

Torah stolen by Nazis gets new home in Milton

Early 19th century scroll arrives at Temple Shalom

By Trisha Currier
The Patriot Ledger

MILTON — A Czechoslovakian Torah that survived the destruction of its home community and its theft by the Nazis during World War II arrived at Milton's Temple Shalom yesterday.

The early 19th century scroll from the town of Dolni Kounice will serve as a memorial to the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust, according to Rabbi Jerome Weistrop.

The Torah was recovered and stored by the Memorial Scrolls Trust in London, and is now on long-term loan to the temple at 180 Blue Hill Ave.

"We feel that the tragedy of the Nazi period must never be forgotten and we feel a strong sense of obligation to remember the Jewish communities of Europe which were annihilated," Weistrop wrote in a letter to the trust.

"Both the memory of the Holocaust and the promise of the future of Judaism are symbolized in the rescued Torah scrolls which you and your committee have so kindly offered for adoption by Jewish communities," the letter said.

Weistrop picked up the sacred scroll at Logan International Airport yesterday afternoon.

The Torah was one of about a

Milton

thousand taken from Czechoslovakian synagogues and stored by Hitler's army before being recovered and sent to Westminster Synagogue in Rutland Gardens, London.

"(The Nazis) would think it would have some value to show a dead culture they had destroyed," Weistrop said.

One of the Torahs destroyed in the March fire of Temple Beth David in Westwood was also taken by Nazis from a Czechoslovakian temple.

Weistrop said members of his synagogue are "very excited" about having the Czechoslovakian Torah in their temple, and that the scroll has a special meaning for the estimated 25 Milton families who lost relatives in the Holocaust.

"I'm sure they were wiped out," Weistrop said of the synagogue that originally held the Czechoslovakian scroll.

The Czechoslovakian Torah will be dedicated in a ceremony in the fall after a special case that will house it is completed. It will then be displayed in the lobby of the temple.

Weistrop wrote to the Memorial Scrolls Trust in England in December and requested a Torah that had survived the Holocaust.

Two weeks ago, a chairman of the Memorial Scrolls Trust wrote to Weistrop and said that scroll number 263 is on "permanent loan" to Temple Shalom.

The Memorial Scrolls Trust keeps a waiting list of synagogues that want scrolls that survived the Holocaust.

The Torah is valuable because of its special parchment and because of the labor that goes into the scribing process.

"It is worth many thousands of dollars because it takes a man months to write it," Weistrop said.

There are very few scribes in the immediate area who write Torahs, and many of the scribes in Europe were killed during the Holocaust.

Torahs are written anonymously, and no information is available on the scribe who wrote the Czechoslovakian scroll.

The Torah contains the first five books of the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. It is the covenant made between God and the people of Israel.

"According to tradition, it's believed Moses wrote all of the Torah and God gave him the words to write," Weistrop said.

The Torah is read during Saturday, Monday and Thursday services, as well as on holidays. A different chapter is read each week.



Rosemary Cundari/The Patriot Ledger

Rabbi Jerome Weistrop, Al Rosenbaum, President Lila Rosenbaum and Francine Weistrop of Temple Shalom in Milton examine the temple's new Torah on its arrival at U.S Customs at Logan Airport.

"In order to be a synagogue, you have to have a Torah," Weistrop said.

Until the dedication ceremonies this fall, the scroll will be stored in an ark with the temple's six other Torahs, many of which were donated by families.

"You have to keep it somewhere, and it has to be a respectful kind of

place," Weistrop said.

The dedication ceremony will also include the installation of a stained glass window that will commemorate Holocaust victims.

Weistrop said one of the verses temple members are considering inscribing on the window is taken from the writings of Maimonides, a Middle Ages rabbi, physician and philos-

opher who is considered one of the greatest influences on Jewish thought.

The verse reads: *Despite all that has happened, I still believe in the coming of the Messiah.*

"Even as they were suffering, they believed the Messiah would come and they would be saved," Weistrop said of the Holocaust victims.