

Project Witness

Rescue of Jews in Budapest, 1944-1945

PWA0033-7

Dates:

1944-1945

Level of Description:

Item

Extent and Medium:

1 document

Conditions of Access:

Unknown

Collection Description

Scope and Content

The crowning achievement of her work was the rescue of at least 1200 Jews in Budapest during the war's final agonizing months, in the latter half of 1944 and early 1945. Switzerland, who then allocated many thousands of dollars from Vaad Hatzalah funds for her project. (Dispatching money was not a simple matter, and most of the time circuitous routes were used.) Vaad Hatzalah in New York granted her official status as its representative in Tangier, which among other things, enabled her to make free use of the War Refugee Board communications system. It also gave her added stature in dealing with both the American charge d'affaires and the Spanish Government. HER CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT The crowning achievement of her rescue work was the rescue of at least 1200 Jews in Budapest during the war's final agonizing months, in the latter half of 1944 and early 1945. This extraordinary effort began soon after the occupation of Hungary. Jews were seeking all means of avoiding the Nazi measures of forced ghettoization and then deportation to Auschwitz. One of the few ways of evading the Nazi net was by obtaining a foreign passport, which with a few notable exceptions was generally respected by the Germans. Such an escape route, by means of bogus papers, was pioneered by the Sternbuchs in 1941, through the "purchase" of Latin American passports, especially Paraguayan, and was emulated by several, but not all, other Jewish organizations. These life-giving documents were expensive, costing from 500 to 3,000 SF each. Only Salvadoran citizenship papers were given gratis by George (Mandel) Mantello. His assistant, Dr. Mattieux Muller¹, in charge of "producing" these papers, was a refugee from France, where he had headed its Agudath Israel office for a half century. Within ten days, the previously mentioned Swiss press campaign triggered a world-wide protest by the Pope, Roosevelt, Churchill, and King Gustave of Sweden (who then dispatched Wallenberg) against the Nazi decimation of Hungarian Jewry. On July 7, Hungary's Regent Admiral Miklos Horthy ordered the halt in deportations from Budapest to Auschwitz, despite pressures by Eichmann to complete the Final Solution in Hungary, which by this time had taken the lives of about a half million Jews. This created a new and more promising situation for the surviving 150-200,000 Jews in and around Budapest. For the first time, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, the Papal Nuncio and 4. Muller had been introduced in 1943 to Mantello by Chaim Yisroel Eiss, another Agudah rescue activist in Switzerland, who had long been active in obtaining Latin American papers and in sending food packages to the Polish ghettos with the support of the Swiss Agudah and American Zeirei Agudath Israel youth organization, headed by Reb Elimelech Tress and Harry Goodman of London, secretary of World Agudath Israel, and important rescue activist. The Germans even gave some sort of protective status to holders of Palestinian Certificates as British subjects (enemy aliens), rather than being considered as totally defenseless, stateless. As a result of the recognition of the Latin America papers, especially the Salvadoran citizenship papers, the Swiss were able to convince the Hungarian Government to provide protective status to the holders of "Palestine Certificates." TORAH TAPES ON MEGILOS & PESACH HAGGADAH BY RABBI RALPH PELCOVITZ of Congregation-Knesseth Israel (The White Shul, Far Rockaway, N.Y.) Noted Rabbi Lecturer & Author Discourses on: The Five Megilos & Pesach Haggadah - Analysis, Interpretation & Commentary 1. Megilas Esther 2. Pesach Haggadah Part I 3. Pesach Haggadah Part II 4. Shir Hashirim 5. Megilas Ruth 6. Eichah 7. Kohelles Please

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Access Points

Geographic Names:

- Auschwitz
- Budapest
- Switzerland