



New museum exhibit tells a story of determination, tenacity, and faith

Provides inspiration for those who value cultural and religious diversity in rural Canada

For Immediate Release, October 31, 2006
Official opening (by invitation only) November 26, 2:00pm
Public opening November 27, 10:00am

Owen Sound, ON – Grey Roots Museum and Archives will open to the public its new exhibit, *L'Chaim, the Story of Beth Ezekiel Synagogue* on Monday November 27th.

Beth Ezekiel Synagogue has the bittersweet distinction of being Canada's last small town synagogue. It remains in Owen Sound, which is by far the smallest community in Canada to still have an active synagogue, as the final reminder of an institution that was once a familiar fixture in small towns across this country.

The exhibit, which has been more than two years in the making, celebrates a remarkable story of determination, tenacity, and faith. It tells of local Jewish pioneers and the contributions they made to Grey County. It tells of a burgeoning community enjoying religious life and observance free from the persecution that dogged its founders in Eastern Europe at the turn of the last century. And it tells the story of a synagogue on the brink of collapse, seemingly destined to follow dozens of other small town Jewish communities into oblivion.

But this story takes a happy turn. Today Beth Ezekiel enjoys unprecedented revitalization with growing membership, renewed optimism, and the will, not only to endure, but to succeed in the face of relative cultural isolation.

According to Petal Furness, Heritage Interpretation Coordinator for Grey Roots, the exhibit is a lesson in religious and cultural freedom. "This exhibit offers a rare glimpse into a community determined to survive against all odds, and provides inspiration for those of us who value cultural and religious diversity in Canada's increasingly homogenous heartland." Furness adds that the exhibit will have feel-good appeal to people of all faiths and of all ages.

For Jeff Elie, President of Beth Ezekiel Synagogue, the effort made by the museum to tell this story reflects the support and goodwill shown by the local community towards the synagogue for more than a century. "I think what sets us apart from other Jewish communities that have disappeared is the way the local population has embraced the notion of a truly pluralistic society," he says. "There's something different about Owen Sound and Grey County that has made this story possible."

L'Chaim, the Story of Beth Ezekiel Synagogue is scheduled to run through to the end of 2008. A Gallery Guide is being produced, and educational programs are being developed for schools and community groups.

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Note to Media:

The official opening of *L'Chaim*, which is by invitation only, will take place at the museum on Sunday November 26 at 2:00pm. On hand will be past and present members of the synagogue, and representatives of the County, the City, and the Government of Canada. Opening ceremonies will feature remarks by dignitaries, as well as Jewish food, music and storytelling. A limited number of press passes are available for this event. ***Please contact Petal Furness to be included on the media list for this function.***

The synagogue will be open to attendees of the official function before and after the opening ceremonies at the museum on November 26. Everyone is invited to visit the synagogue, including members of the press.