

## **HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST RESCUED TORAHS IN WESTCHESTER AND SURROUNDING AREA**

### **Bet Am Shalom Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah scroll originates from Czechoslovakia. It is approximately 160 years old and is written in the Beit Yoseph-Maharal style. The quality of writing is very good and it is written on unglazed klaf.

### **Beth Am Temple Holocaust Rescued Torah #1**

This large Torah scroll is from the community of Vlasim, in the Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic. It was written between 1845 and 1850.

### **Beth Am Temple Holocaust Rescued Torah #2**

This small Torah scroll is from Frydek-Mistek, in the Moravian-Silesian Region of the Czech Republic. It was written around 1800.

### **Beth El Pearl River Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The Torah scroll is from the city of Vlasim and is a Memorial Scrolls Trust Torah, number 46.

### **Beth El Synagogue Center Wolloch Family Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The Wolloch Family Torah was liberated from Theresienstadt in May 1945. It was brought to Vienna in 1946, and used by the congregation of a small shtetle. While Zygfryd Wolloch was reciting kaddish for his father at the shtetle, the Rabbi approached him to say that the shtetle was in desperate need of funds and asked if he would purchase the Torah. When Zygfryd Wolloch came to America in January 1947, the only things that he brought with him were a single valise and the Theresienstadt Torah. Upon arriving in New York City, he brought the Torah to a sofer on Essex Street for restoration. It then remained in the Wolloch family home for decades until Helene and Zygfryd Wolloch donated the Torah to Beth El Synagogue on the occasion of their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The Torah is used by the congregation to commemorate Yom HaShoah, as well as on the yahrzeits of the parents of Helene and Zygfryd Wolloch, of blessed memory. The Torah has travelled throughout the United States where it has been used at the B'nei Mitzvah of Helene and Zygfryd Wolloch's grandchildren and cousins.

### **Chavurat Tikvah Holocaust Rescued Torah**

For twenty years after the conclusion of World War II, there lay, unattended, in a damp, moldy warehouse that had been converted from a former synagogue in Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1,564 Torah scrolls. These Torahs, formerly the property of hundreds of Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe that had been wiped out during the war, were stacked up and rotting.

In 1964 a well-known London art dealer, with funding from a congregant of the Westminster Synagogue in London, quietly negotiated with the Czech government for the purchase of the entire lot of Torahs and had them shipped to the Westminster Synagogue. There, a Holocaust Torah Scroll Trust had been established to take custody of the scrolls, care for, repair, and ultimately return them to the communities from which they were taken, all to the extent possible. Until a proper home-return could be found for each scroll, the Trust would distribute them on a "permanent loan" basis to congregations throughout

the world who could demonstrate that they would, in the interim, properly care for and use these Holocaust Memorial Torah Scrolls.

In 1980 our then-Rabbi's/members Larry Hoffman and Rami Arian brought these Torahs to the attention of our Chavurah and, in 1981, after a year of negotiations between the Chavurah and the Westminster Memorial Scrolls Trust, Chavurat Tikvah received one of the 1,564 scrolls on "permanent loan." The Torah that we received to care for, while complete, is not a "Kosher" Torah in that it has been re-assembled from parts of several Torahs that had been otherwise damaged beyond repair. Our Torah has been reclaimed from several Torahs originally stolen by the Nazis from the community of Brno, Czechoslovakia.

Our Holocaust Torah is the centerpiece of our religious community, constantly in use, and the only Torah that our congregation has. It is truly a living memorial to those congregations that were wiped out during the War. As mentioned within our own "Prayer for Our Chavurah", in reference to our Holocaust Memorial Torah, "...their voices have been stilled, and so we shall speak for them."

### **Community Synagogue of Rye Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah once lived in the [Alt Neu Shul in Prague](#). Prior to World War II, the Nazis confiscated it, along with hundreds of scrolls with the idea of creating a museum to a destroyed people. When that dark period in our people's history came to an end, the scrolls were discovered languishing in a warehouse by several United States soldiers.

The Torah scrolls were sent to London, England where, upon the creation of the [Memorial Scrolls Trust](#), they were sent to over 1,000 congregations worldwide.

Our Torah was received in the early 1970's. Since that time, it became our custom for our b'nei mitzvah to read from it when they are called to the Torah on their special Shabbat.

