

JEWISH PATH
MINI-RESERACH
HISTORY OF JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ORADEA

1489 – Jewish presence in the region; a document mentions a person named “*Judeo Joza de Varad nunc Bude*”;

1722 – The establishment of the Jewish community is mentioned in written documents; the Jewish community of Oradea is born;

1731 – *Chevra Kadisa* (The Sacred Brotherhood) is founded by 68 members of the Jewish community; Membership could only be obtained by those men who made proof of an exemplary family life and spirit of sacrifice.

[During this time, Oradea consisted of four independent town-states: Velența (Velence), Subcetate (Lower Fortress), Orașul Nou (New City), and Olosig (Olaszi). Later, in 1849 they unified to become the municipality of Oradea Mare (Greater Oradea). Due to severe restrictions on settling or renting, Jews were first permitted to live in mud huts they constructed in the wastelands around the Fortress. In the beginning, they settled between Velența and the Fortress.]

1735 – The 1735 census shows that the Jews from Orașul Nou (The new City) and Olosig were mostly of Czech descend and, to a lesser extent, of Polish origin. These two mixed sources of the Jewish immigration carried inside them the future separation of the Jewish community from the second-half of the next century. Olosig showed a greater tolerance towards the Jews than Orașul Nou (The New Town). The latter was almost entirely composed of manufacturers and traders who saw the Jews as unwanted competitors;

1740 – The settlement, in the Olosig area, of Honigsberg, Michel Fr. (Mihelfy) and Puliczner families, whose descendants are going to play a major role in the economic, intellectual and social life of Oradea until deportation in 1944;

1742 – An imperial decree brought some facilities concerning the standard of living for the Jewish community and after the seven years war (1756-1763), Empress Maria Theresa introduced the “tolerance tax” for the Jews;

1778 – Emperor Joseph II introduced even greater facilities towards the Jews, and after the year 1781 when the “tolerance decrees” were issued, Jewish children could be schooled in confessional schools and had the right to be accepted in any public schools. Also, the Jews

gained the right to work the land and to practice all the occupations they were denied until then. German became the official language, replacing the Hebrew which, from now on, is reserved exclusively for religious purposes. The Jews could also build synagogues without special approvals and they were not obliged anymore to wear distinctive signs;

1783 – All the Jews within the Habsburg Monarchy gained the right of free travel within the empire and the right to settle in cities;

1785 – The “tolerance tax” is renamed “cameral tax”, a notion less discriminatory;

1783 – The Superior Council of War decided that the fortress of Oradea should be disbanded. The gained land was offered to build houses. The Commander of the Oradea fortress, Colonel Georg Roth has offered land for housing even since the year 1780, long before the Jews had the right to buy buildings;

1786 – Local administrative authorities were reluctant in applying the imperial decrees thus the measures to ease the Jewish trade and commerce were published only in 1786 due to repeated protests from the local tradesmen;

1787 – German names take the place of the Hebrew names and the building of houses of praying was approved;

1792 – The new settlement received officially the name Subcetate (“under the fortress” or “next to the fortress”) and was composed of 46 families of which 26 owned their homes. The town Subcetate, established by the Jews, became an independent territory, with the approval of the military authorities. Their mayor was elected from the Jewish community. From now on, the Jews from Oraşul nou and Olosig, who were previously subordinated to the Jewish mayor of Velenţa, Brod Samu, become subordinated to the mayor from Subcetate. The first elected mayor was Mihaly Samuel, who was followed by Brod Samu and others;

1796 – The other two cities had their own Jewish mayors. The function of Jewish Mayor was maintained until 1849, when the town of Oradea was officially established;

1835 – The 1835 census reveals 107 Jewish families in Subcetate, of which 55 owned their own houses;

1850 – There were 1438 Jews living in Oradea;

1851 – The Association of Craftsmen and Tradesmen from Oradea is established. It comprises 28 elected members, of which 6 are Jews;

1867 – The year of the Jewish emancipation, their number in Oradea being 6438, representing 22, 4% of the city’s population;

1869 – The Jews were responsible for creating a modern commercial network that had connections with all the cities in Transylvania and as well with numerous commercial houses

from Austria, Germany, Great Britain and the countries of the Middle East. The modernization of the banking system of Oradea is the work of Reismann Mor. He initiated the creation, in 1869, of The Commercial Hall. Its first president was Brull Lipot, who detained this function until 1881;

