



This project brought me to think about us, people. It brought me to consider our mutual tolerance and friendship and how can we, as a majority, accept other individuals or minorities. I am perhaps a foolish optimist but I am convinced that in the present modernized times, these relations have reached a higher level although they still aren't ideal. I think that an intelligent individual would, in a dialogue with another person, while still a stranger, not be interested in their race and confession. Instead, they would talk to that other person and treat them as an equal. Of course, in the case of emergency, they would offer them protection and help.

Even though there are places where exceptions exist. However, as the saying goes, "the exception proves the rule."

Zuzana Křížová



## Otázky:

- What happened to Eva, the girl in a light colored dress?
- Why could Eva and her friend only go out at night?
- Why did the grandmother of Zuzana - the author of the project - name her daughter Eva?
  
- Why were the Jews from the Protectorate deported to Terezín?
- What were the Jews in Terezín most afraid of?

## The Origins and History of Jews in the Stříbro Region

The first evidence of Jewish presence in the West of Bohemia is a note about a fire in 1270. The synagogue was burned down in this fire. Another evidence is that a certain rabbi, Moses ben Chisdaj, who lived in the 13th century, was from Tachov. It is not too far-fetched to think that if there was a synagogue in Cheb and a certain rabbi came from Tachov, the region of Stříbro could have been inhabited by Jews.

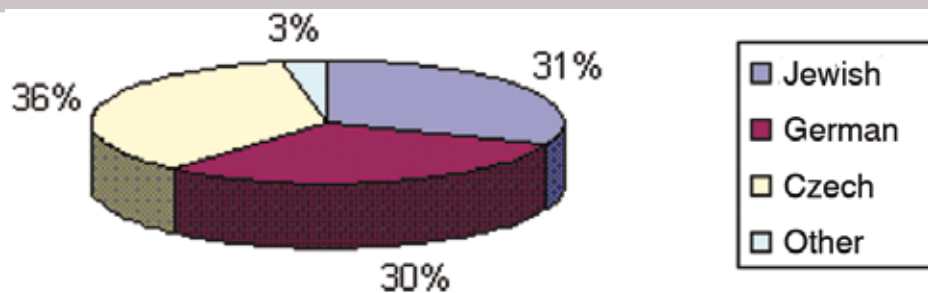
A faint trace that we may certainly exploit is the consent issued by King John of Bohemia to the town of Stráž in 1331 to keep the income from Jews (a tax the Jews were charged to pay)<sup>1</sup>. There is written proof of Jews living in Tachov in 1456. Their further presence in the region is proven as follows: Bor, Nové Sedliště and Staré Sedliště in the first half of the sixteenth century, Tisová, 1578, Lesná, earlier than 1618, Dlouhý Újezd and Pořejov, in the middle of the seventeenth century, Částkov and Studénka around 1670, Labuť and Lhotka, around 1700, Bernartice and Darmyšl, in the eighteenth century. Western Bohemian and Bavarian birth registers show that the Jews who settled in the Stříbro region and in the surrounding towns were from Southern Germany.

They were allowed to earn their living only in certain professions. Among these were primarily some types of trade and crafts that served exclusively the Jewish population, e.g. butchers, bakers, tailors, and shoemakers. If they had Christian and peace-loving neighbours, they could also work as cattle slaughterers, tanners, glaziers, ribbon-makers and in later times as bonesetters. However, they were strictly forbidden to own land, grow plants and keep cattle for trading.

Western Bohemia, particularly the present-day Tachov District, was covered with a dense web of Jewish villages. This applied, in a lesser extent, to the northern part of the Domažlice District as well. There was a great boom and growth of the Jewish population of the Tachov area at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

The advent of Nazism resulted in a great change and turn in the development of the Jewish community and its tendency to assimilate to the original population. Since 1933, Jews moved from Germany to Western Bohemia. After 1938, they were followed by Jewish families from Austria. In the Autumn of 1938 began a mass exodus of Jewish people inland or abroad. After Sudetenland was adjoined to Germany, the synagogues in Tachov and in Stráž were burned down during the Crystal Night, the praying house in Bor was bereaved of its furnishings and almost all the cemeteries had been damaged. Jewish citizens who failed to save themselves in time were deprived of their civil rights and interned in camps (Milov at Přimda, Olšová Vrata by Karlovy Vary). After 1942, they were moved to Terezín and from there transported eastward, most often to extermination camps in Poland. After the war ended, only few survivors returned to their home towns and villages. The post-war Stříbro region remained, therefore, forlorn and deprived of its Jewish populace.