### **Congregation B'nai Yisrael, Armonk Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Congregation B'nai Yisrael, Armonk procured its scroll from the Memorial Scrolls Trust, Westminster Synagogue in 2007. The scroll was most likely used in the synagogue in Pacov (Ger. Patzau), in the Pelhrimov district in Bohemia. Today it is a town (pop.c.5000), about 50 miles SE of Prague, Czech Republic.

Jews were living in Pacov by 1570. In the early 19th century, Pacov was the seat of the regional rabbi. The Jewish population peaked in 1880 when 207 Jews lived in Pacov but by 1930 there were only 107 Jews living there.

In 1942, the contents of the of the synagogue including the liturgical artifacts, the synagogue's equipment and the community records and archives were sent to the Prague Jewish Museum as part of the plan which had been initiated by Jews at the museum to save the contents of the deserted provincial synagogues from being plundered and scattered. Among the items that were sent to Prague from Pacov were 9 Torah Scrolls.

Under the German occupation, 151 Jews registered in Pacov and the surrounding villages were deported

to Terezin from the nearby centre of Tabor.

### **Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah came from Tabor, Czechoslovakia. This Torah can be traced back eight generations and was given to our synagogue by Mr. Pitt as a gift in honor of a bar mitzvah. The Torah was rescued by the Westminster Synagogue in London in 1964. It is one of 1,564 sacred scrolls that had been gathered together in Prague from the desolated synagogues of Bohemia and Moravia, by the Nazi official in charge of the Czech "Protectorate".

### **Congregation Kneses Tifereth Israel (KTI) Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Congregation Kneses Tifereth Israel's rescued Torah comes from Smichow, a section of Prague, and was written in 1890. It is number 331 in a collection of 1,564 salvaged from Czechoslovakian synagogues during World War II and put in the Memorial Scrolls Trust of the Westminster Synagogue in London. They were part of a large collection of Jewish ceremonial objects confiscated by the Nazis and intended for a cynical museum of "the artifacts of the extinct race of the Jews."

### **Congregation Kol Ami Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Congregation Kol Ami of White Plains is proud and privileged to have a Czech Scroll from Brno. When the Munich Agreement was signed in September 1938, Britain and France agreed to Hitler's demand to be given the German-speaking border regions of Czechoslovakia. The Germans marched in and the Jews from about sixty congregations in the prosperous industrial and commercial towns in the Sudetenland had 2 or 3 days to flee to the interior, which was still a free and sovereign country. They left behind their synagogues, which were in German hands in time for the destruction of the Pogrom of November 1938, when synagogues across the expanded Germany, which now included the Sudetenland, were burned or vandalized and looted. Most of the ritual treasures of these Sudetenland synagogues were destroyed or lost. Private and communal Jewish property in the towns was confiscated. In 1942 the communities were instructed to send the contents of their synagogues to the Jewish Museum in Prague. Most of the Torah scrolls, gold, silver and ritual textiles were sent, along with thousands of books and even clocks and pianos. The remaining Jews were deported in 1943 and 1944, and quite a number survived.

The 18th century Michle Synagogue, with its thick walls of stone, is built into the hillside deep in the valley suburbs of Prague. In 1958 it became the damp warehouse for hundreds of Torah scrolls from the large Prague Jewish community and from all the much smaller communities that were scattered across what was left of Bohemia and Moravia, after the Sudetenland had been detached. On February 7, 1964, two lorries laden with 1,564 Scrolls arrived at the Westminster Synagogue. After months of sorting, examining and cataloguing each Scroll, the task of distributing them began, with the aim of getting the Scrolls back into the life of Jewish congregations across the world. The Memorial Scrolls Trust was established to carry out this task.

Our Torah is number 45 of the 1,564 Torah scrolls rescued by the Memorial Scrolls Trust. Each Memorial Scroll is a messenger from a community that was lost, but does not deserve to be forgotten.

### **Congregation Shir Shalom of Westchester and Fairfield Counties Holocaust Rescued Torah #1**

This Torah is one of the 1,564 scrolls rescued by the Memorial Scrolls Trust located in England. The Jewish community of Brno, Czechoslovakia is said to have used this Torah beginning in 1831. The first record of Jews in the region of Brno dates back to the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning in 1848 Jews had the freedom to live where they wanted to and to carry on any trade or profession. The Jewish population of Brno reached over 7000 by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A new synagogue was built and many Jewish owned businesses thrived. During World War I there were many Jews who emigrated from Galicia to Brno and the Jewish population rose to 11,102 by the start of World War II. Over 10,000 Jews were deported to Terezin between November 1941 and June 1943. Only 700 residents were said to have survived.

