

# TEMPLE ADATH YESHURUN

## BULLETIN

Shevat/Adar 5778

### Temple Adath Yeshurun's Czech Torah: A Fascinating Story of Survival

by Jonathan Pollack

The Torah adorning our lobby has a long history of survival. It is a member of the Memorial Scrolls Trust of London, England, which was established to save Jewish artifacts from the Bohemian and Moravian regions of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic), which might otherwise have been lost to the Holocaust.

The scroll dates from the late 1800s, and was originally a Torah in a Synagogue in *Mlada Boleslav*, also known as *Bumsla* by the Jewish inhabitants. The late 1800s was the height of the Jewish populations in *Bumsla*, numbering over 850, many of whom were descended from Jews who emigrated from Vienna, Austria, and parts of Poland 200 years earlier.

Further immigration to the United States and shifting politics saw the numbers in *Bumsla* fall to less than 200 prior to World War II, although the number of Jews in Czechoslovakia numbered around 350,000, with 120,000 living in what is now the Czech Republic (the regions of Bohemia and Moravia).

In the last years of the 1930s, Czechoslovakia was in political disarray—suffering military pressure from Germany, Hungary, and Poland. Ultimately, the Nazis took control of the Czech territory, renamed as the “Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia”. It is during this period that Czech Torah #1257, the Torah in our lobby, begins a rather incredible journey.

A small, dedicated group of Jews in Prague sought to preserve the Jewish identity and history of the region. Synagogues and schools had been plundered or destroyed, so the Jews from Prague moved as many artifacts to the Central Jewish Synagogue of Prague as possible under the guise of a museum. Though there were difficult working conditions, some items were restored, while others were simply put aside for safe keeping. All

items were cataloged – a substantial collection of 100,000 artifacts. Torah #1257 had found a temporary home shortly before another terrible turn of events.

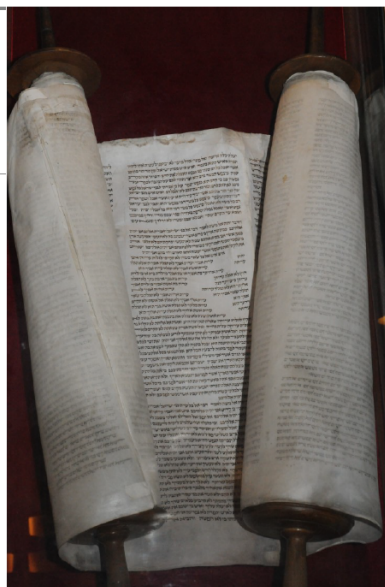
In 1942, the Nazis ordered 1041 Jews culled from the town of *Bumsla* and its surrounding area to assemble in the Boleslav Castle, from which they were sent to the Terezin concentration camp, and ultimately, to various extermination camps. This effectively wiped out the Jewish population of *Bumsla*.

Not long after, the curators at the Prague Synagogue were sent to Terezin, and then to Auschwitz. Only two survived. By the end of the war, over 80,000 Jews from the Czech territory were killed during internment or executed in the gas chambers.

A legend has developed in modern times that the Nazis were planning to build a “museum to an extinct race”. While this has not been verified, it was certainly true that the Nazis were interested in retaining some items from their conquests, specifically from Jews. The members of the Prague’s Jewish community who had saved so many artifacts, including 1800 Sifrei Torah from Bohemian and Moravian communities, convinced the Nazis to allow them to maintain a museum.

After the war, the remnants of the Czech Jewish community were too small and had too little in the way of resources to care for the artifacts. Most of the items from Prague, including Torah #1257, went to the Michle Synagogue (outside of Prague) for safe keeping, while the remainder went to small, newly established Jewish communities. By 1948, communism had taken hold in the Czech Republic, and Jewish life was again in trouble. Most synagogues were closed, but a recently founded Jewish Museum of Prague remained open, becoming the recipient of the original artifacts. Torah #1257 was moved again and remained in the new Museum.

In 1963, Eric Estorick, a London art dealer, was given the opportunity to purchase the remaining 1564 scrolls (250 had been



**Czech Torah #1257**

1-16-18 On Display in the lobby at Temple Adath Yeshurun, 152 Prospect Street, Manchester, NH, USA.

~Photo by Alan Kaplan.

dispersed to small communities). He contacted his client Ralph Yablon who, with Harold Reinhart, then Rabbi of Westminster Synagogue, and Chimen Abramsky, moved the Sifrei Torah to London, and established the Memorial Scrolls Trust.

Shortly after the founding of the Trust, Rabbi Reinhart and his administrator, Ruth Shaffer, made the scrolls available to congregations around the world under “permanent adoption” for a nominal donation to the Trust.

