, a cultural rescue worker or a salvager of ancient cultures that might soon be lost to the modern world.

Curio dealers from the southwest, Pacific northwest, and the plains sold wholesale to one another in order to mix together pan-Indian collections valued by customers.<sup>38</sup> They bundled together west coast Haida totem poles, southwest Navajo blankets, and plains Sioux headdresses, for example, clearly unconcerned about whether or not their white consumers paid attention to the cultural specifics of various Native peoples and artifacts. In search of opportunities, Jewish merchants unwittingly provided the material basis on which a consuming white public absorbed ideas about First Nations. Jake Gold marketed himself as a purveyor of Indian heritage objects not just from the southwest, but nation-wide.<sup>39</sup> H.H. Tammen and W.G. Walz of El Paso, Gold's Jewish competitors, mimicked Gold's catalogues, selling packages of goods as collections including one, for example, of "pottery, Apache Soap Weed Basket, a Pueblo Idol, a bow,

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<sup>38</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. "Tourism is Overrated. Pueblo Pottery and the Early Curio Trade, 1880-1910" in Ruth B. Phillips, and Christopher B. Steiner, (eds.) *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. pp.282-297.

<sup>39</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. "Some Early Curio Dealers of New Mexico". Ibid.

arrows, Beaded moccasins, an Indian drum, a buckskin shirt, Indian necklace, a raw hide canteen, Apache war club, mounted bird, a pair of old Spanish spurs,... all labeled and carefully shipped.”<sup>40</sup> Other catalogues organized their curios by tribe: Uncompaghre, White River Ute, Sioux, Piute, Crow, San Carlos, Apache, Zuni, Navajo, Cochita and other tribes.

Marketing curios as “relics” or antiques provided another sales strategy that pulled both purse strings and cultural strings. The ability to tie an object to a by-gone era of the primitive past increased a curio’s sale price and endowed it with an aura of that certain *something* that modern civilization had lost.<sup>41</sup> Prior to 1910, H.H. Tammen published at least thirteen full-length catalogues and at least four supplements in color for mail-order sales from “The H.H. Tammen Curio Co.” established in 1881 most of which echoed this nostalgia for the primitive. One, called “Western Echoes,” from 1882, made Indian objects into stand-ins for the ancient aboriginal American past, somehow both lost to the West, but still located there.<sup>42</sup> These “echoes,” supposedly embodied as artifacts from the ancient aboriginal past, could be purchased, owned, and kept. Likewise, “Gold’s Free Museum and Old Curiosity Shop,” sold “old stone vessels and pottery from the Cliff Dwellers of New Mexico.” Gold promoted not just his wares but New Mexico itself as the “richest field in the world of antiquities and historical curiosities.” His marketing strategy associated Indian curios with his global competitors’ exotica and relics from other dying civilizations around the globe. Gold elevated Indian objects above all, and then excoriated his customers’ ignorance, hoping to convince them to buy a piece of the ancient past:

Americans – always comparatively ignorant of their own great nation – travel the earth over in search of novelties less marvelous than abound in New Mexico... The

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<sup>40</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. “Mail-Order Catalogs as Artifacts,” *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> The Indian curio boom ought also to be seen within the context of booming markets for other exotica – Japanese and Chinese antiques and curios, African heritage objects, and relics from ancient defunct empires. See, for example, Lowenthal, David. *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. New York: Free Press, 1996

<sup>42</sup> Batkin, Jonathan. “Mail-Order Catalogues as Artifacts of the Early Native American Curio Trade” *ibid.*



undersigned has known and been known by the people of New Mexico for 27 years. He is familiar with their country, their customs and their languages. His collectors are all the time gathering curios from the remotest parts of the Territory where the stranger could not penetrate. There is no archeological treasure which does not come to his hands, from relics of the Stone Age to the implements used by the aborigines of to-day. All articles are genuine, and it is well known by New Mexican travelers that each article can be bought more cheaply from him than from the Indians themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Boasting of his own credentials as a master of Indian country, customs and languages, and his collectors' furtive access to zones otherwise forbidden to white men, Gold claimed to have been the middleman for all local artifacts, a custodian of archeological treasures, hoping to convince buyers to bypass even Native sellers themselves.