1870 – The Jewish community of Oradea splits in two. First-Rabbi Landsberg remained in the Orthodox community; as President was elected Kurlander Elias. Rosenberg Sandor was elected First-Rabbi of the Congressional community and Dr. Pollak Hermann became President. The Congressional community will, eventually, become the Neolog community;

1881-1885 – Some members of those communities formed a third one, Status Quo Ante, which had the declared goal to restore the lost unity of the Jewish community as a whole. Held Hermann was elected as president and Kunstadt Isac as First-Rabbi. Nevertheless, the unity of the Jewish community was maintained through Chevra Kadisa, which remained unique and indivisible;

1910 – There were at the time 48 doctors, 10 engineers, 6 pharmacists, 8 journalists and 29 Jewish teachers in Oradea. At the beginning of WWI, there were 15155 Jews in Oradea, representing 23, 6% of the city's total population;

1914 – 1918 – In the military campaigns of the WWI, the Jews participated according to their percentage in the total population. The schools and the Jewish hospital were handed over to the Army, for military use. The Jewish communities, along with Jewish charities, organized the help for the families left without any support. The Neolog community organized an orphanage for the children whose parents died during the war; in this orphanage the children who escaped the bloody pogroms of 1918 and were brought to Oradea were also placed. In 1915, when the Russian armies occupied Galicia and Bukovina, Rabbi Israel Hager found refuge in Oradea with the help of the Romanian authorities;

1918 – 1932 – The new Karolyi Mihaly government of the Hungarian Republic, has appointed, towards the end of 1918, as ruler of the Bihor county, a known anti-Semite, Dr. Agoston Peter. During the final years of the Austrian monarchy and the establishment of East European national states, the question of the Jewish national identity was brought up. In Oradea, the Orthodox Jews were integrated in the Mizrachi organization, which was constituted in Oradea soon after the Romanian administration was chaired. The organization edited, beginning with 1921, a newspaper which defended the interests of the Jewish community. The ideas promoted by this organization led to the creation of the National Jewish Party who obtained absolute majority in the local elections of the year 1920 and remained in power until 1932;

1932 – 1941 – The hard work and the perseverance of the Jews, together with the liberal profile of the new Romanian administration led to the disappearance of the past social problems, to economic growth and the development of the city. While fascism gained ground throughout Europe, but mostly after the implementation of racial laws directed against Jews in Hungary, the Romanian and Jewish communities left aside the ideological issues and cooperated closely. The number of the Jews in Oradea reached 25000;

1941 – 1944 – After the Second Vienna Award, the racial laws introduced in Hungary as soon as 1938 also applied to the Jewish community of Oradea;

1941 – The National Central Alien Control Office (KEOKH) decided that all the Jews with foreign citizenship were to be arrested, along with their families, and deported to Poland. They were handed over to the German administration and subsequently killed in Kamanetz-Podolsk. Men with ages between 18 and 45 were retained for forced labour. They were sent unarmed in Ukraine, close to the battlefields. Thousands of men dressed as civilians, poorly fed, had to work hard and were the subjects of inhuman treatment from officers and soldiers especially trained for torturing them;

March 19th 1944 – Along with the German occupation of Hungary Jews were forbidden to leave their hometowns. Everybody caught on their way home, in trains or train stations was arrested without the possibility of contacting their families. All these measures had the purpose of removing Jews from the social and economic life;

April 5th 1944 – The wear of the yellow star is introduced. One day later, numerous arrests occur, under the accusation of “sabotaging the war effort”. Among those arrested there were dr. Adorjan Emil, president of the Black Eagle Society, Leitner Sandor, brother of the President of the Orthodox community, dr. Vali Peter, hero of WWI, many clerks, writers, journalists, etc.;

April 16th 1944 – The seizure of all Jewish property by governmental order takes place. Nobody could possess more than 3,000 pengo (the currency of Hungary between 1 January 1927);

April 17th 1944 – All Jewish stores were closed and sealed, the merchandise was confiscated;

April 21st 1944 – The old Synagogue of Subcetate was handed over to the German Army for military use. The newspapers were spreading hate against the Jews;

April 26th 1944 – The Ministry Council of the Hungarian Republic decided that all Jewish real estate property should be confiscated. Also, it was decided, at German request that 50000 Jewish workers, along with their families, should be sent in Germany. These decisions predicted the establishment of the Ghetto and the deportations that would follow;

