

A historical artefact in routine use at SPS Our small Czech Memorial Torah Scroll #365



- ITS PAST, GENUINE PROVENANCE, AND PREVIOUS MISCONCEPTION

About Ivančice

Ivančice is a town in the South Moravian Region of the Czech Republic, known by the original Jewish residents as Eybshitz and by the Germans as Eibenschultz. It is located 13 miles (21km) southwest of Brno, a major city in the Czech Republic, the former capital of Moravia.

Until 1918 Ivančice was part of the Austrian Empire. Between the two World Wars, and during the postwar communist era, it was part of the Republic of Czechoslovakia.

The new Ivančice synagogue, which was built in 1853 to replace the town's first synagogue, was used as a storage space for 50 years. Since 2008 it has undergone a reconstruction process in order to restore it for the town's cultural needs.

The Jewish cemetery has nearly 1,800 tombstones, the oldest of which dates to 1580. It also includes a ceremonial hall, which was built in 1902. The cemetery can be visited by appointment.

Of the 73 homes that once stood in the Jewish Quarter, 52 remain. A wall-mounted plaque on 1 Krumlovska Street memorializes where the transit and internment camp for Jews was located between 1938 and 1942.

HISTORY

The Jewish community of Ivančice was one of the oldest in Moravia. According to a local tradition, Jews arrived with Roman troops during the first century and were later expelled. By 956 there was already a synagogue in the town and the names of 157 Jews, and 783 Christians appear in tax registers from the time. During the rule of the House of Premysl (895-1306) the Jews had equal rights when it came to taxes and owning property. They were also responsible for participating in building the town's walls and defending them, along with their Christian neighbours. They were not, however, permitted to carry arms and they did not work as officials for the local government.

In 1454 the community of Ivančice absorbed Jewish refugees from Austria and a number of royal towns of Moravia, thereby becoming among the largest and the most important of the Jewish communities in Moravia at that time. However, at the beginning of the 16th century, during the reign of Emperor Ferdinand of Hapsburg, the Jews became subjects to a number of

economic restrictions and were also forced to wear a yellow badge that would identify them as Jewish.

The Jewish Ghetto of Ivančice was first established during the 14th century outside the town. It was subsequently moved inside the town walls to be administered as an autonomous municipal entity, with a Jewish mayor.

The Jews of Ivančice and of a number of nearby settlements lived under the protection of the nobles of the House of Pernstein. During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), following the persecution of the Christian reform sects by the Catholic Church, the number of Christians in Ivančice shrank.

Simultaneously, the Jewish community began to grow, helped by the arrival of many refugees from Bohemia. This influx of Jewish refugees resulted in a 1650 edict forbidding any Jew to live in Moravia who arrived after 1618.

The Ivančice Jewish community became officially organized around the 17th century. It had its own rabbi, dayanim (religious judges), a gabbai, and a chevra kaddisha. The Jewish cemetery, in which the oldest tombstone dated to 1552, was expanded during the 17th, and again in the 19th, century.

Ivančice's first recorded rabbi, Rabbi Abraham the son of Hirsch Foreis, served during the second half of the 17th century. He was succeeded by Rabbi David of Rakov, who in turn was succeeded by his son Rabbi Joseph Rakov. Rabbi Rakov was followed by Rabbi Elia ben Shmuel, Rabbi Nathan Zelig of Cracow, Rabbi Issachar ber Oppenheim (1829-1859), his son Rabbi Joachim Oppenheim, Rabbi Dr Jacob Tauber, and Rabbi Dr Hermann Handel (1881- 1925). Rabbi Handel was the community's last rabbi; afterwards, the community would refer to Rabbi Dr Heinrich Flesch, the rabbi of Kanits. Ivančice also had a yeshiva that trained Rabbis.

The town's original synagogue was built sometime during the 16th century; in 1853 a new synagogue was consecrated in its place.

It was around this time that the SPS Czech Memorial Scroll was written.

This new synagogue had a girls' choir that accompanied the cantor. While the Jewish community offered its children a Jewish education since the 16th century (there are records of a Jewish melamed - teacher of small children - dating to 1598), a Jewish school was opened 1823, in which the language of instruction was German. A new school was opened in 1833 and enrolled 121 pupils, some of whom were not Jewish. By 1856 this second school had 4 classes, however, in 1902 it was closed due to lack of enrolment and the building was used by the community to house the community's offices and the mikveh.

A funeral house was built in the building's courtyard; the man in charge of Jewish burials served also as a policeman and jailer in the Jewish Quarter.

In 1752 the Jews of Ivančice lived in 67 houses. By 1791 the community had grown to 533 people (about 45% of the town's total population) living in 72 houses. In 1830 their number rose to 797, and in 1835 the Jewish population was 877.