If the remote past, "relics from the Stone Age," offered a certain appeal, so too contemporary ethnological accuracy, "the implements used by the aborigines of to-day," as Gold's catalogue worded it, provided an effective marketing strategy merchants designed for domestic and institutional collectors.<sup>44</sup> Gold's catalogue of "Curios from the Ancient Mounds and Ruins in the Salt River Valley, Arizona," advertised for sale "many curious Articles used by the Modern Indians of Arizona and New Mexico." His 1893 advertisement pitched an "extremely low price asked for this collection [which] places it in the power of any college, public institution and many private collectors to become the owner of it."<sup>45</sup>

A related strategy leveraged the idea of the West's natural landscape as a point of sale. Calling himself a "Purveyor of Natural History," Tammen, known as an amateur mineralogist, eventually built one of the largest curio businesses, growing out of a business enterprise in which

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<sup>43</sup> Catalogue of Gold's Free Museum, 1889. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. ZC54 889go.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Black Hills Retail Catalogue #12. Est. 1884 (1911): *Indian Relic and Curio Establishment*. L.W. Stilwell Wholesale and Retail. Deadwood, S.D., ZC35 911LW, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>45</sup> Catalogue of Collection of Curios. , ZC56 893dy. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Yale University.

he and a partner sold inks, stereoviews and photographs of western landscapes.<sup>46</sup> One curio catalogue emphasized the link between nature and the Indian curio, listing a collection of “wood, slate, stone carving, basket woven articles, wearing apparel, and miscellaneous section including doctors aprons, Wampooms, used by the Indians as money, carved spoons, recreation games, paint, shells, bracelets, sperm-whale, bear, beaver, seal and other animals’ teeth, tom toms of different sizes.” As this wares list shows, curio dealers brought together all kinds of commodities including medical, domestic, music and play objects, and linked them seamlessly with objects of nature like wood, slate, shells, animal teeth, stones and materials. Presenting themselves as natural historians, dealers capitalized on the popular associations between Indians with nature in order to sell wares to urban consumers eager to bring natural exotica into their homes.<sup>47</sup> It also allowed Jewish merchants to present themselves as knowledgeable of, and connected to the land, countering the persistent that they suffered estrangement from land.

Casting themselves as educators, ethnographers and natural historians provided dealers further opportunities for improved sales. Their supposed specialized, esoteric or arcane knowledge offered potential buyers the sense that the newly available objects for purchase might embody this knowledge. Morris Moss, an English Jewish trader on the northwest coast, fashioned himself “expert” on the Natives around Bella Coola, as did J.J. Hart.<sup>48</sup> Hart published a 44-page booklet entitled “The Indian Bazaar,” that was part advertisement, part ethnographic treatise about Pacific Coast Natives, not entirely accurate; ultimately a booklet more about the

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<sup>46</sup> An October 1881 article about a topical remedy called St. Jacob’s Oil in which Tammen was quoted described him as “a well known and reliable collector of Colorado curiosities.” *Rocky Mountain News*, 1881:8, p.43; Padgett, Martin, “Claiming, Corrupting, Contesting: Reconsidering “The West” in Western American Literature,” *American Literary History*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), pp. 378-392

<sup>47</sup> Albanese, Catherine, *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; and Nash, Roderick, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

<sup>48</sup> Tobe, Sarah H. “New Frontiers,” *The Scribe: The Journal of the Jewish Historical Society of B.C.* Vol. XIX, no. 2, 1999, p.10.

Bazaar itself than anything else, published to coincide with his sale of artifacts to the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Its cover advertised his collection as “The Largest Stock of Curios on the Pacific North West.” It printed the location of the shop prominently, beckoned “the Public, Especially Tourists” to inspect his commodities, and even paired up his shop with other “Sights worth seeing in Victoria,” like the city’s architectural gems, a provincial museum and the landscape’s natural beauty itself, suggesting the essential nature of his shop as part of the experience of the place itself. On the ethnographic side of things, the booklet included pseudo-ethnographic discussions of Indian mythology, the history of the totem pole, legends and traditions of Bella Coola, Queen Charlotte Island and Haida Indians, and a terse study of *Ne-kil-stlass*, “The Creator-The-Raven God.” It even reprinted a Christian missionary report about the origins of the Haida race, their deities and moral standards.

