

BEING JEWISH IN ONTARIO



MOUNT SINAI HOSPITAL



Early picture of Dorothy Dworkin (nee Dora Goldstick), ca. 1909. Dworkin was born in Windau, Latvia, in 1890. She moved to Canada at age 14 and went to the US at 17 to train in nursing and midwifery. She came back to Toronto in 1909 to operate the first free Jewish medical clinic, along with Ida Siegel and her brother Abraham Lewis, Dr. Samuel Lavine (the first Jewish doctor to practice in Toronto), and Drs. A.I. Willinsky, Solomon Singer, L.J. Solway, and Bessie Pullen, Toronto's first Jewish female doctor. Ontario Jewish Archives, 2006-1-2.

Historical Context: Dorothy Dworkin & Mount Sinai

Dorothy Dworkin was one of the founders of Mount Sinai Hospital. She was its unofficial leader for many years. She was very energetic and changed Toronto for the better.

Dorothy moved to Toronto from Latvia when she was 14. She wanted to help people and hoped to be a doctor. Since she was a woman, Jewish, and born in another country, her career choices were limited. At 17, she moved to Ohio to become a nurse and **midwife**.

When she came back to Toronto, she worked in a clinic run by a Jewish doctor. She helped 60 to 80 patients each day and delivered 150 babies in two years. Dorothy also helped women who were very poor. Her supplies were donated by a Jewish community group, and she made the women feel clean and comfortable.

Early 20th Century Hospitals

In the early 1900s, most people in Ontario got medical help at home. If you were sick or had a baby, a doctor or **midwife** would visit you. Your family would take care of you until you felt better.

If you needed extra care, there were special homes to help you. Everyone paid for their own medical help. If you were sick and couldn't pay, your city might send you to a public hospital and pay the bill for you.

Public hospitals could be scary. Poor, sick people went there when they had no one to care for them at home. People were scared of hospitals because they might catch more illnesses. Poor immigrants, like Toronto's newcomer Jews, chose to go to clinics, such as the one Dorothy Dworkin worked at, instead of hospitals.

Why a Jewish Hospital in Toronto

Toronto's Jewish population grew very quickly in the early 1900s. Many of the newcomer Jews were very poor immigrants from eastern Europe who couldn't speak English well and couldn't afford to pay for doctors. They went to special Jewish clinics to feel understood.

Unfortunately, these clinics couldn't help everyone. People who needed to stay overnight wished to be understood by their doctors. They also wanted to eat **kosher** food. Kosher food follows special rules that some Jewish people use. However, none of the city's hospitals had this kind of food.

Jewish doctors also had a hard time because other hospitals wouldn't let them work there. So, they dreamed of making their own hospital. This hospital would be for their community, where everyone could feel comfortable and understood.¹



A photograph of Dorothy Dworkin (seated in the centre) with members of the Mount Sinai Hospital Ladies Auxiliary, Toronto. Celia Goldstein stands in the back row on the right and Mrs. Salkovitch stands in the back row, second from the right. [ca. 1923] Ontario Jewish Archives, fonds 10, item 1.



The Ezras Noshem Society Executive composite, Toronto, 1930. Ontario Jewish Archives, item 3704.



Former Mount Sinai Hospital, Yorkville Ave., Toronto, [197-]. The original building had been used as a private hospital before the Ezras Noshem (Ladies Aid) Society bought it and renovated it to become a public Jewish hospital in 1922. This building had 20 beds and focused on caring for people during childbirth and recovery from illness or accident. Ontario Jewish Archives, item 1464.

The Ladies Take the Lead

A small group of amazing Jewish women wanted to help their community. With the help of Dorothy Dworkin and other leaders, who became known as the Ezras Noshem (Ladies Aid), they raised money to turn two houses into Toronto's first Jewish Home for the Aged. In 1922, they knocked on doors and had bake sales and fairs to raise more money. They bought an old hospital and made it into the Hebrew Maternity and Convalescent Hospital. In 1923, it became Mount Sinai Hospital. It was the first hospital in Canada to serve kosher food and one of the first to hire Jewish doctors.

These women did many things to help the hospital. They raised money, cooked, cleaned, and took care of the patients. Dorothy Dworkin even went to the market to buy food. When people were scared to go to the hospital, the women showed them around and made them feel comfortable. Dorothy often shared how Mount Sinai would not have succeeded without the help of these kind women.

¹ Dworkin, Dorothy. Unpublished memoir manuscript, p. 4, p. 14. Ontario Jewish Archives, Fonds 10.

The hospital became well-known and people started to trust it. Soon, many people wanted to stay there, but there weren't enough beds. Even though the hospital was made for Jewish people, it welcomed everyone. It was a place for all people, but it also helped the Jewish community in many ways.

Conclusion

In 1923, Dorothy Dworkin helped pregnant people feel safe having their babies in the hospital. Now, Mount Sinai Hospital helps over 7,000 babies come into the world every year!

In 1923, Dorothy Dworkin had a hard time filling just 20 beds. Today, the hospital has more than 1,100 beds and many people waiting to use them.

A small group of Jewish women and doctors had a big idea. They worked really hard to help their community when they needed help the most. They started a hospital where everyone is welcome. Now, people all over the world know about it!

Connections

- Think of a community you belong to (e.g. your school, a faith group, a neighbourhood).
How has your community responded to the needs of the people within it?
What are the ways that members of a community help each other?
- Can you think of a time your community came together to support a common goal?
What were the steps your community took to achieve this goal? What was the outcome?
- Why do you think it was important to have a hospital for Jewish people to be able to go to?
- How did Dorothy Dworkin become a role model for her community?
What is something that you could do to be a role model in your school?

Additional Resources

Marrus Barsky, Lesley. *From Generation to Generation: A History of Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1998.

A Note to Teachers

Primary source quotes and texts, including quotes taken from diaries and scholarship, have been synthesized into more accessible language.