Our Torah, Brno scroll #1242, has had an important place in the ritual of Jewish Family Congregation and now Congregation Shir Shalom since it has come into our possession. Our congregation has been using this scroll on a weekly basis for over 25 years. Each of our b'nai mitzvah chants from this Torah. On Shabbatot where there is no bar or bat mitzvah the Rabbi reads from this scroll. Each school year the Rabbi shares the Torah with our religious school students. During our Yom Hashoah remembrance every year, remarks are included about the former Jewish community of Brno and we include them in our recitation of the mourner's kaddish at that service.

In 1972 one of our members, Zachary Gottlieb, traveled to Prague and visited the Jewish Museum in that city. He obtained a database of names of the Holocaust victims of Brno, including the dates they were transported, the camps to which they were transported, their dates of birth and dates of death. Since that time we have been reciting 12 names of Brno Holocaust victims alphabetically each Shabbat when we recite the mourners kaddish. We estimate it will take 13 years to complete this remembrance. We hope that this will provide a meaningful way for our congregation to connect with this former Jewish community.

### **Congregation Shir Shalom of Westchester and Fairfield Counties Holocaust Rescued Torah #2**

This Torah comes from the Jewish Congregation in Kromeriz, a town in central Moravia, Czechoslovakia, located about 150 miles from Prague. The Jewish community in Kromeriz was one of the oldest in Europe, dating from 1322, when the local bishop allowed one Jew to settle in the town exempt from royal servitude. There are stories of refugees and expulsion over the years. In 1689, Kromeriz was considered the most important and affluent Moravian community, and from then until 1697 it was the seat of the country rabbinate. In 1942, all of the Jews there were rounded up and most were deported to the Terezin Concentration Camp.

Torah scrolls and other ceremonial objects from congregations in the region were collected and warehoused in the small deserted Michle synagogue, located in a suburb of Prague. They were collected at the instigation of the Jewish curators who worked at the Jewish Museum under the watchful eye of the Nazis. For the Jews employed, it was a short reprieve, for even before their task was completed, they were deported, and all but two eventually perished in the death camps. It is generally believed that the accumulation of the Torah scrolls, as with other Judaica, was intended by the Nazis to become part of their museum to the extinct Jewish race.

The Torah scrolls were eventually rescued and brought to the Westminster Synagogue in London, in 1964. The Holocaust Memorial Scrolls Trust was established to care for, repair, return the scrolls to their original congregation or get them back into the lives of other Jewish congregations across the world. Priority was given to small congregations, homes for the aged, hospitals, and children's camps that could act as messengers to the lost congregations. Our precious Scroll, number 547 of the 1,564 Torahs rescued by the Holocaust Memorial Scrolls Trust, was entrusted to Temple Shearith Israel in 1969 (now Congregation Shir Shalom of Westchester and Fairfield Counties).

### **Congregation Sons of Israel Briarcliff Manor Holocaust Rescued Torah**

In 1938 an agreement was signed between Britain, France and Germany to give to Germany the German speaking provinces of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. Most of the Jews in those provinces fled to what was still, at the time, a free Czechoslovakia. Later in 1939 the Germans invaded the rest of the country, and by 1940 all synagogues were closed. As deportations began in 1941-42, the Jewish communities outside of Prague were instructed to send the contents of their synagogues, including Torah scrolls, books, and gold and silver ornaments, to the Jewish museum in Prague. These items, from over 100 congregations in Bohemia and Moravia, were catalogued and put into storage, perhaps to become a future "museum of an extinct people."

After the war ended, a free and independent Czechoslovakia emerged, but it was without the significant Jewish community that existed before the war. After the communist takeover in 1948, the Torah scrolls from the destroyed communities were housed at the Michle Synagogue in a suburb of Prague. They remained there until the early 1960's when a man named Eric Estorick, an American art dealer living in London, was approached by the Czech authorities and asked if he was interested in purchasing some Torah scrolls.

### **Congregation Sulam Yaakov Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah is #912 from the Memorial Scrolls in Trust. The Torah is about 200 years old and is from the Pinkus synagogue in Prague, with Czech ref. no. 48919. It was loaned to Beth Emeth Synagogue, now Congregation Sulam Yaakov in 1985.