Other dealers emphasized the ritual power still attached to “Indian Idols” to enhance their desirability. “The Idols are made by the Cochita Indians in New Mexico,” ran one advertisement, “and until recently have been worshiped by them as gods. Nothing surpasses them as an ornament for mantle pieces or brackets, and their extreme oddity makes them a valuable curiosity... Should you desire any ... write, as they are hard to obtain and not always in stock.”<sup>49</sup>

By the early 1880s frontier traders, Jews among them, had brought many tribes of Native Americans into cash economies that linked them together with merchants, and connected them to larger markets as the railroads and lines of credit linked rural outposts to commercial city centers.<sup>50</sup> Jewish merchants took some measure of pride in believing they had taught Indians to be better capitalists and therefore better Americans. Expanding capitalism to new participants in the economy of the West provided Jews social capital on top of the actual capital gained from

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Batkin, Jonathan. “Some Early Curio Dealers of New Mexico.” *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Cronon, William. *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton. 1991. See Part III, “The Geography of Capital.”

commercial exchange with Indians. To both Jews and non-Jews, Indian trading could be seen as a kind of missionizing for capitalism. One *Boston Hebrew Observer* article described how Indians learned to become more savvy buyers over time, admiring their abilities to learn capitalism's logic.<sup>51</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* item praised Hopi traders as "Indian Jews," describing their trading acumen in detail and claiming that the Hopi "are natural traders of the keenest sort, against whom visitors from neighboring tribes have no chance whatever."<sup>52</sup> These kinds of articles cast Jews as educators for capitalism or models for commercial activity, and Jews tended to embrace the mantle. Indeed, Jews hoped to show their fellow white but Christian neighbors that the patriotic pursuit of civilizing the Indians did not require Christianization. Rather the spirit of capitalism alone, to which Jews strategically laid claim, could bend outsiders into insiders in the capitalist cauldron.<sup>53</sup> The civic repercussions of Jews' efforts at making a living in this "wild" West also helped to counter anxiety Jews had of themselves as underproductive siphons of more "natural" primary producers such as mining or agriculture. Being a part of the commercial transformation of "empty" land, inhabited only by the "uncivil," meant participation in the expansion process as well as a means to the practical end of mobility. Of course, commercial expansion and the extension of the frontier both formed key elements in the West's conquest.

Jewish curio men were not shy about casting themselves as conquering colonist in order to further promote their industry. "Subduing" Indians, as nineteenth century western Jewish memoirists frequently put it, allowed civilization and commerce to bloom in its wake; curios

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<sup>51</sup> "Indians Trading," *Boston Hebrew Observer*, Vol. 1, No. 21, May 25, 1883.

<sup>52</sup> "Decay Hits Oldest Town" *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1924.

<sup>53</sup> This argument was often made implicitly rather than explicitly. It is significant, however, given that the "missionary spirit," was at the heart of much Indian relations. Though Jews were excluded from harnessing this missionizing spirit, they nonetheless adopted an adapted version of it that removed religion from the equation.

appeared to customers as the salable plunder of the conquerors.<sup>54</sup> Listed as a pawnbroker at the British Columbia and Alaska Colonial and Indian exhibition in 1886, A.A. Aronson, made over as “Wild Dick” Aaronson, clearly modeling himself on the Wild West show character “Wild Bill” Hickok, fibbed to the British press he was “in charge of B.C. Indian curios.” Dressed in buckskin, he fibbed that he was “employed to hunt the recalcitrant Indian to his forest retreat,” pushing back Indians, killing them, and selling the booty to white consumers of white bravado and anti-Indian sentiment, what Herman Melville famously called the metaphysics of Indian hating in his best selling 1857 novel *The Confidence Man*.<sup>55</sup>