In 1848 Jews throughout the Austrian Empire were emancipated, and residence restrictions were lifted. As a result, Jews throughout the region began moving to larger towns and cities in search of greater economic and educational opportunities. As a result, Jewish populations in places like Ivančice began to decline. By 1857 the population had dropped to 629 though twenty years later, in 1877, they still made up 25% of the total population. In 1900 the town's Jewish population was 564.

During World War I the town's Jewish population saw an increase, a result of the many Jewish refugees arriving in Ivančice from Bukovina, but these refugees were asked to leave once the war was over. In 1918 the heretofore autonomous Jewish town was united with the Christian town, after which the community's authority was restricted to religious and social welfare issues. In 1921 the president of the community was Alexander Stern. Among the community's institutions were a Bikkur Holim society, a women's society, and a charity organization.

In the second half of the 19th century, following the emancipation, the Jews began to be able to take advantage of a wide range of economic opportunities. The first Jews in Ivančice made their living in crafts, trade, and in leasing inns. Jews were not allowed to own real estate during the 17th century, limiting their economic activities, and during the 18th century Jewish merchants were allowed to conduct their business only in the town's market.

After the emancipation, however, things changed. The Jews of Ivančice founded businesses and went into academic professions. The Ivančice graduates of the German universities of Vienna, Prague, and Brno, who did not find suitable positions in their town, left for other towns.

The Jews of Ivančice declared their nationality as German until the turn of the 20th century. At that point Ivančice became one of the centres of Czech nationalism, which led to tensions between the Christian residents of the town, who began identifying strongly as Czech, and their Jewish neighbours who were seen as 'other.' The town's residents demonstrated in the Jewish Quarter and withdrew their children from the Jewish school.

Ultimately, once the Republic of Czechoslovakia was formed at the end of World War I, the new republic recognized the Jews as a national minority. Nonetheless, the nationalist friction between the Jews of Ivančice and the Czech townspeople continued until 1925.

Once Jews were recognized as a national minority within the Republic of Czechoslovakia, many became involved with Jewish nationalism and the Zionist movement. In 1921, 157 out of the 190 Jews of Ivančice declared their nationality as Jewish; the remaining 33 declared their nationality as Czech or German.

During this period Zionism became popular; in 1926, members of the community purchased membership and voting rights prior to the 15th Zionist Congress and continued to do so over the years. Jews were also active in the town's politics, and during the interwar period delegates from the Jewish community served on the town council.

Relationships between the Jews and Czechs improved during the interwar period, so much so that Jewish assimilation rose and some younger members of the community married non-Jews. Among the notable Jews from Ivančice are the actor, director, and playwright Leopold Adler, the musicologist Guido Adler, and the composer Hugo Weisgall.

THE HOLOCAUST

The Munich Agreement of September 1938 resulted in the dissolution of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and annexed the 'Sudeten' Region to Germany. As a result, large numbers of Czech and Jewish refugees from the region came to nearby Ivančice, though many of them were expelled and forced to return to the annexed territory. Jews who refused to return were left stranded on the new border, without any shelter or protection.

After the intervention of Jan Masaryk, the exiled president of Czechoslovakia who had fled to London, a transit camp was set up for the refugees at the leather factory of Moritz Goldmann, the president of the community of Ivančice. This transit camp functioned until 1942, and 801 refugees passed through it.

In March 1939, the Czech part of the republic (Bohemia and Moravia) became a protectorate of Nazi Germany, ushering in a period of discrimination and violence against the Jews of the region.

Under German rule, the community of Ivančice served as a regional community. The Jews were evicted from their houses and concentrated in the Jewish Quarter. Their property was nationalized, their rights were dispossessed, and they were sent to work in factories and in mines.

By November 1939 young Jewish men from the transit camp were deported to the concentration camp of Nisko in Poland. Some escaped and joined the Czech units that fought the Germans with the Soviet Red Army.

Led by the Czech student Hynek Ruzicka, an anti-Nazi underground movement emerged at Ivančice which young Jews from the transit camp joined. In 1942 the Jews of Ivančice and the nearby transit camp were sent

to the Terezin (Theresienstadt) Ghetto in 4 transports, the first of which took place on March 11, 1942. Some of the deportees were sent to the concentration camp Maidanek, while others and others were sent to Auschwitz. The last Jews, those who were in mixed marriages, were deported in 1944.

Before the deportation, 517 documents and ritual objects from the Jewish community of Ivančice were sent to the Central Jewish Museum in Prague - one of which was our small Czech Memorial Scroll at SPS.

POSTWAR

Only eighteen Jews from Ivančice survived the war. In May 1945, at the end of the WW2, the first of the community's survivors returned to Ivančice. They were mostly those from mixed marriages who were deported later, as well as the young men who had escaped from Nisko and fought in the Czech units. Most of them left Ivančice shortly thereafter, and only very few remained in the town. The synagogue building was demolished in 1950.

This information was kindly provided by courtesy of Beit Hatfutsot, The Museum of the Jewish People, which is housed within the campus of Tel Aviv University.

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