### **First Hebrew Congregation of Peekskill Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah is from Kolin, Czech Republic. For 600 years the Jews of Kolin played an integral part in the history of that town. Few survived the Holocaust other than the handful of 'serial survivors', among them their beloved Rabbi Feder, who returned to Kolin to rebuild. Fearing that their story would be lost in the enormity of the Jewish tragedy, Rabbi Feder arranged for Sifrei Torah to be placed in Jewish communities around the world, thereby ensuring that the fate of Kolin's Jews would become part of the heritage of those congregations. This Kolin Torah was placed with Croton Jewish Center, now merged with First Hebrew Congregation, Peekskill.

### **Greenburgh Hebrew Center Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah originated in Germany. Steve and Alex Neuburger's parents (Herman and Tony) brought the Torah with their furniture to America in 1938 from Treuchtlingen, Bavaria in the Southeast portion of Germany. The Torah is on permanent loan to Greenburgh Hebrew Center from Steve and Alex Neuburger. It is written in Beit Yosef script, and is believed to be over 100 years old.

### **Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center Rescued Torah**

This Sefer Torah parchment comes from the desolate communities of Bohemia and Moravia and was there for some time under the control of the Czechoslovak Government. The Scroll was housed in a derelict synagogue by curators of the Jewish Museum in Prague, acquired with the help of good friends and brought to Westminster Synagogue in 1964. It was written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Jewish Community Center of Harrison Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Although we do not know the history of this Holocaust Rescued Torah, it serves as an important memorial to the Jewish communities that were destroyed and the people that perished in the Holocaust.

### **Larchmont Temple Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The Larchmont Temple Holocaust Torah has a white cover with red broken "stars". It is on loan from the Westminster Synagogue in London that redeemed thousands of these scrolls, engaging scribes to repair them. Our Torah came from Moranske-Budjedvice, Czechoslovakia. We obtained it in 1973 when we observed Larchmont Temple's 25th anniversary. Due to its fragility, it is read only on Yom Kippur and Confirmation.

### ~~**Lengel Family Holocaust Rescued Torah at Temple Israel Center of White Plains**~~

~~Mike Lengel's grandfather brought the Torah to Luneberg, Germany when he and Mike's grandmother immigrated sometime around the early 1900s from Dombrova. The scroll was used in a small synagogue in his home for many years. In 1939, when Mike's father was released from Buchenwald, he went home to Luneberg to retrieve the Torah before it fell into the hands of the Nazis. His father was then deported from Germany and made his way to England. From there, he and Mike's mother came to the United States and settled in Pennsylvania with family. The Lengel family subsequently resettled in The Bronx where the Torah was used regularly for many years. In the early 1960s, the synagogue suffered a fire and the Torah was rescued by the fire department. In 1971, Mike's parents moved to Co-Op City and were among the founders of the Young Israel of Co-Op City. The Torah was damaged by smoke from the fire but was deemed kosher and used by this congregation on a limited basis during Passover as it was written in Egypt. Young Israel housed the scroll until Mike and his daughter brought it to Temple Israel in White Plains.~~

### ~~**New City Jewish Center Holocaust Rescued Torah**~~

~~The Torah scroll is from Turnov and is a Westminster Memorial Scroll Trust Torah, number 910.~~

### **Reform Temple Putnam Valley Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The Torah scroll was written in 1830 in the town of Kolin, a town 25 miles southeast of Prague in the region that prior to World War I was known as Bohemia. Our synagogue received the Torah Scroll in January 1970.

The oldest tombstone in the Jewish cemetery in Prague is from the year 941. Jews lived in this region for over a thousand years, thriving intellectually, economically, and culturally despite waves of persecution and restrictions throughout the centuries.

Persecution escalated as early as the 14th century. There were massacres as Jews were blamed for ritual murder and plagues known as Black Death. The gravestones in the Jewish cemetery were broken, synagogues were looted and set on fire, and their walls were streaked with the blood of Jewish martyrs. Jewish persecution and restriction continued for 500 years.

The original synagogue in Kolin was rebuilt in 1696, and was subsequently enlarged and updated. The area became a large and thriving Jewish community, both religious and secular, giving rise to countless professionals, academics, artists, politicians and religious leaders. In 1918, when the Czech Republic was formed, Jews were recognized as a legitimate national minority and were given full rights and freedom. Jews were then able to move not only out of their ghetto to other parts of Kolin, but also to Prague and Vienna as well. As a result, the Jewish population of Kolin steadily diminished. By 1930 the Jewish population of Kolin, which had been in the thousands, was 482.