Since 1990, the Jewish monuments are taken care of by voluntary institutions and individual patrons. Until then, the monuments deteriorated as nobody took interest in them, save for time and vandals who changed their conditions to the worse.



Nationality of Stříbro residents before the war

## Why is my aunt called Eva?



Before I began to work on this project about Jews I asked members of my family to find out whether we had any Jewish relatives. The result was what I already thought it would be – we did not. But Grandmother told me about a friend she used to have, who was Jewish. Grandmother went to the same class with her and they used to be inseparable friends. She reportedly had beautiful blond hair and blue eyes. She inherited her beautiful eyes from her father. He was rather small with red hair and a beard. Unfortunately, Grandmother does not remember what her mother looked like. When Grandmother's friend had to leave school because of the new Nazi law, it was as if Grandmother lost all her spirit. She missed her best friend so badly. Hitler's laws

forbade even visiting Jewish friends or to have anything to do with them whatsoever. If these rules were trespassed, the trespassers were punished as if they were Jews themselves.

Several months before 15 March 1939, the relatives of Grandmother's friend bought plane tickets to America and sold all their belongings. Grandmother's friend's parents were going to do the same. They already had their tickets purchased and were supposed to leave early in the autumn. Unfortunately, they did not make it. The chateau they went to every summer was confiscated as well as the house they lived in. They moved into a small apartment. They had only a few pieces of furniture, dresses and other the indispensable things. Their maid stayed with them out of affection.

Grandmother risked her life and secretly paid visits to her friend. She taught her what she missed at school, and at night they made trips into the environs. Since her friend was forced to wear a yellow star on a black background on her dress that shone out even in the blackest dark, she walked with her hands on her chest permanently so that her ancestry would remain secret and she would stay out of trouble.

One day, Grandmother's friend had to pack her things – they couldn't weigh more than 50kg – and leave the country, perhaps for good. Grandmother reminisced these moments with pain and regret. An event like when her best friend stepped into the train and waved for the last time in her life, is something one remembers for a lifetime, inescapably. Grandmother's friend and her mother were put on a transport to Auschwitz. Her friend's Grandfather was taken to Buchenwald.

When the war was over and the concentration camps were liberated, Eva's father returned to his home town and started to look for his wife and daughter. For a long time, they were not coming home. There was no sign of them anywhere and the agencies weren't giving any news. So he made an admirable deed. He began to visit all the concentration camps. Still, he found no trace of them. He found out that after they were separated, his wife and daughter spent some time in Terezín. Then they were taken elsewhere. He continued his search. Then he finally found their names on a list in Auschwitz. All the names on the list were the names of Jews – Jews who died forcefully in the gas chambers. He returned home utterly broken, that is to say that he returned where he stayed after the war, and wrote a letter to his brother in the USA. From him he received an airplane ticket and he might still be alive somewhere near the Statue of Liberty.

When a daughter was born to my grandmother she didn't hesitate to call her by the name of her Jewish friend, Eva. A majority of her former classmates have children who were given the same name too. Grandmother's brother, who also used to know Eva, is among them. All of them named their daughters in Eva's honor, so that she could live on with them.

## Jewish monuments and significant buildings in Stříbro

Among the lasting reminders of the older and modern Jewish communities are predominantly ghettos, synagogues, and cemeteries. In Stříbro, only torsi of these buildings and monuments of the lost Jewish presence remain.

### The Jewish Gate

There was never a ghetto in Stříbro in the full sense of the word. There is, however, a “Jewish Gate” in the South-East part of town in the inner city wall. It is a broadly arched brick gate from the second half of the eighteenth century, built in place of a former narrow entrance through the wall. The simple arc, half-circle and without a prole, stretcher over a street that passes through the inner city wall next to the Jewish house (Judenhaus) near the Kostelní náměstí (The Church Square). A house adjacent to it, with a sundial, for which it is sometimes called “The House of the Sun”, was the only designated Jewish house in the town in the Middle Ages.



### The Jewish cemetery

Cemeteries were always inseparable parts of Jewish settlements. Since 1787, all cemeteries including Christian ones, had to lie outside city walls. Therefore, establishing a cemetery was one of the chief activities of a the Jewish community in Stříbro.

On November 5, 1901, the Jewish community asked for a permission to build their cemetery on the lot no. 1763, 90.3 meters long and 24 meters wide with a two meter circumference wall. The architect and contractor, Mr. Hacker, and the Jewish community board deputy, Moritz Lederer, presented two projects before commission of the city council. The flrst concerned the funeral room, the second the cemetery itself. On August 12 1902, the cemetery was delimited and authorized for use.

