



BACKGROUNDER

Preserving the History of Hungary's Jews Through Microfilm Archives

The late Prof. Randolph Braham, a Hungarian-born scholar and preeminent expert on the Holocaust in Hungary, spearheaded a monumental project in the 1960s to document the persecution and destruction of Hungary's Jewish community during World War II. Working in collaboration with the Hungarian government, Prof. Braham oversaw the creation of 180 microfilm reels, which serve as a comprehensive historical record of the atrocities committed against Hungarian Jews. These reels, written in Hungarian, provide detailed accounts of exclusion, property confiscation, and deportations, along with records of looted cultural property.

Four sets of these reels were produced. Prof. Braham distributed three sets to major institutions: Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York City. These sets were made available for in-person review but, under agreements of these institutions with the Hungarian government, were not to be published or made widely accessible. The fourth set, however, was retained by Prof. Braham and later donated to The Zekelman Holocaust Center in Farmington Hills, Michigan. Unlike the other sets, this donation did not carry restrictions on publication. Prof. Braham was a frequent lecturer in Detroit and conducted research at the Zekelman Holocaust Center in their library and archives.

The rediscovery of the reels at The Zekelman Holocaust Center presented a unique opportunity to make this extensive archive publicly accessible for the first time. While some of the information contained in the reels has been available to researchers, this marks the first time the full collection has been digitized and made globally accessible, significantly enhancing opportunities for education, research, and justice. By bringing these records online, survivors and their families now have a new avenue to identify and pursue the restitution of their stolen property and cultural heritage, offering a chance to reclaim pieces of their history.

With funding provided by the Claims Conference-WJRO Looted Art & Cultural Property Initiative, The Zekelman Holocaust Center undertook the significant task of digitizing the reels and creating a user-friendly website. This accomplishment represents a monumental step forward in Holocaust education and the preservation of history.

A particular highlight of this achievement is the dedication of Clara Garbon-Radnoti, a Detroit-area Hungarian Holocaust survivor, who devoted significant time and effort meticulously creating a general finding aid and translating reels 143-145 into English. Her work has made it possible for users to navigate and utilize these records to learn more about looted property, cultural heritage, and the lives of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.

The Zekelman Holocaust Center's efforts to preserve and share these archives reflect a profound commitment to education, remembrance, and justice. By ensuring that this invaluable resource is now available globally, the Center has opened new pathways for understanding the Holocaust, honoring the memory of a nearly destroyed community, and empowering survivors and their families to seek restitution and justice for what was taken from them.

Other stories referenced in the reels:

Each reel contains a series of individual frames, each bearing an image of a pertinent historical document, offering users unprecedented ways to search for information, including by agency, location, victim name, and property description. The reels also contain vast genealogical records, featuring thousands of names and personal data of those who perished in the Holocaust. Users can request to download images for personal use, making the archives a powerful tool for researchers and families alike.

Among the treasures documented is the story of Károly Dénes, a Hungarian swordsman and collector of weapons and books. In April 1944, he tragically took his own life, refusing to wear the yellow star after losing his job and status as a decorated wartime captain. His remarkable collection, including 17th-century Schiavona swords, was seized by Csánky and remains unaccounted for, as referenced in Reel 143C.

Another entry is found in Reel 144H, which highlights a Reményi violin, showcasing the legacy of Mihály Reményi, a renowned violin maker and collector of musical instruments. Known for their exceptional craftsmanship, the Reményi workshop created violins from 200-year-old wood. In 1944, this collection was also confiscated by Csánky, with most of it subsequently lost. Although additional information is preserved in the Reményi archive in Budapest, access to these records remains restricted.

The site, through these reels, sheds light on the immense cultural and personal losses suffered during the Holocaust while providing a vital resource for those seeking justice, reconnection, or understanding.

Jews in Hungary, History Past & Present

Two-thirds of the approximately 825,000 Jews who lived in pre-war Hungary were killed during the Holocaust. About 100,000 Jews currently reside in the country. Hungary has not met its obligations under the post-war Treaty of Paris to provide compensation for heirless and

unclaimed formerly Jewish-owned assets. Moreover, Hungary has made efforts to address the restitution of, or compensation for, confiscated Jewish communal and private property but, significantly, the private property claims process suffered from numerous problems yet to be effectively addressed.

About The Zekelman Holocaust Center:

The Zekelman Holocaust Center was founded by Michigan survivors in 1984 as a lasting memorial. Our mission is to engage, educate, and empower by remembering the Holocaust so that individuals and society will recognize, combat, and prevent antisemitism, discrimination and hate-based violence. The Center teaches history's darkest period to 100,000 visitors each year, including students and adults of all backgrounds. Our new permanent exhibit features personal stories, films, and artifacts such as an authentic WWII-era boxcar and a sapling from the tree located outside Anne Frank's hiding place window. The Center also invites the public to make use of its extensive 20,000 volume Library Archive. Museum Educators and Docents provide customized tours, workshops and programs, empowering visitors to apply the lessons of the Holocaust to create a more compassionate world.

Learn more at www.holocaustcenter.org

Hours: Sunday through Thursday 9:30 am to 5:00 pm and Friday 9:30 am to 3:00 pm. The last admission is one hour before closing. Wheelchair accessible. Free parking. For additional information, visit www.holocaustcenter.org or call 248-553-2400.

About WJRO:

[WJRO](http://www.wjro.org) represents world Jewry in pursuing claims for the recovery of Jewish properties in Europe (outside of Germany and Austria). WJRO was established by leading world Jewish organizations to address the restitution of Jewish property and to remind the world that the time has come to redress the enormous material wrongs caused to European Jewry during the Holocaust.

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