In the early 1960s, Eric Estorick, an American art dealer living in London, was asked by officials if he would be interested in buying over 1500 Torah scrolls found languishing in a warehouse. He contacted the Westminster Synagogue, where a congregant offered to put up the money to buy the scrolls. In 1964, 1,564 scrolls arrived at the Westminster Synagogue. The Memorial Scrolls Trust was established to sort, examine and catalog each scroll, and distribute them back into the life of Jewish congregations across the world.

Our Torah scroll, on permanent loan from the Memorial Scrolls Trust, is identified as Memorial Scrolls Trust Torah number 14. In 2003, scribe Neil Yerman further restored our Torah. It serves as our continual reminder of the millions of lives that were destroyed in the Shoah.

#### **Scarsdale Synagogue Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The Torah is from Mainz, Germany, known as “Kehilah Kadosha Magenza”, a community respected from medieval centuries on as a center of Jewish history. Dr. Julius Picard brought the Torah to the United States in 1938 when he emigrated to this country.

#### **Temple Beth Abraham Holocaust Rescued Torah**

This Torah is number 1560 of the Czech Memorial Scrolls. It comes from the village of Milevsko and was written about 1830.

#### **Temple Beth El of Danbury Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The Torah was written in 1870. It comes from a synagogue in the town of Kolin, located in the hamlet of Prcice, near the town of Tabor in the Czech Republic. When the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia, they confiscated the Torah and stored it with approximately 3000 others in a warehouse in Prague. At the end of World War II, the Torahs were rescued from the warehouse and taken to the Baker Street Synagogue in London. The Torah was restored with parts of other Torahs. One of our congregants, Bernard Ross, learned of the restoration project, traveled to London, reimbursed those who had restored the Torah and brought it back to Temple Bethel Elohim. Since 1970, the Torah has been used in the B'nei Mitzvah ceremonies of our children. Temple Beth Elohim is proud and privileged to continue the Holy use of this Torah.

### **Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester has Torah number 54 from the Memorial Scrolls Trust. The Torah came from Boskovice and was written in 1853. At that time Boskovice was a part of Germany, but it is now in the Czech Republic.

### **Temple Israel of New Rochelle Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Temple Israel of New Rochelle's Holocaust Torah originally came from Prague, Czechoslovakia. Following the war, it was sent to the West London Synagogue where it was then selected and sent to our synagogue.

### **Temple Israel of Northern Westchester Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah belonged to the Jewish community of Austerlitz, in what is now the Czech Republic. The Jewish cemetery at Austerlitz dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Over the years, the population of the community waxed and waned. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the community flourished as it restored its synagogue, introduced a more modern service with a cantor and a choir and had a German-Jewish school that educated three classes of students. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish population began to decline following an anti-Semitic outrage in 1905 in which many Jewish houses were destroyed. In 1938, the Nazis occupied the region, and two years later, all the Jews from the surrounding area were taken to Austerlitz. Members of the local Jewish community were required to take these new residents into their own homes, giving them food and shelter. In 1942 the Jews of Austerlitz, together with their new guests, were given orders to prepare for deportation. The community was given a few days to prepare for the journey. Early one morning they were taken by truck to the nearby large town of Brno before being sent to Terezin not too long afterwards. From there most of the community were sent to the death camps in the east never to return.

When they were in power, the Nazis collected religious artifacts from plundered synagogues, including this Torah scroll, and brought them to Prague, intending to open an "Exotic Museum of an Extinct Race." After the war, the Czechoslovakian government gained control over this collection. The Torah scrolls lay in storage for several years until the 1960's, when they were sold to a London businessman. This man brought the Torah scrolls to the Westminster synagogue, and a trust was established to re-house them in synagogues all over the world. Ted Stone, a member of our congregation who used to blow the shofar during the High Holy Days, heard of the effort to re-house these Torah scrolls. Through his efforts, the Torah scroll in our Ark came to Temple Israel in 1967.

### **Temple Shaaray Tefila Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Temple Shaaray Tefila acquired the Klatovy Torah scroll in 1976 from the Czech Memorial Trust. The Torah is believed to be about 175 years old (originally written around 1840) and believed to be from a small town about 90 minutes southwest of Prague, Klatovy. Klatovy had a synagogue near the town center until 1940, when it along with other synagogues in Czechoslovakia was shuttered. Our Scroll along with 1546 Torah scrolls in Czechoslovakia were brought to Prague, catalogued, and then left in a synagogue and later a warehouse until 1964 when they were moved to London. Our Torah scroll and others were then restored and distributed to congregations around the world. Today, there are over 1400 congregations with Czech Scrolls. When Temple Shaaray Tefila was founded in 1976, the founding members arranged for the delivery of our scroll from the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust. The congregation welcomed the scroll with a dedication ceremony attended by a survivor from the town of Klatovy.

