

Artist and benefactor team up to tell story of Jewish immigration to Toronto

A love of Jewish history led artist Ian Leventhal on a quest to uncover some of the unique stories about Jews who settled in Toronto from such countries as Eastern Europe, India, China, Tunisia and the Caribbean.

"There are so many untold stories out there, and when the older people are gone, their stories go with them," he says.

Once he started exploring Jewish immigration to Toronto, Leventhal was welcomed into many homes and discovered a wealth of information, including photographs, documents and artifacts, which he decided to combine into an art form to tell peoples' stories.

"I wanted to celebrate the diversity of the Jewish community in Toronto," he explains. "I thought it would be inspirational for others to see this richness of history."

The final product is five collage panels that have been installed in the Community Hall on

the main floor of the Apotex Centre, Jewish Home for the Aged thanks to a generous gift from Aubrey and Marla Dan.

"When Ian approached me with the idea, I thought what a brilliant way to meld the historical component of how Jews came to Toronto and illustrate it in a fashion that celebrates where they came from," says Aubrey Dan, who is both a patron of the arts and a Baycrest supporter. "Each collage tells a different story of Jewish immigration, and it's all the collages combined that make us a unique community in Toronto."

The collages tell individual family stories against a backdrop of world events. "I wish I had more room to include all the wonderful artifacts that the families so graciously shared with me," adds Leventhal. "It was truly a fascinating experience and I hope others learn as much from it as I did."



Artist Ian Leventhal and patron Aubrey Dan stand in front of the collage depicting Jewish life in the Caribbean. The main image is of Da Costa/Alexander family matriarch, Abigail Rodrigues, in her Kingston, Jamaica home circa 1937. The Alexanders can trace their roots back to 15th century Spain and Portugal.