

Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths of Jewish Religion Communities from the years 1784-1949.

Information for the Users

In 2011, all volumes of the Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths of Jewish communities deposited in the National Archives were digitalized.

In the course of this year they will be gradually made accessible on:

<http://www.badatelna.cz/fond/1073>

First of all there will be volumes from the fond „ Matriky židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích“ (HBMa) (Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands) for the publication of which the original inventory was used after some improvements.

A description of individual volumes contains the name of the Jewish community that was the seat of registry district, specification of the kind of the register (N=narozených/born; O=oddaných/married; Z=zemřelých/dead), its time span and inventory number. The Name indexes, in cases they were conducted separately, have their own inventory number, most often specification of the time span, and the kind of register they were assigned to. It is necessary to point out the fact that in some of the registers the serial numbers and numbers of folios relate to the former volumes, or new numbers of folios appear from the time when the registers were microfilmed. Legibility of the text, especially in the oldest registers, from the end of the 18th century, is limited according to their physical state and the quality of ink and paper used. While working with the duplicates of the registers, often bound unprofessionally, it is necessary to follow a sequence of entries on individual double-leaves.

The registers needing substantial preservation and restoration interference, were exempt from the process of digitalization and will be scanned later. Similarly, there will be published, with delay, those volumes of the registers where errors found during checking snaps are then corrected.

In accordance with the Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths Act (N.301 /2000 Coll.) only records older than 100 years from the last entry in the Births Registers and 75 years from the last entry in the Marriages and Deaths Registers will be made accessible in the individual volumes of the HBMa fond. The restriction does not apply to the Jewish control registers owing to the time range of entries.

On finding individual localities, the user may use a geographical index depicting all places stated in the registers, such as place of birth, of marriage or of death with reference to the inventory number in the register in question.

Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths of Jewish Religion Communities.

Since the end of the 17th century there have been attempts to register Jewish population in the Czech Lands, always led by effort to restrict the number of Jewish families settled here. The situation was changed by the Patent from 20 February 1784, on keeping registers of Christian and Jewish population, due to which Catholic parish priests had to lead and keep Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths and also their boxes were specified. All entries should have been filled in on pre-printed forms to ensure uniformity of their keeping. According to Article 6 of the Patent the Jewish registrars were obliged to keep the same kind of registers but modification of boxes was permitted as the Jewish faith required. It was the Rabbi who was charged with keeping registers in the place where he was appointed. Jewish families, living in

seclusion in the country, belonged to the Rabbi from the nearest laid community or they were recorded by Catholic parish priests on the last pages of the registers of the parish where they were settled. This rule was fully respected, e.g. the first entries in the registers of Prague Jewish town come from the first days of May 1784 when the Patent should have come into force. Three years later (28 July 1787), efforts to improve and standardize registry records led to issue another Patent, this time on writing Registers and Books of Circumcision in the German language with assigned prenames and surnames. This meant in practice that all Jews permitted to reside in Bohemia and/or Moravia by virtue of the Family Act (Familiant – from 1726) were obliged to accept family name (surname) for themselves and their families to be used further on. Even in the following years, every other intrusion of the State into the way of administration of Jewish registers was motivated by effort to ensure accuracy and controllability of registry entries. The relationship between the Jewish population and the State was fundamentally changed by the so-called Systematic Patent from 3 August 1797, which determined rights and duties of the Jewish inhabitants, in its individual sections. Jewish teachers were authorized to keep registers, instead of them there might have been a person authorized by the suzerain lord at places where there was no school. But Jewish registrars were supervised by Catholic priests who also had to keep duplicates of Registers of Births, Marriages and Deaths, the so-called Control Registers.

No changes were made in the given way of keeping registers until issuing Governmental Decree on 24 April 1838, where in the Appendix instruction on conducting Jewish registers was added. Apart from other things, regional authorities had to state districts in the region, for the registrar to be appointed according to them, so that he would live in the centre of the registry district as well as in the place with the highest number of the Jewish inhabitants. The control registers were led in the similar way as the Jewish ones, but a number of them started to be led by virtue of the above-mentioned Decree.

The oldest registers of Jewish communities differed from Christian by modifications given by the Jewish faith (date of circumcision and the giving of a name, name of circumcissor and of witnesses). The records are rather brief, often recording only dates and personal names. The form of entry was chosen by the one who led the registers. As mentioned, since 1787 the registers had been in the German language with newly accepted names and surnames. As late as 1838 there were set strict rules for records of births, marriages and deaths and the number of boxes was increased. It is necessary to state that most registers had never been led in such an ideal way. It depended upon the registrar how much data about the persons recorded in the registers he really stated. The duplicates were led in a simplified form e.g. births registers only with the names of parents, leaving out other prescribed data. Further on, we have to take into consideration the so-called Family Act (Familiant) which permitted residence only to 8,500 Jewish families in Bohemia and 5,400 Jewish families in Moravia from which only the first-born sons could take marriage vows and later succeed their father as the head of the family (familiant). The second-borns and other sons had to wait for a place to be released from the given number and thus for the state permission to marriage. Children born from the bond of marriage concluded by a rabbi but without such a permission were considered illegitimate and recorded in the registers under their mother's maiden name. A father could recognize his paternity, but such recognition together with the signatures of two witnesses was mostly written in the note. Children of the parents who could marry after 1848 were additionally legitimized and accepted their father's name. This fact, not known enough in most of the families, very often complicates searches in the registers before 1848.

