

## **A Unique and Historical Milestone: Montreal's Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue Celebrates 250 Years**

\*\*\*\*\* For Immediate Release:\*\*\*\*\*

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue is the first Jewish Congregation in Canada began in Montreal and it is celebrating its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

As Canada's first Jewish congregation, the Spanish & Portuguese opened their doors in 1768. Founded by Simon Levy and Aaron Hart, it was established in a rented space on St. James Street where approximately 15-20 Jewish Montrealers congregated to pray. "Even at that time, there were many members that came from prominent families that included the Joseph, Hays, David, Solomon and Wolff families", states congregation President Edmond Elbaz.

Today the Spanish & Portuguese synagogue is home to a culturally diverse membership of over 800 families, many of whom emigrated to Canada from countries including Iraq, Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Eastern Europe, and most recently from France.

And with the upcoming milestone year fast approaching, many members have already stepped forward to take on different roles in different committees, all related to the numerous events and happenings.

"There will be many different aspects to the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events", says Senior Anniversary Coordinator Rose Simon Schwartz, "and there will be something for everyone". Events include a travelling Archives exhibit of photos, documents and artefacts that will be launched on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at Montreal City Hall. This unique exhibition will showcase the history of the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue from its humble beginnings on Saint James Street to their current home on Saint Kevin & Lemieux. "This display will officially open at Montreal City Hall next spring", says Simon Schwartz, "and will travel around Montreal for all to enjoy before arriving as a permanent display within our synagogue".

A Gala will be held on May 10, 2018 and a series of speaker evenings will be taking place over the course of the anniversary year, showcasing and highlighting the many unique and diverse communities that make up the tapestry of the congregation. Speakers from the Iraqi, Lebanese, Moroccan, Egyptian, Ethiopian, and Ashkenazi communities will come to present their history and how they came to be an important part of the Montreal Jewish community and the congregation of the Spanish & Portuguese.

The highlight of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year will be the dedication of a new Community Sefer Torah scroll. With every member of the Synagogue able to "purchase" a verse, known as a Passouk, this Torah scroll will be the cornerstone of the celebration for Canada's first and oldest synagogue. "A Torah dedication is an important event" says Rabbi Avi Feingold, "and this new Torah Scroll that will belong to all members of our synagogue and our community at large allows the opportunity for all to be a part of this unique celebration."

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue has grown and flourished over these 250 years, and with the numerous events and activities being planned, this celebration year belongs to all Montrealers, in the Jewish community and beyond.

Contact:

Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue  
4894 Saint-Kevin  
Montreal, QC H3W 1P2  
514-737-3695

[250@thespanish.org](mailto:250@thespanish.org)