Jews in the West, more generally, expressed pleasure in the power they found as fellow white settlers helping civilize the frontier, enjoying what they saw as a reversal of fortune from their subordinate position in Europe. Turn of the century Jewish settlers proudly celebrated the Jews among them who engaged in Indian trades for advancing not just capitalism but colonial expansion. By the close of the nineteenth century, western Jewish immigrant memoirists and newspaper men highlighted Jews’ business acumen, their service to civilization, and the credit they deserved for either clearing Indians from the path of settlement expansion or incorporating them into settlement’s commercial orbit. They aimed to articulate to the non-Jewish world that it owed the western Jews a debt of gratitude for “subduing the Apaches, permitting us [settlers] now to live in peace,” as one Arizona memoirist put it.<sup>56</sup> Journalists and local Jewish history writers would routinely reproduce this rehearsal of Jewish contribution with remarkably little

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<sup>54</sup> Drachman, Samuel H. “Arizona Pioneers and Apaches,” handwritten reminiscences, Tucson, May 4, 1855. AJA MC 649 Box 13, Folder 8.

<sup>55</sup> *British Colonist*, August. 10, 1866, p.3 quoted in Ronald W. Hawker’s “The Johnson Street Gang.” *British Columbia Historical News*, Vol. 22, 1989, p.11.

<sup>56</sup> Drachman, Samuel H. “Arizona Pioneers and Apaches,” handwritten reminiscences, Tucson, May 4, 1855. American Jewish Archives MC 649 Box 13, Folder 8.

variation.<sup>57</sup> Jews in served the country by advancing capitalism in their local counties in much the same way. Likewise over time; Jews in the 1860s, 1870s and 1890s presented themselves as heroes in the same noble project of transforming new lands into economically and commercially viable civic spaces. In 1894 Isaac Goldberg, an Arizona pioneer trader, characterized Jewish traders as standing at the cutting edge of “the irrepressible advances of conquering civilization.”<sup>58</sup> This process represented, according to those who hoped to write Jews into the center of New World history, the most significant gift that Jews made to the development of the nation.

Frontier trading among Indians meant more than eking out a living at the margins. It meant transforming the economically backward European Jewish sub-citizen into a heroic agent of nation-building. Not only might a living be made via commercial intercourse with Natives, but, as new immigrants during the era of mass migration, Jews decidedly cast their commercial achievements as proof of their utility to the larger project of nation forming.

The marketing strategies that Jewish merchants like Hart on the Pacific northwest, Meyer on the Plains, or Gold in the southwest used to promote the curio business obfuscated the primary action of the industry. By helping invent and supply a new market for whites to buy “Indianness,” the curio trade brought new players into intercontinental cash relations, and thus helped incorporate Indians into the expanding commercial structure. It also commodified

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<sup>57</sup> Personal, familial, local, state, and popular western Jewish history writers reproduced this narrative of frontier Jews from their earliest arrival in the Americas. Ruth Arnfeld described Pittsburgh’s Jewish Indian trading “Founding Fathers,” as “pioneers [of] vision and faith,” the “men of good will” who transformed the frontier from a dangerous place of raw wild, to the great cities of American life.” Arnfeld, Ruth. “Jews in America Tradition. Some of Pittsburgh’s Own Founding Fathers,” *The Jewish Criterion*. September 11, 1942, p.30-31. Harold Sharfman exaggerated that the trading activities of Joseph Simon, David Franks, Heyman Levy and Levy Andrew Levy “helped shape Indian policy and opened much of the Trans-Appalachian West to commerce and settlement,” and that Heyman Levy of New York, “the leading Indian trader of his day,” along with Abraham Mordecai and his Indian wife “dominated the trade of the lower Mississippi Valley.” Sharfman, Harold. *Jews on the Frontier*. Chicago: Regnery, 1977; ADD MORE SOURCES?

<sup>58</sup> Goldberg, Isaac. “An Old Timer’s Experiences in Arizona,” *Arizona Historical Review*, Vol. II, October 1929 [1894 San Bernadino, California], pp.90-91. American Jewish Archives SC 4010.

