

## Holocaust Torah at FWB temple repaired

*By Special to the Daily News*

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FORT WALTON BEACH — A miracle is an event or a series of circumstances that would otherwise be inconceivable to the imagination. A religious miracle is one that also, reveals a larger truth.

The story of the Holocaust Torahs is just this kind of miracle.

### **The Journey of the Torah**

Torah scrolls from the former Czechoslovakia were part of a huge collection of Jewish ceremonial objects that were collected at the end of World War II by Jewish curators.

This Judaica had been planned as exhibits in a Nazi museum, dedicated to the display of how a “race of vermin” had been brought to extinction.

Under the watchful eye of the Nazis, Jews in Prague sorted, classified, and catalogued these treasures, loosely stacking the scrolls 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.

On Feb. 7, 1964, in the 19th year after the last German troops had surrendered in Prague, there arrived in London 1,564 Torah scrolls representing hundreds of Jewish communities in Bohemia and Moravia that were liquidated in the Holocaust.

For many years, the scrolls had lain unused and unattended in the dank cellar of a Prague synagogue which served as a warehouse. They traveled across Europe and arrived at the Westminster Synagogue in London.

From there, over the many years that have since passed, they have been given basic repairs before being sent out on loan to Jewish communities in Great Britain and 20 other countries of the Western world, including West Germany.

The scrolls have been cherished as memorials to a tragic past but at the same time read and studied by a new generation of Jews, the guarantors of Jewish survival and rebirth.

Temple Beth Shalom of Fort Walton Beach became custodian, on loan from the Westminster Synagogue, of Torah No. 816 in 1986. This Torah was rescued from the town of Ledec Nad Sazavou, Bohemia, now in the Czech Republic. It is estimated that the Torah was written in the mid 1800's.

### **Writing of a Torah**

It would be hard to find an object that represents the Jewish culture and religion more aptly than the Torah scroll. The reading from a parchment manuscript which contains the Hebrew text of the Five Books of Moses — the Divine Teaching handed over to the people of Israel — is the core of the Jewish synagogue liturgy.

The Torah scroll consists of parchment “pages,” prepared from the skin of a kosher animal, sewn together into a scroll. It is many yards in length and has two wooden rollers at each end.

Considered to be holy, both the text and the scroll itself have a unique position within Judaism. In order to be suitable for reading in the synagogue, the Torah scroll must be written in a square Hebrew script with permanent ink and a quill made



from a kosher bird, such as a goose or turkey.

The scroll may have no textual errors and the letters must be legible. Certain errors and imperfections may be corrected by the scribe, but if there is extensive damage the parchment must not be used and is attended to according to Jewish law.

### **Repair of a Torah**

The repair of a Torah is done by a Sofer, a specially trained Rabbi. On Jan. 26, Rabbi Yochanan Salazar-Loewe, from Soferonsite.com, located in North Miami Beach, examined and started repair of the Temple Beth Shalom's Torah scroll. He also told the temple of the origins of its Torah based on font style, type of parchment and other revealing details.

World War II and the Nazi occupation of Europe have taken its toll on many of these scrolls. These Torahs were beaten, water-soaked, cut-up, burned, blood-stained, and ravaged by time.

Rabbi Salazar-Loewe was able to clean some sections, correct letters, and replace patches. But much is still to be done when he later receives the Torah for the work of restoring it back to its valid status under Jewish Law.

### **The Responsibility**

Marty Siegel, president of the Temple Beth Shalom, pointed out that in becoming its custodian, there is an element of melancholy as well as an element of great joy and celebration.

Melancholy because when it is viewed, the Torah will always serve as a chilling reminder of the millions of Jews who tragically lost their lives only because they were Jews.

Joy and celebration because having this Torah for use in a vibrant Jewish community, reminds them of their people's tenacity for survival.

Finally, being custodians of this sacred scroll becomes a powerful reminder of the responsibility to take Torah and Judaism seriously — to study Torah, to live Torah and to pass that legacy on to the next generation.

For more information and to book a short presentation, "The Miracle of the Holocaust Torahs," contact Temple Beth Shalom at 862-6086.

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