The first person buried at the Jewish cemetery was Weil Ornesstine, born in 1872 and deceased on September 29 1902, the last was Popper Markus, born June 6 1865 and deceased June 28 1935. The cemetery was predominantly used for the burial of Jewish residents of Stříbro but also from nearby villages such as Cebiv (Rosenberger Fransizka – 1913), Černošín (Schwarz Leopold – 1924), Vlkýš (Pinková Sophie – 1920), Mutětín (Schwarzkopfová Anna – 1917), Kladruby (Grünhut Josef 1922, Küblová Rosa – 1907).

Today, the cemetery is only accessible through a small wicket in the southern cemetery wall. It must be locked by a keeper to protect it against vandalism. When open, the cemetery was often visited with a lack of piety and tombstones were stolen. There are 128 distinct graves on the cemetery, 65 of which are marked with tombstones, the placement of which is not right in all cases. The tombstones have been toppled over during the occupation (in the years 1939-45) and they were only returned to their proper places in 1946 by the then keepers of the cemetery. The inscriptions on many of the tombstones have become illegible to the plain eye, and the plaques at the more recent graves are damaged. Out of the tombstones where inscriptions can be read, only two are in Czech, three exclusively in German, seventeen in Yiddish and in twenty two cases in Yiddish and German. Only sixty people were identified. We found names of members of thirty four families. The most frequently occuring names are Weil (six times), Bergler (five), and Popper (four).

## The Synagogue



Above: House no. 16, the Jewish house, during the war. The second picture shows the same place after the demolition. The synagogue can be seen in the background

The fate of the synagogue in Stříbro is in a significant way parallel to the fates of the Stříbro Jews. The community was successfully established and experienced a considerable boom but after that, a period of suffering came and the community sunk into oblivion.

On March 5, 1878, Leopold Ignác Weil, head of the local religious community, asked the mayor of the upper royal town of Stříbro for a permission to build a synagogue in the court of house no. 16 (the so called rabbinic house) on lot no. 53/1 and 651 at the Ringplatz, and showed him the construction plan designed by Andreas Deimling.

The official evaluation of the completed work took place toward the end of July (July 29), 1879, the construction was finalized and the synagogue opened to the community's use.

The building was used for sacral purposes until the 1938, the year of the Sudetenland annexation by Germany when most of the residents of non-German origins were forced to leave the city of Stříbro. In the Spring of 1938 (March 21), the contractor Rudolf Bergr asked for permission to make adjustments in the surroundings of the synagogue for an entrepreneur called Franzi Hammerschmied. In

the course of the "Crystal Night" (November 9-10, 1938), the synagogue and an adjacent house were plundered and everything having to do with Judaism in the slightest way was destroyed. Later, the buildings became property of the city. In 1940, the site of the synagogue was purchased by the Hitlerjugend, which turned it into a community space for its activities, including a boarding house.

After the war, the building was deserted and left to decrepitude until the late fifties. It wasn't until 1958 when things started to change. Based on a ruling from January 23, 1958, the Department of development of the District National Council (ONV) in Stříbro demanded by the Municipal Council of Stříbro (MNV), the owner was obliged to perform necessary repairs in order to ensure security of the building. The owner of the building – the Jewish Religious Community in Plzeň – appealed to the Regional National Council. Despite of that, the head of MNV Stříbro, due to the inactivity of the owner, asked for the appropriation of building no. 16 and its subsequent demolition.

During a meeting on October 14, 1958, a representative of the Jewish Religious Community Plzeň, Tanzer Lev, a lawyer, proposed, after a new evaluation of the actual condition of the buildings and a proposition to demolish the buildings due to insufficient funds, that the building be gratuitously given to the state. The Municipal Council of Stříbro then gave its assent to the proposal and on June 24, 1959, a decree of demolition of the uninhabited corner house no. 16 was issued. The building in the court was rented out to the State Farms. On June 6, 1966 a construction permit was issued for the reconstruction of the former Jewish synagogue adjacent to no. 16 into State Farms agrarian laboratories. The reconstruction was finished on January 21, 1969. In 1981, the building passed through another round of adjustments for the convenience of the Youth and Pioneers' House (dům pionýrů). In 1992, the building's ownership was transferred back to the city of Stříbro. Today, it serves as a Youth House – an activity place for young people.