Indianness. Curio salesmen thus “sold” more than Indian objects. They sold the idea of the Indian, flexible enough to include a range of meanings. By helping create and foster a new commodities market that specifically laid claim to Indian heritage, Jews helped extended capitalism’s reach to peoples that had previously lay outside the economy.

The curio trade, and the Jews that plied it, helped the expansion of capitalism not just by including new players in the system, but by absorbing new geographies and new lands – and the resources on those lands – into the economy as well. It helped new settlers appropriate Indian land upon which mass development in the West depended, for it helped perpetuate myths about Indians as alternately disappearing, recalcitrant, and otherwise un-citizen-like.<sup>59</sup> Jews, along with other Canadian and American-born whites and immigrants, clearly benefited from western expansion, much of it reliant on the very Native producers, consumers and laborers who suffered systemic land loss. Although it remains a minor factor in the juggernaut of development, attention to the curio trade and Jews’ involvement in western expansion more generally, reveals ways that culture and commerce collude in the colonial story of the “winning of the West.”

So the reason that I brought you all these details about curio dealers, their small-scale exchange with Native peoples, and the cultural meanings these Jews ascribed to their commercial practices, was to help illustrate how the local, pedestrian inter-ethnic encounter captures something of the much larger social processes of the expansions of three interrelated key forces for the development of the modern world in general and of Canada in particular and the ways in which migrating Jews were active agents in these processes: empire, settlement and capitalism. A *frontiering* process happened in at least somewhat a similar way wherever and whenever Jews

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<sup>59</sup> Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

were on a frontier be it in the Canadian west, on the Australian outback, or in the Argentinian pampas.

Let me spell out three implications, and with these I'll conclude. First, and perhaps most fundamentally, is the virtually unexamined but very significant contribution Jewish peddlers made for expansions on the margins of empires wherever they extended their imperial reaches from the 18<sup>th</sup> through early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, be they British, French, Dutch, Russian, Ottoman, or Austro-Hungarian. Peddling - face-to-face, door-to-door trading, petty as it may seem, was the cutting edge of capitalism. Jewish peddlers were modernity's petty tools, expanding capital and colony.

Second, as I suggested at the start of this talk, Jewish western immigration history ought to be seen in the broad context of modernity's triumph on this continent, a context into which Jewish immigration properly fits but within which it is rarely cast, namely, capitalist and colonial expansion. I believe this reframing contests the celebratory narrative that is generally inherited as Canadian Jewish received memory, and cuts against the grain of much of modern Jewish historiography more generally. Though Jews fled Europe and Russia as relatively powerless victims of continental imperialism, they arrived in the Americas as relatively powerful agents of French, Dutch, and British colonialism. Seen from the West and from *this* site of inter-ethnic encounter, the Jewish experience of mass relocation across continents that so fundamentally shaped Jewish modernity was, *ipso facto*, an experience of forging a frontier. What's new for scholars of modern Jewry is the fact that **these** processes - colonialism, expansion, capitalism – were fundamental shapers of the lives and choices of modern Jews.

Third and finally, for Canadian history, I think these case studies suggest a reasonable model for new questions about national identity, racial & religious belonging, and multi-



culturalism, by looking *beyond* the relationship between the state and its minorities, to the interactions among minority groups, however they have been defined. Our focus on marginal subjects in marginal places offers Canadian Studies, the utility of a broadened concept of the frontier, taken to be "the conceptual and physical space where groups in motion meet, confront, alter, destroy, and build."<sup>60</sup> This concept might serve as a productive alternative to the local history that often fails to see myriad connections to broader forces not visible when focused on individuals, other places not geographically contiguous, and other times that share some similar patterns. The national border is not the most important shaping force of certain histories – commodities, culture, and Native history in general.

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<sup>60</sup> Sander Gilman, "Introduction: The Frontier as a Model for Jewish History," in *Jewish Frontiers: Essays on Bodies, Histories and Identities*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p.15.