



**Sefer Torah, #334, Memorial Trust Scroll,
Czech Scroll #689976
Handwritten, and completed in the 1800s, Rokycany, Czechoslovakia**

Written in the mid 1800s, the last congregation in Bohemia to read, learn and pray with this Sefer Torah was the Jewish congregation in Rokycany, Czechoslovakia sometime between 1938 and 1940.

A History of Survival

Before WWII, 350,000 Jews lived in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, or what became after WWI, the nation of Czechoslovakia.

Between 1598 and 1940, the area was home to a thriving Jewish community. On March 15, 1938, Hitler invaded the newly created nation of Czechoslovakia. By 1940, Jews in Rokycany had either emigrated, been purged, or were murdered at the hands of the Nazis. What remained of the Jewish community was their cemetery, built in 1890 and their shul. Derelict by the end of the 20th century, the building was demolished in 1981.

By the end of the Holocaust, the Nazis had murdered 263,000 Jews in Bohemia and Moravia. Today less than 4,000 Jews live in the Czech Republic.

In 1942, the Jewish communities of Czechoslovakia were ordered by Nazi Zentralstelle (Central Office for Jewish Emigration) to send their "historically valuable" items including Sifrei Torah, books, and textiles to the Jewish Museum in Prague, which long before the Holocaust, housed historical texts and items from Prague's old Jewish Quarter.

While the murders and purges continued, and new laws enacted, including those which prohibited Jewish services, items from vacated synagogues were carefully catalogued by Jews at the Nazis' behest.

By war's end many who worked to preserve the cultural artifacts of theirs, and their neighboring towns, were deported and murdered.

Following the Communist coup of 1948, the artifacts, among them approximately 1800 Torah scrolls, became possessions of the newly formed Communist state.

Approximately 240 of the Torahs did not survive years of storage.

In 1964, the remaining 1,564 scrolls were sold by the Czech government to Ralph Yablon, an art collector in London. They were ultimately transferred to the Memorial Scrolls Trust and are now on loan to Jewish congregations around the world.

In a 1940 memo to Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler wrote of non-Germans in the East, "I hope that through the possibility of large-scale emigration of all Jews to Africa or some other colony, the concept of Jew will have completely disappeared from Europe."

This scroll, like a thousand other of its companion scrolls, did not burn on Kristallnacht, or any other night of the Shoah. Our history, our commandments, were not destroyed by Hitler. While he succeeded in murdering 6,000,000 of our brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, aunts, uncles, parents, and friends, our written word survived. This Torah, like its companions, serves as a symbol of survival, and commitment, in service to Jews alive globally, including Jews in Europe.

For more information:
<https://memorialscrollstrust.org/>