May 3rd 1944 – Hundreds of posters (signed by Gyapay Laszlo, the Mayor's assistant) announced to the Jewish population the creation of the Ghetto. Going out was permitted only between 9 and 10 a.m. One hundred special commissions crossed the city, entered the houses of the Jewish community and challenged the inhabitants to leave their homes, taking with them no more than a 50 kg luggage. All the money and jewelry were confiscated;

May 4th 1944 – “Estilap” newspaper announced that: *“The Oradea Ghetto will have 30000 inhabitants”* and *“The resettlement of the Jews would end in four days”*. The Ghetto was set up in an already crowded area, which meant that as many as 16 persons were sharing the same room. To prevent escapes, a fence of 2 m high was erected;

May 10th 1944 – The Ghetto was taken over by the Hungarian Gendarmerie. The commandant of the Ghetto was Lieutenant Colonel Vitez Peterffy Jenő, together with his assistant, Captain Garay István. The worst period in the life of those detained in the Ghetto started when The Office for Investigation also known as “Dreher” (because they used the buildings of the Dreher-Haggenmacher beer factory) was founded. The investigations were conducted with the purpose of obtaining confessions about hidden valuables and frequently involved torture and beatings. People were crippled, murdered and many committed suicide during these investigations;

May 25th 1944 – The evacuation of the Ghetto takes place. Between May 25th and June 3rd 1944, some 2500 – 3000 Jews were evacuated daily. They were sent, by train, to Kosice without food, water or elementary hygiene and were handed over to the German forces. At their arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau only 10% of them were selected for forced labour, the rest were being killed immediately. The Jews from Oradea were killed towards the end of the Auschwitz's lifetime. Only 2,000 of the pre-war Jewish community returned, after the war, to Oradea;

October 1944 – When the city of Oradea was liberated only a few Jews were found (16 families and another 450 men). The returning of refugees, survivors from death camps and of those who were used for forced labour commenced soon. The need for resolving a number of stringent problems like housing, food, etc. led to the creation of an institution named The Jewish Democrat Group. Its mission was to help the reintegration in the social life of those returned, and their regaining of human dignity. From this institution, there was detached a special one named The Committee for the Tracking of Deportees, which, under the presidency of Dr. Ludovic Karl, had the goal of tracking and bringing home all those who survived the death camps. They organized 6 train travels from Oradea to Krakow and they

searched all the death camps, including Auschwitz. 4,500 survivors, from the North of Transylvania, returned to Oradea this way;

1945 – 1953 – With the help of Joint Distribution Committee, The Jewish Democrat Group, built one hall for 100 boys and one for 70 girls. They also founded an ORT (Organization, Reconstruction, Travail school, in the building of the former Jewish high school, where some 150 youths learned an occupation. They opened a Jewish school for the children of those from the southern Transylvania, a library, a summer school, IKUF organization for promoting the Yiddish language, etc. In 1945 The Jewish Democrat Group merged with the Jewish Democrat Committee, continuing its activity until 1953. The Jewish Community became the only organization that represented the Jews from Oradea;

1946 – According to a statistics elaborated in 1946 by the Jewish Democrat Committee, the number of Jews living in Oradea is around 6,500;

1948 – All the Jewish institutions – the Hospital, the ritual Bath, the Jewish School, the ORT school, etc. – were nationalized. Most of the religious buildings were demolished. From 1948, after Israel declared its independence, the Zionist movement in Oradea gained strength and emigration began. Almost 400000 Jews immigrated to Israel from Romania and the majority of the Jewish community from Oradea;

Today – With the help of the Jewish Communities Federation, there still exist in Oradea 3 synagogues and 2 Jewish cemeteries. The community of Oradea – which half a century ago represented almost one third of the city's population – is no larger than 600 persons. The remembrance of the past Jewish community – the largest in Transylvania – is kept by a monument in black marble, in honor of those killed in the Holocaust, placed nearby the grand Orthodox Synagogue.

Jewish people made important and lasting contributions in the arts and sciences, commerce, industry, and humanitarian service. They helped establish the city's chemical and milling industries, its transportation, communications and banking infrastructure. They played important roles in the city's medical, academic and artistic institutions.

As a multicultural city, Oradea discovers itself in a powerful architectural identity. Cultural identity of a city, as in most cases, can be best illustrated by its ecclesiastical architecture. Viewed in this respect, the Jewish community hall-mark on the cultural identity of Oradea is truly remarkable

JEWISH PALACES IN ORADEA

Some of the finest buildings in Oradea were designed, built or financed by Jews. Many of the most ornate were designated as “Palaces”.

