THE CUBA FAMILY ARCHIVES FOR SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY AT THE BREMAN MUSEUM

MSS 167, RUBIN AND LOLA LANSKY PAPERS, 1940-1996

BOX 1, FILE 12

Ozorkow, Poland – Torah Dedication, 1977

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Torah saved from Holocaust to be dedicated at synagogue

by Marian Hareluk

A Torah that remained hidden in the town of Ozorkow, Poland throughout the Holocaust and thirty years thereafter, will be dedicated at Ahavath Achim Synagogue on Sunday, Aug. 14, at 10:30 a.m., in honor of Tobias Drajhorn and in memory of the Jewish community of Ozorkow which perished in the Holocaust.

The Torah comes to Atlanta by way of Rubin and Lola Lansky of Atlanta who came across it two years ago when they returned to Poland for the first time in thirty years. The couple, both survivors of the ghettos and concentration camps of the Holocaust, were touring Poland in the summer of 1975 when they decided to leave the tour in Warsaw and take a taxi to Rubin Lansky's home town of Ozorkow in Lodz province of Poland.

When the Lansky's arrived in the once industrial town whose Jewish population on the eve of the Holocaust numbered about 5,000 (33 per cent of the total population), they immediately inquired about the Jews living in the city. They were directed to one man, Tobias Drajhorn, the only remaining Jew in the Ozorkow community.

During the Nazi atrocities, when 2,000 Jews from Ozorkow were sent to the Chelmno death camp and 800 of the able-bodied to Lodz ghetto, Drajhorn and his uncle, Israel Frydman, secured their congregation's Torah and hid it in the attic of the shtibl (small house of prayer). As the Nazis carried away their heinous reign they destroyed all synagogues and Temples, beginning with the burning of Torahs.

Drajhorn, whose uncle had not survived in the Holocaust, grave stones that the Nazis had used to line the streets. He and his wife recruited Polish school children to plant pine tree saplings throughout the cemetery.

Drajhorn, now up in years and in failing health, desired to see the Torah put to use and offered it to the Lanskys for their synagogue. With Poland under Communist rule and no permit to transport the Torah, the Lanskys were afraid at the time to accept the Torah.

In August of 1975, when the Lanskys returned to Atlanta, Rabbi Harry Epstein of Congregation Ahavath Achim sent a letter to Drajhorn requesting he donate the Torah to the synagogue. The letter was then used by Drajhorn to receive a special permit from Warsaw.

In the summer of 1976 the Lanskys received a letter from Drajhorn in which he said that the Polish government had sent him a telegram from Lodz notifying him that the Torah could be picked up but that he needed another permit from the Historical Society to show that the Torah was not being used for profit.

Meanwhile, the Lanskys unable to return to Poland at the time, contacted the Atlanta Jewish Welfare Federation which was sponsoring a mission to Poland. A letter was given to a person on the tour to get in touch with Drajhorn and bring the Torah back. When he was contacted, Drajhorn had just received the second permit, but had only three days before the tour left to mail and process the permit.

The situation had begun to seem hopeless to the Lanskys until a few weeks later when a package arrived in the mail. Packed between two boards and wrapped in a white cloth was the Sefer Torah and Etz Chaim.

The Torah was inspected and miraculously found to be still kosher and able to be used in the synagogue.

In October of 1976, the Lanskys received a letter from Mrs. Drajhorn. When her husband learned of the arrival of the Torah, his "last living link with the past," she recounted, "he was overcome with tears, he was so happy. He was beside himself that the Torah could be used again."

In recounting the story, Mrs. Lansky commented, that "Now while everyone is looking for roots, there aren't many 'roots' left in Poland."

Scholars have said that before giving the Torah to Israel, God offered it to other nations but they refused it; and when He did give the Torah to Israel, He revealed it in the extraterritorial desert and simultaneously in all the seventy languages, so that men of all nations would have a right to it.

Rabbi Akiva called the Torah, "the precious instrument by which the world was created," while Deuteronomy proclaims it an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.

The message of the Torah of Ozorkow seems to be "for all mankind," as the scholars said; and proves that the roots of Poland run thick and strong.
RABBI AS, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGREGATION, DR. WILLIAM SHATTAN, CANTOR GOODFRIEND, HONORABLE QUEST AND DEAR FRIENDS.

It is with pride and joy my husband and I present this old Sacred Sefer Tora from the city of OZORKOW Poland in honor of Tobias Draihorn, the last living Jew in the city and in loving memory of the Jewish Community that perished in the Holocaust.

Since ancient times our religion teaches us, that in our most joyous occasions, even on a wedding day, a glass is broken by the groom to remember the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the sorrow of our people.

So today in our joy of having this only Sefer Tora that survived the Holocaust from the city of Ozorkow, we should remember its tragic past.