The Memorial Scrolls Trust currently resides in Kent House, adjacent to the Westminster Synagogue, near Hyde Park in central London. Torah #1257 had made a move to London and stayed at the Memorial Scrolls Trust for 10 years.

In 1973, our Rabbi Emeritus, Arthur Starr, read an article about the Czech Torahs and wanted to get one for Temple Adath Yeshurun. He needed a sponsor to secure the Torah and pay for the transportation to Manchester. He found willing partners in the Solensky Family.

*Continued at Czech Torah, p. 10,  
Column 1 and 2.*

## Czech Torah: Story of Survival

(Continued from page 9.)

Torah #1257 arrived in Manchester, NH less than a year later, in early 1974.

The Torah was not Kosher – not up to the religious standard for reading during a service – so a discussion about the proper use of the Torah ensued. It could have been fully restored as a Kosher Torah at great cost, but for how long? Having weathered a long and difficult life, a restoration might only be temporary.

Perhaps it could have been kept in the Ark along with the others and taken out for procession on special occasions, such as Simchat Torah, Rosh HaShannah, or Yom Kippur.

The final, prescient decision was to display Torah #1257 in a special case affixed to the wall in the lobby. The decision was prescient because not long after, another heart-wrenching event occurred.

Before going on, an interesting side story is important. Having a Holocaust artifact inspired another idea in Rabbi Starr. Shortly after receiving the Czech Torah, the construction of a Holocaust memorial on the patio began because none in New Hampshire existed up to that point.

Holocaust survivor and artist Armand Szainer funded much of it, cast the bronze that was used; the people who provide the monuments for the cemetery contributed stone work; and a “casket”, an Ark of repose, was created. Congregants, and others not affiliated with TAY, who wanted a place of memorial for those lost in the Holocaust could place the names of their loved ones on a card which was added to the casket. In total, it contains 180 names.

Back to our story: During an otherwise quiet Sunday morning in June 1974, Temple Adath Yeshurun suffered a terrible fire which consumed much of the sanctuary.

As Rabbi Starr came to the synagogue at 6:15 that morning, he asked a Fireman to show him the area in the sanctuary where TAY's Sifrei Torah were held, and saw that all of them had been con-

sumed in the fire. The Ark was burned, the windows had been blown out by the intense heat, and, as Rabbi Starr recalled during a recent interview, “The smell lasted for years.”

Torah #1257, situated on its own in the lobby, was not only safe from the fire, but from the smoke, soot, and pernicious odor that permeated the building. It had survived a second holocaust.

The burned Torahs from the fire were laid out in the Rabbi's office (now the library) for 10 days, before finding a final resting place in the casket on the patio. This was recently uncovered during our patio remodeling, though not yet opened. At the time, no one knew what it was. Now we know it is a memorial for two Holocausts, one a tragedy for the world, and one a tragedy for our synagogue family.

[Ed.: If you would like to read more about the Memorial Scrolls Trust, please visit:  
<http://www.memorialscrollstrust.org/>



### Todah Robah!

Thank You to these people who provided for Oneg Shabbats after services from Aug. 2017—Jan. 2018.

#### August

David Rosenzweig  
Miri Singer &  
JoAnn Meyers

#### September

Emilie and Alan Kaplan  
Jeannette Popovsky

#### October

Pamela Englander  
Nancy Frankel &  
Mary Atwell  
JoAnn Meyers

#### November

TAY Board  
Jet Goldberg  
Elda Cordero-Goodman

#### December

Sisterhood

#### January

Emilie Kaplan  
Judith Jolton  
Jet Goldberg  
Jonathan Baron

## Reflections on Faith

~from *A Woman's Journey to God*

Emily Dickinson wrote about faith as a fragile thing, a winged thing. Like a thin, diaphanous membrane, it changes the color of the world. Under the spell of faith, the ordinary shimmers. The mundane becomes miraculous. The daily sunrise and sunset are a call to celebration. The seasons, in their majestic turning, a succession of holy days. Every face holds the possibility of love, and strangers are just friends whom we don't know yet.

~Joan Boryshenko, *A Woman's Journey to God*, 1999.

From *The Quotable Jewish Woman: Wisdom, Inspiration & Humor from the Mind & Heart* (Elaine Bernstein Partnow, ED.), 2007, page 106.

### PHOTO CAPTION for New HORIZONS Servers

pictured on the bottom of page 5:

From left to right: Paul Gladstone, Christine Gagnon, Ellen Bressinger, Rachel & Mel Spierer, Ken Cohn. Leon Hankin & Asa, Vivianne and Georgia Schill are ready to serve a New Horizons dinner on 12-25-17. Sorry no room for all the pictures.