

July 5, 2020

BET MISHPACHAH
Washington, D.C.

**History of our Holocaust Memorial Scroll,
Second *Sefer Torah*, Mantles, *Aron Kodesh*
and *Ner Tamid*, *Yad* and *Rimonim***

Memorial Scroll. In 1979, Bet Mishpachah president Michael Greenwald arranged for us to acquire our first *Sefer Torah*: a Torah scroll originally from the Czech town of Dolni Kounice. It is a fragile Holocaust Memorial Scroll placed on permanent loan to Bet Mishpachah by the Westminster Synagogue in Knightsbridge, London. In 1964, Westminster Synagogue acquired 1,564 rescued Czech Torah scrolls; since then they have generously placed 1,400 of them in synagogues around the world. Placement and coordination of these scrolls is handled by the **Memorial Scrolls Trust** of London (www.memorialscrollstrust.org). In late 1979, still bearing a catalogue number painted on the handle of one of the wooden rollers (akin to the numbers the Nazis tattooed on their prisoners), Memorial Scroll #703 found a new and loving home with Bet Mishpachah.

Dolni Kounice. Dolni Kounice is a small town in Moravia, which became part of Czechoslovakia and is now part of the Czech Republic. The Jewish community in Dolni Kounice began in the 14th century. Over the years, they faced many perils, including the destruction of their synagogue, laws limiting the number of Jews allowed to live there, a fire in the 1830s, a devastating flood in 1862, and finally the forced deportation of the town's entire Jewish community to the Auschwitz death camp. The only survivor was our Torah scroll. Jerry Goldberg (president of Bet Mishpachah in 1980) and his brother Myron visited Dolni Kounice in 1985; they found the boarded-up synagogue and were shown the Jewish cemetery. Later the synagogue was restored and converted into a museum of the town's Jewish history.

Programs. Jerry Goldberg has given several talks to Bet Mishpachah about Dolni Kounice over the years. In March 2012, Rabbi Michael Tayvah, z"l, gave us a talk about our Memorial Scroll and the Jewish community of Dolni Kounice, which he told us was known as Kaunitz in Yiddish. In May 2019 for the 40th anniversary of our Memorial Scroll's arrival at Bet Mishpachah, Joel Wind (our archivist and a past president) and Al Munzer gave a talk about Dolni Kounice and our Memorial Scroll.

Second *Sefer Torah.* In 1991, Beth Cohen and Allan Armus went to Brooklyn, NY, and bought a second *Sefer Torah* for Bet Mishpachah. The dealer said he thought the scroll was written in Russia shortly before the 1917 Revolution, but had never

been mounted on *eitzei chayim* (wooden rollers, literally “trees of life”) until it was bought by Bet Mishpachah. (Years later Beth earned her rabbinic ordination from Aleph, the seminary of the Jewish Renewal movement.)

Torah Mantles. To adorn our two *sifrei Torah*, Bet Mishpachah commissioned artist Reeva Schaeffer to design and create Torah mantles for them. The silk mantles have rainbow stripes with a hand-painted Hebrew verse from *B'reishit* (Genesis) 9:14b-15a: *V'nir-ata ha-kèshet b'anan, v'zachàrti et b'riti*: “And when the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember My covenant.” The rainbow mantles were donated by Michael Strum and John Crotts and were dedicated in 1987 on *Simchat Torah*. In 2000, white Torah mantles and a sheer *Parochet* (curtain) for the Ark were donated by Joel Wind and Alfred Munzer for use during the High Holy Day period. They bear the phrase *Hashivèinu Adonai eilècha v'nashuva, chadeish yamèinu k'kèdem*: “Return is to You, God, and we shall return; renew our days as of old.”

Ark and Ner Tamid. Bet Mishpachah's first *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark) for housing our Memorial Torah scroll was hand-made by Jim Dronenburg and Ken Edwards. They carved an intricate cut-out filigree design for the doors; the center of each door featured the Greek letter *lambda* (an early Gay Liberation symbol) within a *Magen David*. Later the doors from the first Ark were incorporated into a new Ark with a classic broken pediment. A *Ner Tamid* (perpetual light) to sit in the broken pediment was created by artist Rebecca Kamen in the form of a circular burning bush in front of the Hebrew letter *shin* for *Shaddai*, one of the feminine Hebrew names for God. A beautiful new Ark was ordered from Israel in 2016, funded by a generous donation from president Stuart Sotsky, and our *Ner Tamid* was moved to the new Ark.

Yad and Rimonim. A silver *Yad* (pointer, literally “hand”) for reading the Torah was donated in 1980 by Irving Fine, *z"l*, who for many years hosted Bet Mishpachah's Purim parties at his home in Mt. Pleasant, where he had a huge collection of *mezuzot* and other Judaïca. The sterling silver *Rimonim* (finials) for our Russian *Sefer Torah* were donated in 2004 by Murray Woldman and his brother Joel Woldman, *z"l*. The *Rimonim* for our Holocaust Memorial scroll were donated by DC Minyan (which also meets at the Edlavitch Jewish Community Center of Washington, D.C.) in appreciation for letting them use our Torah scrolls before they acquired their own.