

# News

## Czech Torah scrolls commemorated at reunion event

By Becky Raspe  
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On April 23, The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Beachwood played host to 19 Czech Torah scrolls as part of a reunion and celebration of their survival of the Holocaust, their rediscovery and repair in 1963 by the Memorial Scrolls Trust, and how they're now cared for by congregations and organizations all around the world.

As part of the program, scrolls were gathered from entities throughout Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Participating communities included The Temple Congregation Shomer Emunim in Sylvania near Toledo; Kneseth Israel Temple in Wooster; Temple Israel in Dayton; Temple Israel in Columbus; Temple El-Emeth in Youngstown; The Temple-Tifereth Israel in Beachwood; Temple Israel Ner Tamid in Mayfield Heights; B'nai Jeshurun Congregation in Pepper Pike; Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood; Gross Schechter Day School in Pepper Pike; Temple Beth Israel-Shaare Zedek in Lima; Suburban Temple-Kol Ami in Beachwood; Jewish Senior Life-Prentis Apartments in Oak Park, Mich.; Congregation Beth Shalom in Pittsburgh; and Temple Sholom in Blue Ash near Cincinnati. Some of the communities also made poster boards describing the origins of their Czech Torah scroll and were displayed in the temple lobby.

Each Torah scroll was paraded through the sanctuary before being displayed together at the front of the room, with each scroll being called to the bimah by its community name with a representative from its custodial organization. Each representative then read a line from The Temple's scroll as part of the program with the help of Rabbi Jonathan Cohen and Cantor Kathryn Wolfe Sebo, who also sang a song with The Temple's orphan scroll.

Created by The Temple member Ed Magiste, with the help of Memorial Scrolls Trust volunteer and Fairmount Temple member Susan Ringel, the program also featured speeches from Cleveland State University professor Mark Cole and Memorial Scrolls Trust trustee Lois Roman.

Roman described these efforts, and that of the work MST does, as "four miracles," starting with their collection and storage, followed by the fact only one World War II bomb landed in Prague leaving the synagogue they were housed in relatively untouched even though Czech Jewry was "decimated," that they were rediscovered and sold to a London investor, and then landed in the hands of what would become Memorial Scrolls Trust.

As the story goes, in 1942, the Nazi officials in charge of the Czech "Protectorate" created the Central Jewish Museum in Prague, and shipped over 10,000 ritual objects from liquidated Jewish communities and synagogues to the museum, including ceremonial objects, books, pictures and embroidered vestments. The museum curators, who were later taken to Terezin and Auschwitz, cataloged the collection. As part of that cataloging process, approximately 1,800 Torah scrolls were taken to the museum with the hope they'd be returned to their communities. After World War II, those scrolls were taken to the abandoned Michle Synagogue in suburban Prague. They stayed there, in disuse in the 18th-century stone building.

Through the effort of what is now MST, 1,564 scrolls were packed and sent to London to be restored, and in 1964, the Westminster Synagogue was selected as trustee and the Memorial Scrolls Committee was established to distribute the repaired scrolls on permanent loan to communities around the world.

Each scroll is numbered according to its listing with Memorial Scrolls Trust, and is also labeled with the community it came from, if that information is available. MST is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, with 2022 marking the 80th anniversary of Czech Jews first working to preserve their Torah scrolls. Currently, there are 1,400 scrolls in circulation, Roman said, with the collection dating from the 1200s to the early 20th century.

"All of the scrolls you see here today have this shared legacy, but each has a unique backstory, written for a specific Jewish community in a small town or a large city that was lost in the Shoah," she said. "Today is not just a reunion of Torah scrolls – it is a commemoration of dozens of lost Jewish communities that were vibrant and active before the Holocaust."

Asking who would tell the story of the Holocaust to future generations as more first-hand survivors pass away, Roman said current generations must continue telling the story of "the biggest tragedy of the Jewish people of our time."

"We have an obligation to retell the story in the same way we retell the



**Representatives from participating congregations and organizations march their scrolls through the crowd. Pictured here, center, is Beverly Karp. She and Janet Rogolsky represented Temple Shomer Emunim with Czech Scroll #186. This is the 50th year The Temple has been guardian of the Czech Scroll, the 186th scroll that was unwrapped and given to Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust after they were rescued from Communist Czechoslovakia 20 years after the Holocaust. CJN Photo / Becky Raspe**

Passover story," she said. "We have an opportunity to use these scrolls, which are themselves, survivors of the Shoah, to teach future generations."

During Cole's talk, he spoke of how Nazi ideology categorized Jews as "culture destroyers," which served as motivation for the widespread theft of everyday Jewish items and religious artifacts. Using Jews only for what they were deemed useful for, Cole said item and property theft can be described in three phases – street level, state/national level and generalized war-time plunder as a way to further economically impoverish Jews.

Through Aryanization, Jewish property, businesses and land were transferred to Aryans, with 1938 being a "pivotal year," both due to Kristallnacht, known as the Night of Broken Glass, and for more widespread Aryanization. By that time, Cole said no more Jewish-owned businesses existed in Germany.

Cole also referenced the proposed Furhermuseum, an unrealized art museum within a cultural complex planned by Adolf Hitler for his hometown of Linz, Austria, which

would've been a display of art bought, stolen or confiscated by Nazis from throughout Europe during World War II.

"While the Nazis wanted to eradicate Jews and Jewish culture from the face of the earth, what we're experiencing and what we're seeing right now is maybe the best anecdote to that," he said. "This is what we see as a success. History was not changed. The narrative was not ultimately changed. We see millions of dollars of artifacts still missing, but we're slowly finding the rightful owners and giving them this stuff back. ... This thriving Jewish life, both in the United States and around the world, is the last great testament."

Holocaust survivor Erika Gold of Beachwood also detailed her survival of the Holocaust as a young girl in Hungary. Born in Budapest in 1932, she was only 5 months old when Hitler rose to power in Germany. She recalled wearing a yellow star on her clothes, the confiscation of their family home and non-Jewish housekeeper, her father losing the family business and being sent to a labor camp, and she and her mother's life living and working in a factory that made military uniforms. After being taken with 300 other women and children from the factory by Nazis, Gold said she and her mother jumped from the transport vehicle and ran, and were then hidden by their former housekeeper and her daughter for several months.

After the Soviet Union liberated Hungary, Gold and her mother were reunited with her father and eventually traveled to Cuba in 1948. They made it to the United States in 1950, eventually settling in Cleveland.

"If anyone found out she saved us, all four of us would've been shot," Gold said of the former family housekeeper that hid them in her apartment.

Upon their return to their Budapest apartment, she said there was no gas, water or electricity, but "we were free."

## Antisemitism is the focus at a Jewish American Heritage Month event at the White House

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In songs and in speeches, an event at the White House marking Jewish American Heritage Month celebrated the presence of Jews in America since colonial times — and fretted about threats to American Jewry today.

"For some reason it's come roaring back in the last several years," President Biden told a crowd of Jewish supporters in the White House's East Room on Tuesday evening. "Reports have shown that antisemitic incidents are at a record high in our history — a record high in the United States."

The emphasis on antisemitism was evident even in the entertainment — which featured a selection of songs from "Parade," a Broadway musical about the 1915 lynching of a Jewish man. That theme was a departure from past White House

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