Black Eagle Palace

In 1905 there was a competition for the design of the new Black Eagle Palace. This was won by the Jewish architects Komor Marcell and Jakab Dezso. The building was financed by two Jewish lawyers Dr. Kurlander Ede and Dr. Adorjan Emil and erected on the site of the old Black Eagle and Green Tree Inns. It was opened for business in 1908. A particular feature of the Palace is the glass covered passages crowned by the large glass decoration of a Black Eagle made by the local manufacturer Neuman Karoly.



Ullmann Palace was completed in 1913. It is one of the few non-religious buildings in Oradea which clearly displays its Jewish allegiance. The façade is decorated with the Lions of Judah framing a traditional Menorah. This is the work of Professor Breitner from the Vienna School of Arts and manufactured at the famous Zsolnay factory in south-west Hungary.



The Ullmann family were one of the leading Jewish families of Oradea having arrived in the 1860s and Izidor Ullmann played a major role in the creation of Oradea’s Chamber of Trade and Industry as well as in the founding of the Orthodox Jewish School. It was Sandor Ullman, son of Izidor, who commissioned the local architect Ferenc Lobl, who was born in Oradea in December 1882, to design the Palace. Ferenc Lobl did most of his most famous work in Vienna.

Moskovits Palace was erected in two phases between 1910 and 1911. It was commissioned by the Moskovits family, Jewish entrepreneurs in the mill and food trade. They commissioned Jozsef and Laszlo Vago, two of the most prominent of the Secessionist architects of the time, to provide an innovative and distinctive facade design. It is organised around a courtyard with shops at ground level and three floors of apartments. It is currently due for a substantial refurbishment of the original Vago motifs.



Miksa Moskovits Palace



This building was commissioned by Miksa Moskovits, a Jewish engineer, for his own occupation and was built in 1904-1905. It is thought to be the first building in Oradea that incorporated reinforced concrete following a design of Szilard Zielinszky from Budapest. It is exceptionally rich in decoration with birds, trees and flowers.

Stern Palace was built in 1904-05 under the supervision of architects Komor Marcell and Jakab Dezso. It has a Lechnerian style and has two hidden courtyards. The decorative motifs represent aspects of nature and folk art. There is some fine ironwork both inside and in the gates.



Sonnenfeld Palace



The commissioner and owner of this building was Adolf Sonnenfeld, the Jewish owner of the largest printing works in Oradea. It was built in 1911-1912. Adolf Sonnenfeld also commissioned the first Secessionist house in Oradea. The printing works were contained in the inner courtyard. The architect was Frigyes Spiegel, a noted Art Nouveau innovator and Jew, who worked primarily in Budapest, but who lived and worked in Oradea between 1919 and 1923.

OTHER NOTABLE JEWISH RELATED BUILDINGS IN ORADEA

Darvas House can be considered the most original Secession-style individual residence built in Oradea. It was the second villa designed in Oradea by the Vago brothers (Laszlo and Jozsef). The house was commissioned by the owner Imre Darvas, a wood-dealing entrepreneur in Oradea and built by Ferenc Sztarill in 1909-1910. In 2016, the Darvas House was converted into a museum of Art Nouveau.



The Gendarmes School



Built in 1911-13, the Gendarmes School is the last building designed by Jozsef Vago in Oradea. It is clearly a very functional, but harmonious complex and comprises a range of buildings. It is now part of the University of Oradea.

Salamon Goldstein building



The architect of the Salamon Goldstein building was Ferenc Sztarill and it was built in 1910. Like many other Sztarill designs it has a minimum of ornamentation and gets its uniqueness from its trapezoid design and cantilevered tower. It has the only remaining entrance gate in Oradea with a Star of David design.

Adorjan I House is the first building commissioned by Emil Adorjan. Emil Adorjan was a Jewish entrepreneur, an intellectual and an attorney. He appointed two young friends, Marcell Komor and Dezso Jakab to be the architects. The building was erected shortly after 1900 and is one of the most richly decorated buildings in Oradea.



Adorjan II House was the second building commissioned by Emil Adorjan. It is a symmetric construction with three balconies with a richly designed facade and ironworks with floral and vegetation motifs. It was built in 1904-1905 by Ferenc Sztarillto. It was the work of the architects Dezso Jakab and Marcell Komor.



The Parc Hotel

The Parc Hotel consists of several buildings. The hotel was inaugurated by the Veiszlovits brothers (Emil and Gyula) in March 1915.

