

Pioneers of Feminism and Unionism: Léa Roback and Madeleine Parent

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These transcriptions were extracted from footage shot during the filming of *A Vision in the Darkness* (1991), directed by Sophie Bissonnette.

A Jewish Seniors' Residence Founded by her Grandmother (1910s or 1920s)

Léa Roback: In 1912 or 1913, my grandparents founded the first Jewish seniors' residence in Montréal, on Evans Street, a small street . . .

Sophie Bissonnette: In the lower town?

LR: Yes. Evans is a small street near Saint-Urbain Street. And there . . . So, my grandmother would put money aside. My parents . . . My maternal grandparents owned a furniture store. They lived comfortably. And my grandmother had heard that a family, a Jewish family . . . that the old mother was sleeping on the balcony in November. "My God! That's not possible! It's inhuman!" So my grandmother said, "Bring her to my house." My grandmother lived on Jeanne-Mance Street. And she let the woman sleep at her place until we could find her a family. And then my grandmother said to my grandfather (in Yiddish), "Bero, *besaf hobn a heim für die jüdische Älter* [Bero, we need a home for Jewish seniors!]" And my grandfather said, "But that would cost a fortune!" And she said, "Too bad!" [Inaudible.] She had a little bag [for the money], and each time she put a little more money aside, my mother made her a slightly bigger bag to put . . . She had . . . She was quite a busty woman. So she saved it all up, and one day she said to my grandfather (in Yiddish), "Bero, *ikh hob die Geld* [Bero, I have the money!]"

SB: So she saved up . . .

LR: She saved it all up! And my grandfather . . . He adored her; he went along with whatever she wanted. And so this small seniors' residence . . . A woman named Madame Legault helped her out. A wonderful lady who lived on Sainte-Émilie Street, in Saint-Henri . . . Oh, she was just wonderful! She went there. My grandmother had a sewing machine. And so she went shopping at Victor on Saint-Laurent Street. She bought cotton with which to make pillowcases, sheets. She bought all that. And my mother was involved, too, because there was no way my grandmother Steinhouse was going to take all that on by herself. "*Meyne Tekhter*, my girls, you're a part of this!" And that was that! And then, it got to be too small. So they moved it to Esplanade Street, and then later, it moved to the Maimonides, and today, there's a big celebration being held there. And because I'm the oldest living Roback-Steinhouse, I'm attending it.