

# “Do Not Forget” The Uhrineves Scroll

“The world stands on three things: Torah, good works and kindness to others.” (1:2) Pirkei Avot

All three attributes came together when, through the efforts of four member couples, Temple Sinai was granted the long-term loan of the over 200-year-old Uhrineves Torah, Number



543, one of the 1,564 Czech scrolls that survived the Holocaust. Its history and survival read like a mystery/adventure interspersed with evil, greed, love and strength in its travels to its new home in Atlanta.

Finchley Reform Synagogue, London, England, is also home to one of the Czech scrolls. That congregation wrote a history of Uhrineves, located about 10 miles from Prague, and its Jewish community. Excerpts from that narrative are reprinted here:

*“The Jewish history of Czechoslovakia dates back over 1,000 years. The earliest written records of a Jewish community in Uhrineves date from 1670. During that time, Jews were frequently expelled from different cities and regions. Uhrineves was one of the settlements where Jews of Prague found refuge whenever expelled...In 1848, the Jewish community of Uhrineves was financially strong enough to build a synagogue.”*

Nearly 100 years later, the Uhrineves synagogue was closed by the Nazis in 1939. Residents were told by the Nazis that their valuables, including religious items, would be stored safely.

*“Torah scrolls were a part of the huge collection of Jewish ritual objects sent to the Jewish Museum in Prague from the deserted synagogues across Bohemia, Slovakia and Moravia. The Nazis had approved a proposal from leading Jews to bring these treasures to Prague for safekeeping.*

*“The Nazis drew up a list of 392 Jews living in Uhrineves and nearby villages. On Rosh Hashanah, 1 Tishrei 5703, (12 September 1942), 210 Jews, including 36 from Uhrineves, were sent by train from Prague on*

*transport ‘Bg’ to the Terezin ghetto. From there, over the following months they were sent to Auschwitz, Treblinka or other death camps. Of the original 392, there were only 14 survivors. After the war, the synagogue building became municipal property and in 1995 it was restored to the Prague Jewish community. It is no longer used as a synagogue.”*

The scrolls and other artifacts stayed in storage for over 20 years, abandoned and forgotten, many deteriorating beyond repair.

The story of the abandoned scrolls was told to a British art dealer visiting Prague in 1963. A benefactor paid \$30,000 to bring the scrolls to London, where they arrived at Westminster Synagogue on February 7, 1964.

How small a world we live in, and an even smaller Jewish one. Four couples, all members of Temple Sinai, were close friends and studied with Rabbi Robert Ichay (z”l), then spiritual leader of Congregation Or VeShalom: Jackie and Gary Metzel (z”l), Sandra and Bernard Palay (z”l), Eleanor and Larry Bogart, and Rosanne and Phillip Diamond (z”l).

“At a party, the Diamonds met Rabbi Albert H. Friedlander of Westminster Synagogue, who was teaching at Emory. He told the Diamonds about the Czech Torahs,” Jackie Metzel explained many years later. “The Diamonds told Gary, who was born in Vienna. Gary was eight years old when the Nazis rounded up all the men and boys, including his father, on Kristlenacht, sending them to Dachau. After his father was released, Gary’s parents put him on a *kindertrain* and sent him to London. Gary was reunited with his parents in London during the war, and they all made their way to Atlanta, where he grew up.”

At the time that he learned about the Torahs, Gary was president of Temple Sinai. He corresponded with Rabbi Friedlander to inquire



## Ornaments & special features:

**Yad** – of Czech origin, long and with a large block design.

**Wimpel** – a red string, reputedly the same string that bound the Torah when it was rescued.

**Mantle** – white (the absence of color) with no breastplate or other ornamentation. Embroidered in Hebrew is “Lo TishKach – Do Not Forget.”

Stitchers: Stacey Geer, Shirley Michalove, Brenna Serby and Stephanie Wyatt



Gary Metzel and Rabbi Lehrman holding Uhrineves Scroll.

how to obtain one of the Torahs for Temple Sinai. The Torah's repair, shipping, mantle and yad were made possible by the generosity of the four couples.

