

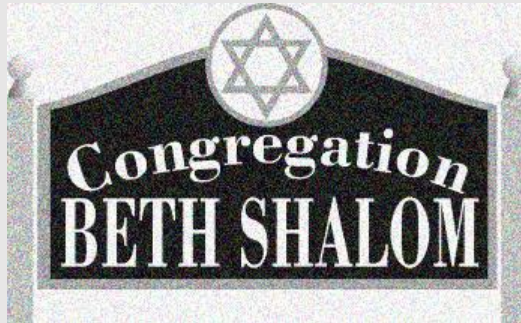
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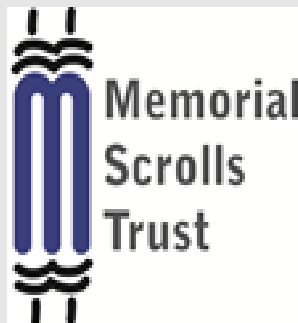
## Congregation Beth Shalom

688 Clifton Park Center Road  
Clifton Park, NY 12065

Website: [bethshalomcp.webs.com](http://bethshalomcp.webs.com)



**"Each Memorial Scroll is a messenger from a community that was lost, but does not deserve to be forgotten"**



### MEMORIAL SCROLLS TRUST

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London SW7 1BX United Kingdom  
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Website: [www.memorialscrollstrust.org](http://www.memorialscrollstrust.org)

Donate to the Memorial Scrolls Trust  
Through American Fund of Charities  
Charity AFC1056  
[www.americanfund.info](http://www.americanfund.info)



Through the scrolls, we wish to remember European Jewish life before the Holocaust as well as its tragic destruction, challenge those who interact with the scrolls to confront prejudice and hatred, and inspire them to action by committing to their Jewish lives and working to build bridges across communities.

[Please click here for more information about international Czech torahs.](#)

The Memorial Scrolls Trust (MST) holds approximately 1,564 Czech Torah scrolls.

The scrolls were rescued from the Holocaust by the Prague Jewish community, which largely perished. For many years, the scrolls had lain unused and unattended in Prague. The 1,564 Torah scrolls representing hundreds of Jewish communities in Bohemia and Moravia that had been wiped out in the Holocaust arrived traveled across Europe and arrived at the Westminster Synagogue in London. The Westminster Synagogue is Jewish Reform synagogue and congregation near Hyde Park, London. It is located in Kent House, a restored Victorian town house in Knightsbridge. The building, which dates from the late 1800s, also houses the Memorial Scrolls Trust. From there, over the years that have passed since, the MST has sent out to Jewish communities in Great Britain and twenty other countries of the Western world, including West Germany, scrolls to be cherished as memorials to a tragic past but at the same time to be read and studied by a new generation of Jews.



The Torah scrolls from Czechoslovakia were part of a huge collection of Jewish ceremonial objects that were collected during the Second World War by the Jewish Museum of Prague at the instigation of the Jewish curators who worked there. Under the watchful eye of the Nazis, Jews in Prague sorted, classified, and catalogued these treasures and arranged the scrolls in stacks reaching from the floor to the ceiling. For the Jews thus employed, it was a short reprieve; even before their task was completed, they were deported and all but two eventually perished in the death camps. However, one would like to believe that as the Torah scrolls and the other sacred objects, including some of great value and antiquity, passed through their hands, these martyrs took comfort in the hope that the ceremonial objects, in some cases hundreds of years old, would be returned to the restored Jewish communities.



The MST is now in the phase of ensuring that recipients remain aware of the unique importance of the Scroll in their care, and the special link it represents with the Jews of the destroyed congregations from which it came. A small museum in Kent House displays the work of the Trust and tells the history of the scrolls.



## Torah saved by Nazis gets Clifton Park home

By Linda Somberg

Staff Writer

CLIFTON PARK — Small children touched the parchment scroll gently with their prayer books as the rabbi escorted the Torah down one aisle and up the other of the Beth Shalom Synagogue.

Solemnly the children kissed their books and stood quietly as adult members of the small congregation followed suit.

There was nothing unusual in this show of love and respect for perhaps the most cherished symbol of the Jewish faith. Ceremonies such as this were taking place at Saturday morning Sabbath services throughout the United States.

What was unusual was the Torah itself.

This Torah, recently acquired by the Beth Shalom Congregation, had once been intended for a vastly different purpose.

Found in the basement of a warehouse in Prague after World War II, it had been slated by the Nazis for display after the war in a museum of Jewish artifacts.

"It was going to be a monument to the successful completion of Hitler's stated purpose which was to obliterate the Jewish people," said Rabbi Jonathan Gerard of the Berith Shalom Synagogue in Troy.

"He wanted to take the living documents of Judaism and turn them into museum relics," said Gerard, who was instrumental in securing the Torah for Clifton Park.

"It is like Hammurabi's Code (the laws of Mesopotamia circa 1750 BC) which is a symbol of an ancient culture that no longer exists except in museums to be read about — to say look at this ancient unintelligible writing. The Torahs would have been cast in a pejorative light."

For Yetta Fox, 34, of Clifton Park, the Beth Shalom Torah is a poignant and personal reminder of the Holocaust that wiped out six million Jews, among them her own grandparents.