Since 1976 our Scroll has been used almost every week during our Saturday morning services. Our b'nei mitzvah read from the Scroll each week and our Rabbis often speak to our congregation about our Scroll and its remarkable story. In many ways, the Scroll educates us about the ancient history of the Jewish people and the current history of our people's survival.

### **Temple Sholom Holocaust Rescued Torah**

The scroll came to Temple Sholom from the Westminster Synagogue Memorial Scrolls Trust in London in 1982. It is scroll number 278 and is one of 1,564 scrolls that came from Czechoslovakia.

### **~~Temple Sinai of Bergen County Holocaust Rescued Torah~~**

~~Our Czech scroll is on permanent loan from the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London. This Torah, Memorial Scrolls Trust number 656, was written around 1880 and comes from the Pinkas synagogue in Prague. The covering for our scroll was handmade by a congregant who created a scene with barbed wire to represent the fencing surrounding the concentration camps and the yellow Star of David patch Jews in Europe were forced to wear during WWII.~~

### **The Leffell School Holocaust Rescued Torah #1**

Solomon Schechter School of Westchester is bringing two Shoah Torahs to the Countywide Commemoration. The first is a Czech Torah Scroll entrusted to the school over 30 years ago by the Westminster Memorial Scroll Trust. This Torah scroll, originally used by the Jewish community in the town of Milevsko in the region of Bohemia, was written in 1900 but left *pasul* (not fit for ritual use) by the events of the Shoah and is not intended to ever be made kosher, as a lasting memorial to the loss of the Shoah.

### **The Leffell School Holocaust Rescued Torah #2**

The second Torah was found naked and upside down in the window of a pawn shop in Warsaw by Schechter High School seniors in 2007 and rescued. When it was found, it was damaged and missing most of Numbers and all of Deuteronomy. Working with sofrim in Israel, it was matched up with another incomplete Shoah scroll from Iasi, Romania and painstakingly restored to kosher status. Today, it is used regularly by middle school and high school students at Schechter and is a testament to the spirit of survival, renewal and hope.

### **Westchester Jewish Center Holocaust Rescued Torah**

After World War II, over 1500 Torah scrolls lay for 20 years in a vacant synagogue in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where the Nazis had stored them. In 1964, the Torahs were taken to London, where they were examined, classified and restored. Gerhard Spies, a native of Germany and his wife Ninna, born in Italy, negotiated with authorities for one of the Torah scrolls and eventually brought over Torah number 909, on permanent loan.

Technically the Torah belongs to the synagogue where it originated, but it is impossible to determine the exact origin. It is believed that this Torah was housed in the main synagogue in Berlin before the war. When the Nazis destroyed this synagogue, the Torah was taken by a few hardy Jewish souls and hid in a cave in a suburb of Berlin. From there it made its way to the vacant synagogue in Prague, to London and

eventually to the United States. The scribe who repaired and restored the Torah once it arrived in the United States believes it to have been written by a German scribe 150-200 years ago.

Torah number 909 arrived at the home of Gerhard Spies in Mamaroneck in 1986. To welcome the Torah, Gerhard's fellow Westchester Jewish Center congregants, many of them Holocaust survivors, sang, danced and celebrated as they paraded the Torah from the Spies' home to its new home at the Westchester Jewish Center where it resides to this day and forever after.

### **Westchester Reform Temple Holocaust Rescued Torah**

Our Torah is number 1357 of the 1,564 Czech Memorial Sifre Torah which were saved when they were collected in Prague during the Nazi occupation in 1939 to 1945 from the desolated Jewish communities of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, and which then came under the control of the Czechoslovak Government for many years. The Scrolls were acquired from Artia for Westminster Synagogue, where they arrived on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1964. Some of the collection remains at Westminster Synagogue, a permanent memorial to the martyrs from whose synagogues they come. Many of them are distributed throughout the world, to be memorials to the Jewish tragedy, and to spread the light as harbingers of future brotherhood on earth; and all of them bear witness to the glory of the holy name.

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A project of the

### **Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center**

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