

Bet Mishpachah
Washington, D.C.

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

In 1979, Bet Mishpachah acquired our first *Sefer Torah*: a Torah scroll originally from the Czech town of Dolni Kounice (known as Kaunitz in Yiddish). It is a fragile Holocaust Memorial Scroll placed on permanent loan to Bet Mishpachah by the Westminster Synagogue in London, which acquired a large group of Holocaust scrolls after World War II and generously placed them in synagogues around the world. The placement and coordination of these scrolls is now handled by the Memorial Scrolls Trust of London; our *Sefer Torah* is Memorial Scroll #703.

Dolni Kounice is a small town in Moravia, which later became part of Czechoslovakia and is now part of the Czech Republic. The Jewish community there 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.

In 1979, still bearing a number painted on the handle of one of the wooden rollers, akin to the numbers the Nazis tattooed on their prisoners, the Torah scroll found a new home here with Bet Mishpachah. In 1991, the congregation bought a second *Sefer Torah* from a dealer in Brooklyn; this scroll is thought to have been written in Russia shortly before the 1917 Revolution, but was never mounted on *eitzei chayim* (wooden rollers, literally "trees of life") until it was bought by Bet Mishpachah.

To adorn our two *sifrei Torah*, Bet Mishpachah commissioned from artist Reeva Schaeffer custom-designed silk Torah mantles in rainbow stripes with hand-painted Hebrew verses on them from *B'reishit* (Genesis) 9:14b-15a: *V'nir-ata ha-kèshet be'anan, v'zacharti 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 Crofts and were dedicated in 1987 on *Simchat Torah*.

Bet Mishpachah's first *Aron Kodesh* (Holy Ark) for housing our Memorial Torah scroll was made by Jim Dronenburg and Ken Edwards. They carved an intricate

cut-out filigree design for the doors, featuring the Greek letter *lambda* (an early gay liberation symbol) within a *Magen David*. The doors from the first Ark were later incorporated into a new Ark, and a *Ner Tamid* (perpetual light) was created by artist Rebecca Kamen in the form of a circular burning bush backed by the Hebrew letter *shin* for *Shaddai*, one of the feminine Hebrew names for God. A beautiful new Ark was ordered from Israel in 2016, underwritten by a generous donation from then-president Stuart Sotsky; the *Ner Tamid* from our old Ark was moved to the new Ark.

A silver *yad* (pointer, literally “hand”) for reading the Torah was donated 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 Judaica.

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 scroll were donated by DC Minyan in appreciation for letting them use our Torah scrolls when they were first meeting at the DC JCC and hadn’t yet acquired their own.