"I am very affected by it," said Fox, whose father at the age of 14 was taken to a concentration camp and whose mother spent years in forced labor camps.

Flanked by her two children and husband, Fox talked contemplatively about the Torah from Prague.

"In a way it's kind of sad," she said. "It belongs to someone else. But we don't know who those people are, whether they're alive or where they are."

But having the Torah at Beth Shalom, she added, "is almost like a second life for the Torah. Having lost one community, there is now a new community that can nurture this Torah."

Having arrived in the United States with only a cardboard tag tied to its wooden handle, the Prague Torah is now clad in a green velvet and white satin covering.

Once it was identified by a tag, as "The Old Testament of the Jews near Prague for the Central Museum." Now it is viewed by its new congregation as a permanent treasure of their synagogue.



Staff photo by Jack Pinto

**HOLY SCROLL** — Rabbi Harrey Spivak, center, displays a Torah scroll once designated to display in a Nazi museum to Abby Green and Laurence Fox at the Beth Shalom Synagogue in Clifton Park.

Home for the Prague Torah, rendered in 1870, was once a synagogue in the small village of Vlasim in Czechoslovakia. Its new home is a wood-paneled arc where once there were three torahs. Those were stolen last spring in a raid which also claimed four scrolls from the Tfoy synagogue.

Through the efforts of Rabbi Gerard and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Clifton Park was successful in its request for one of the Prague Torahs being distributed by the Westminster Synagogue in London.

Funding for the restoration and transportation of the Prague Torah was made possible by a \$1,200 donation from congregation members Richard and Abby Green.

Beth Shalom Rabbi Harvey Spivak believes there is a particular poignancy to Beth Shalom's acquisition of the Prague Torah.

Because the Congregation is only about nine years old, Spivak said, there is an irony in a newly emerging congregation inheriting a Torah intended by the Nazis to symbolize the death of the Jewish religion.

## Torah Memorial Scrolls Trust (MST) #293

*Times Union, The (Albany, NY) - June 11, 2007*  
Author/Byline: MARC PARRY Staff Writer

*[Excerpt from Times Union Article]*

### **Scroll ever a symbol of hope, faith - Holocaust-era Torah returns to congregation**

CLIFTON PARK - In their occupation of what is now the Czech Republic, Nazis seized one congregation's Torah and stockpiled it with a huge collection of Jewish ritual objects for Adolf Hitler's planned "museum of an extinct race."

The Jewish community that owned the scroll did not survive the Holocaust.

Its holy text did.

Now the small Saratoga County Jewish community that possesses the scroll is resurrecting it, one of more than 1,500 Torahs found after World War II in an abandoned synagogue outside Prague.

Congregation Beth Shalom on Sunday celebrated the return of their Torah - Scriptures non-Jews know as the Old Testament.

"We are by no means extinct," synagogue President Gloria Kupferman said after reminding her Clifton Park congregation what the Nazis had planned for the so-called Holocaust Torah. "We are alive. And we are thriving."

Sunday's events mixed the joy of a celebration with the melancholy of a memorial service.

The day began with a parade from Clifton Park Town Hall to the synagogue five minutes up the road. Marchers took turns cradling the scroll. They sang Jewish songs and waved flags. They paraded under a chuppah, a canopy used for sacred events, which children in the synagogue's Hebrew school had decorated with Stars of David.

They nestled the scroll itself in a wimpel, the cloth traditionally used to wrap a child at his circumcision.

"This is our baby, so we're wrapping our Torah," said Fred Pineau, past president of the 150-family synagogue.

The Torah became their baby in 1981, some four decades after Nazis confiscated it from the area of a town called Vlasim. During the war, Germans compelled Jews to catalog the scrolls and arrange them in the synagogue of a Prague suburb. Stacks stretched up to the ceiling.

An official history of the Czech scrolls described this as "a short reprieve" for the Torah-sorters. "When their task was completed," the history says, "most of them were deported and eventually perished in the death camps."



The scrolls' parchment typically comes from cow's skin, its ink from a brewed mixture of vegetables, plants and charcoal. The Torahs perish if they aren't unfolded periodically.

That wasn't possible in a cramped warehouse. The scrolls, which fell into the hands of the State Jewish Museum in Prague after the war, began to deteriorate on their crude wooden racks. Then, in 1963, a London art collector negotiated the acquisition of 1,564 scrolls. The largest known shipment of Torah scrolls crossed Europe in five sealed railroad cars. Its destination: England's Westminster Synagogue.

An organization called the Czech Memorial Scrolls Trust was formed there. The group distributes the Torahs on "permanent loan" to synagogues and Jewish institutions around the world.

It was through the trust that Congregation Beth Shalom's scroll completed its journey from suburban Prague to suburban Albany. Beth Shalom was a good candidate, explained temple member Sheila Alfasso, because at the time one of its Torahs had just been stolen.

"The Torah is Jews' most sacred object," she went on. "It's significant because it's part of our services every week. It's particularly significant because it commemorates people who perished in the Holocaust."

Temple members completed the Torah's return by laying it to rest in the ark, a special cabinet.

A man in the back row turned to the woman next to him. "It's home," he said. "It's home."