Revolutionary events during 1848-1849 meant the beginning of full emancipation of the Jews with Christian inhabitants and repeal of all the former discriminatory laws. Such changes necessarily revealed in the registry records. The Jewish registers led by authorized registrars were declared to be official documents with full probative value, so the supervision by the

Catholic priests was cancelled in successive steps (Act N.12 from 10 July 1868). The Jewish registrars were obliged to keep duplicates of the registers along with relevant indexes and present them to the District Office (or Municipality in a big town) every year that passed, they were then responsible for depositing the duplicates safely as well as to verify whether they correspond to the master copies. The District Offices and Municipalities supervised conducting of master copies of registers of Jewish communities and kept their duplicates until the first half of the 20th century.

When occupying the border area of Bohemia and Moravia, all Gestapo stations focused on seizing Jewish registers and other written documents from the Jewish communities. Registers from Bohemia were then gathered in the seat of the Sudeten region in Liberec(Reichenau) and were not led at all between 1939-1944. Additional records were made after the liberation of the country, especially entries about deaths. Master copies of registers of Jewish communities in north and south Moravia had not survived. In 1942 the Office of the Reichsprotector ordered to hand in all master copies of Jewish registers from the whole Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia to the office called Zentralamt zur Regelung der Judenfrage (Central Office for the Regulation of the Jewish Question). At the beginning of 1943 the Land Offices in Prague and Brno were asked to hand over also duplicates still deposited in the District Offices. Due to the care of the Czech employees of the Zentralamt, the registers were transferred to the Genealogical Office for Bohemia and Moravia (Sippenamt für Böhmen und Mähren) and duplicates of registers were separately deposited in Český Šternberk castle. Master copies, deposited in Prague, were destroyed under order of the Gestapo in April 1945. The duplicates from the years 1868 and 1880-1945 were luckily saved having been deposited outside of Prague and thus in October were proclaimed to be originals/master copies and together with other saved volumes of registers were handed in to the Jewish Religion Community in Prague which was authorized to lead the agenda for the whole Bohemia and Moravia. Leading of registers by the individual churches was cancelled by the Law from December 7, 1949 and then introduced standardized civil registers administered by National Committees – formerly District Offices (in Prague according to the quarters of the city), local or metropolitan authorities. In accordance with this law, the Prague Jewish community handed over the registers to District National Committee for Prague I(now Office of the Municipal Quarter Prague 1) from where they were put to the Central State Archives (at present National Archives) in Prague. The archival fond of Registers of Jewish Religion Communities in the Czech Regions (HBMa) equates 2,995 volumes, including some preserved master copy registers, the oldest of which come from 1784-1788; then duplicates having been declared to be originals/master copies, after 1888; and finally indexes to individual registers in case they were led separately. A special group is formed from registers for Prague and its quarters (Břevnov, Karlín, Libeň, Michle, Smíchov, Vinohrady and Žižkov).

In some cases only the name indexes have been saved, the registers were destroyed or lost during World War II. The so-called reconstruction registers, led since 1945 separately for Bohemia, and for Moravia and Silesia, were attached to the fond. These registers contain reconstructed records taken on issuance of duplicates of birth certificate and that of marriage from the registers, which were destroyed during the war. The registers of the second collection from 1784-1868 (1874) were originally duplicates deposited in parish offices of the competence where the Jewish community occurred. In contradiction to original directions in the Patents and Decrees from the 18th and 19th centuries they were not led by Catholic priests but were made as duplicates by the registrars of the Jewish communities and authorized priests who only looked them through every year; in a better case they compared them with the originals and provided them with their signature. Also these volumes were gathered during the German occupation and were not destroyed only because of the fact that they were

deposited outside Prague. The control registers from Bohemia were deposited in the Archives of the Ministry of Interior as a fond and after 1954 then in the Central State Archives, while for Moravia a similar group of documents have not been preserved. Besides 1,009 volumes of the registers in the Fond of Jewish Control Registers (HBM) there are deposited copies of records from registers of the Jewish communities which served as the basis for duplicates of the registers which were not handed over during the German occupation and remained deposited among written documents of the District Offices; and finally the copies or photocopies of entries which the Catholic priests had to make during occupation and pass them to the Genealogical Office. The fond itself was gradually completed with registers and copies of records which were found during the filing of written documents coming from district and parish offices. The Regional State Archives, District Archives and Municipal Archives of Prague and Brno were asked to make a list of all kinds of Jewish registers which were preserved in their fonds and then to hand them to the Central State Archives according to the circular from 20 September 1985. Further delimitations in a greater extent happened after 1997 dealing with, with some exceptions, the control registers whose collection was later extended with 80 newly found registers of Jewish communities from Moravia and the Czech part of Silesia.