

It would be impossible to relate every accomplishment and activity in which Lillian Freiman was involved. I will therefore attempt to highlight some of her major achievements.

Born to Pauline Reich and Moses Bilsky in 1885 in Mattawa, the fifth of eleven children, she was brought up in a religious home constantly full of people -- relatives, friends, newly arrived immigrants, or just those who needed food and shelter.

In 1903 Lillian met and married Archibald Jacob Freiman, who had come to Ottawa from Hamilton to open a house furnishing store on Rideau St. Three children and ten years later, the family moved to 149 Somerset St where she conducted what was in effect a social work clinic, receiving committees and “clients” in need of various forms of assistance. The house is now the Ottawa Army Officers Mess. Their summer home, Mitzvah, was the house at Meech Lake, later to be the birthplace of the Meech Lake Accord.

During the war years Lillian continued her work with the Juvenile Court, organized the Red Cross and the Great War Veterans Association, convened a committee to supply milk for Belgian babies, and ensured protection for the sixty or so rag pickers of the city providing them with pushcarts, horses and licences.

In 1917 the flu epidemic struck Ottawa with devastating force. Lillian Freiman, then 32 years old, was asked by the mayor to organize the immense effort needed to respond to the crisis. It was Friday night so she walked to City Hall and for the next five weeks virtually lived in an office there. She supervised 1500 volunteers, coordinating with the City Medical Officer and the media all the emergency services of the city. A centralized information bank for the medical staff was established whereby volunteers and patients were registered and daily records were completed. Through the newspapers she launched a campaign disseminating, not only progress reports, but also information designed to help prevent the spread of the influenza. This innovative approach previewed our modern social service organizations.

Zionism was always in her blood. After her husband was elected President of the Zionist Organization of Canada in 1919, Lillian

coordinated all Zionist women's groups into a national federation resulting in her becoming President of the Dominion Hadassah \Organization.

At this time an urgent appeal for assistance came from the war-wracked Jews in Palestine. Hadassah immediately organized the "Helping Hand Fund". Lillian Freiman toured Canada visiting every centre where the Jewish population was sufficient to warrant an appeal. It was the greatest fundraising drive ever mounted by Canadian Jewry and set a new standard for charitable giving . The donors included many prominent Canadians, such as the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet.

In the summer of 1920 reports were received by Canadian Jewry of the destitute condition of Jewish children of the Ukraine. 137,000 children had been orphaned by war most of whom were already starving. Who better to raise awareness and funds than Lillian Freiman?

As National President of the Jewish War Orphans Committee of Canada, she, and her husband invited Mrs. Arthur Meighen, wife of the Prime Minister to be Honorary President. Another cross country tour provided both money and housing for the soon to arrive immigrants. Every home was personally inspected by Lillian Freiman. Unfortunately the Canadian government limited the number of immigrants so the total was only 146. For many years she kept in touch with these children who continued to call her Mama Freiman, including Gladys who became a member of the family .

She was for ever crossing boundaries that existed between Jews and other ethnic groups. She raised funds for the Institut Jeanne d'Arc helping the sisters who had lost their convent in France during the war. Theirs was the first school I attended in Ottawa. She was also active in many other charitable and philanthropic organizations- the list is too long.

But Zionism and Hadassah remained her true loves . Under her tutelage Hadassah in the early 1920's raised funds for the Jewish National Fund, as well as the Hebrew University whose opening was celebrated with a large reception of 400 in the Freiman home.

Under Lillian Freiman's initiative Hadassah Canada made a unique contribution to the establishment and maintenance of the first agricultural school for women founded in 1923 by Hanna Maisel on the kibbutz of Nahalal. She even arranged for white leghorn chickens to be sent from the Ottawa Experimental Farm. In 1924 Hadassah voted to call the school itself after my grandmother. Although she declined, a building was named for her. In addition, a kibbutz carried her name, Havatzelet Hasharon (Lily of Sharon). The neighbouring settlement of Bitan Aharon is named after A.J. Freiman, Two years ago my family and I, while in Israel for one of my grandsons' Bar Mitzvah at Masada, visited both moshavim. The town councils welcomed us graciously and we heard many stories of the early days as most were families of the original settlers.

June 2, 1939, the family gathered at the foot of the Peace Tower for a half hour carillon concert of Jewish music in her honour when many of her favourite Hebrew and Yiddish folk songs were played.

1939 and war. Again Lillian Freiman ensured that Hadassah worked in cooperation with the Red Cross, raising funds for badly needed blankets and ambulances and a 30 bed hospital in England for Canadian soldiers. They also funded the construction of and the equipment for a base hospital in Nahalal for allied forces in the Middle East.

Designated in 2008 by the Government as a person of national historic significance, Lillian Freiman was tireless in her efforts to aid returning veterans after the first World War. She was one of the founders of the Canadian Legion who subsequently made her an honorary member, at the time, the only woman to be recognized in this manner. The first Canadian poppies were made by blind veterans in her house on her black refectory table – which is now in my son's home. The funds raised by this endeavor went to food shelters for returning soldiers. In recognition of these undertakings a plaque was unveiled in her memory at the entrance to the Officers' Mess, just two days ago. An even greater honour was bestowed on her in 1934 when she received an O.B.E, for "community work, service to returned soldiers and leadership in Jewish Charitable organizations." Lillian Freiman was the first Jew in Canada to be given this distinction.

On the Sabbath, November 2, 1940, Lillian died at the age of 55. Mourners including the Prime Minister and representatives of every organization which she had served crowded the King Edward St. Synagogue. They had come to pay tribute to the woman , described by her husband , as “blessed with the spirit of service”. Tributes poured in from across Canada and Palestine. A beautiful stained glass window was unveiled above the Ark in Congregation Adath Jeshurun. The latter was later moved to Beth Shalom and is now as you can see installed in this sanctuary.

A good and noble woman had passed away. She was remembered by the variety of her interests and scope of her public service. Of course she had also been fortunate in being able to give financial aid and in the early years to help the needy by picking clothes off the rack in the department store. She would choose a warm coat for someone, a blouse or mitts for another -- whatever she felt was needed the most. For the children she always had sweets from the candy counter.

A tribute from the Ottawa Citizen described her as one of the few Canadian women who qualified for a high position in the history of our nation. Modern and ahead of her time she was characterized by simplicity, modesty and whole heartedness in her work.

Today we are honouring my Grandmother who died when I was a small child; more than a lifetime ago. Not only was I fortunate to know her, I have been lucky enough to meet the descendants of so many Jewish and non-Jewish people who were affected by her brave and compassionate works.

Lillian’s life has been an inspiration for her five grandchildren, who, I am so happy to say, are ALL here in this synagogue today. In this age of instant and fleeting celebrity I know that this lady who died more than three score and ten years ago will remain a guiding light for her great and great-great grandchildren and all of us here today. Lillian Freiman was and is the light, warmth and sunshine in the poem by the noted Canadian poet A.M. Klein. Calling her Princess of Israel, he wrote

**Only the light of these yours days
Only the warmth of these your deeds
Eternal sunshine from them speeds
About them sunshine ever plays.**

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