The Uhrineves Torah was repaired by a British Torah scribe, wrapped in a white sheet, placed in a wooden box, and shipped in 1976 to Atlanta. Upon its arrival, Rabbi Ichay collected it at Customs and placed it in the care of Or VeShalom's Chevrah Kadisha until it was brought to Temple Sinai and placed in the ark in April 1976.

"The Torah is taller than the standard size," Jackie explained. "Its mantle was so deteriorated that it disintegrated when touched. The Diamonds found a 19th Century Czech mantle of standard size in a Judaica shop in New York City," Jackie continued. "Because it was too short, we found matching fabric and had it added to the bottom hem."

On the extension are embroidered the following words in Hebrew:

## A harbinger of future brotherhood

Framed and hanging in the hallway of Temple Sinai's education wing is a certificate that accompanied the Uhrineves scroll, when it arrived in 1976.

It reads, in part: "The Torah, which this certificate accompanies, is one of the 1,564 Czech Memorial Safer Torah which constituted

part of the treasures looted by the Nazis during the 1939-1945 war from the desolated Jewish communities of Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia.... Some of the collection remain 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 everywhere to the Jewish tragedy, and to spread light as harbingers of future brotherhood on earth; and all of them bear witness to the glory of the holy Name. This scroll from Uhrineves was written at the end of the 19th Century."

*"Dedicated again in the city of Atlanta, Georgia in order to remember the six million sacreds who gave their lives in binding. The Jewish People lives on."*

Seeing the Czech Torah arrive at Sinai from the ashes of the Holocaust, "Gary didn't show his emotions, but I imagine he really cried on the inside," Jackie said. "The little boy and the memories were always there.

"That's why this Torah meant so much to him. It showed the indomitable will of man conquering evil. I feel gratitude that we were able to participate in preserving our heritage."

In 2008, all of Temple Sinai's Torahs received new mantles. The 19th Century mantle that had clothed the Holocaust Torah is framed and hangs in the education hall along with the Torah's certification.

Today, 1,424 of the Torahs are on permanent loan to synagogues, museums, universities and Jewish retirement centers around the world. The remaining 140 scrolls are in such poor condition that they cannot be restored. The Uhrineves Torah and Temple Sinai are listed at the U.S. Holocaust Museum, along with other congregations that house Holocaust Torahs. Including Sinai's scroll, there are seven known scrolls that came from the synagogue in Uhrineves. Besides Sinai's and Finchley Synagogue's, the others are at Bushley & District Synagogue in England; Beth El Congregation, Fort Worth, TX; Beth Emeth Congregation, Sun City West, AZ; B'nai B'rith Klutznik Exhibition Hall, Washington, DC; and Century Pine Jewish Center, Pembroke Pines, FL.

It is said that the Torah is a tree of life to all who take hold of it, and all its paths are peace. The Uhrineves Torah is a member of Temple Sinai's congregation, a cherished survivor living among us.

In the words of Rabbi Richard Lehrman (z"l), Temple Sinai's founding rabbi, "[This Torah] will not rest but will shed new light on this and future generations of Jews. The message it teaches is that the Jewish people will not die, no matter how much others wish, but will live as an example for mankind."

Right: Uhrineves Torah's original 19th Century mantle now hangs in Sinai's education hall.

## Sinai members pay respect to our Torah's first home

Since the Holocaust Torah was placed in our ark, many Sinai members have made pilgrimages to the place of its origin, Uhrineves. It has been a sacred journey for every one of them.

In 1989, Rabbi Emeritus Philip Kranz led a group to Eastern Europe, and several congregants traveled to the small village and located the synagogue. At that time, it was a laundromat. Many other congregants have visited since then.

A small rock that was an original piece of the synagogue building is now framed with other artifacts and is displayed in the education hallway.