This is a story of a man, a Tora and a Jewish Community that does not exist anymore.

As we present this Sefer Tora the last living king with the perished Jewish community we sincerely hope its presence here will encourage our people to remember the tragic past.

Give us a better understanding and guidance of our commitments for a better and secure future for our Jewish people here and in the State of Israel.

Lola Lansky

Aug. 14, 1947, Atlanta
LOLA AND RUBIN LANSKY
HOLOCAUST TORAH PRESENTATION
SUNDAY - ROH HODESH ELUL - AUG. 14, 1977

ORDER OF SERVICE

p. 76-77 - Ashray - Responses
p. 110 - Psalm 113 - Chant
p. 113 - Psalm 118 - Chant
p. 114 - Responsive Reading
p. 115 - Alternate Reading and Chant
"Ana Hashem"

p. 313 - "The Sefer Torah" - Rabbi reads

p. 117 - OPENING OF ARK - Cantor leads

3 Synagogue officers, donning Tallit, take Torahs from Ark, march down center aisle to rear of Sanctuary where Lola and Rubin Lansky stand with the Holocaust Torah wrapped in a Tallit. Then, the Lanskys march forward up to the Bimah, followed by the officers. On Bimah, all face the congregation in the center of Bimah, and Cantor reads in the Shema, page 123.

The Shofar is now sounded and the Synagogue Torahs are replaced in the Ark.

Rubin Lansky is seated on Bimah, holding the Holocaust Torah, and Lola Lansky makes the presentation to the Synagogue.

Dr. Schatten accepts the Torah on behalf of the Synagogue.

The Holocaust Torah is now placed on the Reading Desk and the 4 portions of Rosh Hodesh are read from it, honoring 4 men designated by the Lanskys.

After Hagba'ha, the Gelila honoree dresses the Torah with a Synagogue mantle.

p. 133 - Replacing Torah in Ark
p. 136 - Cantor and Congregation

Visiting Ozorkow survivor speaks

p. 158 - Alenu
p. 161 - Kaddish
p. 370 - Hatikva and conclusion
The 6,000-member Jewish community of Ozorkav, Poland, is no more, but a Torah at the Ahavath Achim synagogue lives on as its legacy—thanks to Rubin and Lola Lansky.

The saga of the Torah's journey to Atlanta began in 1975 when the Lanskys took a side trip from a tour of Poland to Ozorkav, the birthplace of both Lola's father and Rubin Lansky. Ozorkav is 13 miles from Lodz, the second largest city in Poland. Mr. Lansky had lived in Ozorkav until the Nazis sent him to labor camps. The town of 30,000 boasted a thriving Jewish merchant class.

On the 1975 trip, a townsman recognized him. "Are there any Jews left here?" Mr. Lansky immediately asked. "Just one," the man replied and told him how to get to the home of Tobias Drajhorn.

Mr. Drajhorn welcomed the Lanskys and told them the rest of Ozorkav's Jewish community had been wiped out. He could have immigrated to Israel or America, Mr. Drajhorn said, but he felt it was his duty to tend to the Jewish cemetery and uphold the town's Jewish legacy in other ways.

Opening a drawer, he showed the Lanskys a Torah, 80 years old at the time, which Mr. Drajhorn's uncle had hidden in an attic during World War II. The moment Mrs. Lansky saw it, she was inspired to donate it to her synagogue, Ahavath Achim, in memory of the Jews of Ozorkav. She told Mr. Drajhorn of her wish. Touched, he said that was all right and offered to give the Torah to the Lanskys on the spot. Chary of taking it with them to the other then-Communist countries on the tour, the Lanskys decided to go through proper channels. It took two years for Polish historical authorities to approve the shipment.

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The Torah's dedication at Ahavath Achim Synagogue in 1977 was thus a bit-sweet occasion, far different from the usual celebration of a new Torah. As Mrs. Lansky puts it, "It was not just a Torah, but a touch of a town and a culture wiped out."

Since then, Mr. Drajhorn has died, but he did live to see the Torah again on his only visit to the United States. Today, there are no Jews left in Ozorkav.

To this day, Rabbi Arnold Goodman will read from that particular Torah before Yom HaShoah, Holocaust remembrance day. And the congregation at the Ahavath Achim then remembers a once thriving community that lives on only in the spirit of that yellowing scroll.

—Michael Pousner
Mr. and Mrs. Rubin Lansky
cordially invite you to attend a

Torah Dedication Service
Sunday, August fourteenth
at ten-thirty in the morning
at the Ahavath Achim Synagogue

The only Torah from Ozorkow
that survived the Holocaust
will be presented to the Synagogue
in honor of Tobias Drajhorn
and in loving memory of

The Jewish Community
of Ozorkow