

Jewish Life in Norway 1851–1945

Wergeland's Legacy



IN 1851, THE NORWEGIAN PARLIAMENT (Storting) amended Article 2 of the nation's Constitution, the so-called Jewish clause. This opened the door to Jewish settlement in Norway. During the period 1852–1920, about 1,200 Jewish individuals made Norway their home.

This exhibition tells the story of Jewish immigration to Norway from its very beginning until 1945. It depicts the lives of people who fled from terror and persecution, and who looked for a land where they «could sleep safely at night.»

The exhibition also describes their encounter with a culture that was foreign to them and their struggle to put down roots in a new country. The people who came to Norway had a strong desire to become part of a nation. They wanted to become «ordinary» Norwegians while also upholding their Jewish way of life—to live with a double identity. They discovered that they would pay a price for being different, and that anti-Semitism was not dead.

The exhibition ends with 1945 because World War II marks a watershed for all Norwegians. After the war people wanted to look ahead and to build a modern society. Because the war was a disaster for the Jewish minority, it also represents a watershed for those who survived. The number of Jews in Norway after the war was only about half of what it had been earlier.

◀ May 17
Moss, 1925
All: Sonja, Rubin and Paul

Presentation of the exhibition

Jewish Life and Culture in Norway: Wergeland's Legacy

Background information, photos and theme samples



The exhibition *Jewish Life and Culture in Norway: Wergeland's Legacy* explores a fascinating chapter in the history of the Jews in Europe, telling the story of the Jewish immigrants who came to Norway from 1851 to the Second World War through text and photographs from private albums and archives.

The exhibition is named in honour of Norwegian poet, historian, and philosopher Henrik Wergeland (1808-1845), a tireless advocate for the repeal of the so-called "Jewish Clause" in the Norwegian Constitution, which prohibited Jewish immigration to Norway prior to 1851.

The exhibition was originally produced by Norsk Folkemuseum – The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History in Oslo, Norway and curated by folklorist Britt Ormaasen and librarian Oskar Kvasnes, as part of the project "Norwegian-Jewish Documentation". The project was carried out in co-operation with the Jewish Community of Oslo (DMT) and The Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo.

The exhibition was displayed at the museum in 2001, and then toured as a travelling exhibition being displayed in 90 Norwegian public libraries from 2001 to 2004. In January 2003 an English a bigger version of the exhibit opened at Scandinavia House in New York, later touring the States and Canada being displayed in nine Jewish and Norwegian-American Museums and cultural centres. In 2009 a similar version was exhibited at Beit Hatfutsot in Tel Aviv.

Oslo Jewish Museum and Norsk Folkemuseum is proud to present a new travelling version of the exhibit, aimed at the European public for presentation in Jewish Museums throughout Europe. This version has been exhibited once already at The White Stork Synagogue in Wroclaw in May 2010, later to be displayed in two additional places in Poland.

Format and presentation:

The exhibition consists of 12 different themes, presented on 24 square posters. The design of the exhibit is fixed, but the posters can be printed in a size from 70 x 70 cm to 130 x 130 cm.

Oslo Jewish Museum will provide a DVD with original print files and English text. It is possible to translate the exhibit into new languages and replace the English text before printing. The DVD will, apart from the print files, contain photos for promotion, the original English text and additional materials.

The posters can be put on display in a stand alone exhibit system or printed on metal plates or capafix-plates.

Oslo Jewish Museum will not charge for the use of the exhibit, but the host museum will have to fund the printing of the posters. A complete version in Pdf-format can be sent by email to museums who ask for it.

The curators, Britt Ormaasen and Oskar Kvasnes, will be available for talks and presentations in connection with exhibitions opening and the run of the exhibit.

The Themes of the Exhibition:

01. Introduction
02. Henrik Wergeland and Article 2/The first wave of immigration 1852-1880
03. The second wave immigration 1881-1920
04. The Century family – an immigrant story
05. Earning a living
06. Religious life
07. Culture and organizations
08. Jewish life throughout Norway
09. Anti-Semitism and the Norwegian public sphere, 1851-1945
10. Moritz Rabinowitz – humanist in a dark time
11. The Persecution and murder of Norwegian Jews 1940-45
12. Epilogue

Production and financial support:

The exhibition is a co-production between the Oslo Jewish Museum and Norsk Folkemuseum.

Curators: Britt Ormaasen and Oskar Kvasnes, The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History
Project manager: Trond Bjorli, The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History

Consultants:

Sidsel Levin, Oslo Jewish Museum,
Harry T. Cleven and Shari Gerber Nilsen (English translation),
Terje Emberland (text on anti-Semitism),
Irene Levin (consultant),
Anne-Lise Reinsfelt (photographer)

Graphic design: Bison Design

The Freedom of Expression Foundation in Oslo have provided financial support for the exhibition.

Links:

Oslo Jewish Museum: <http://www.jodiskmuseumoslo.no/default.asp?m=9238&lang=ENG>

Norsk Folkemuseum: <http://www.norskfolkemuseum.no/en/>

White Stork Synagogue – Wrocław Center for Jewish Culture and Education:
<http://www.fbk.org.pl/en/2010/06/wergelands-legacy-2> (Presentation in May 2010)

Contact information:

Oslo Jewish Museum
Calmeyers gate 15b
N-0183 Oslo
Tel: +47 22 20 84 00

Director: Sidsel Levin
sidsel.levin@jodiskmuseumoslo.no

The Century family

— an immigrant story

DAVID CENTURY AND REBEKKA ROTHSCHILD were married in Christiania (Oslo) in 1924. Their story is dramatic and complex, like the stories of many Jewish immigrants to Norway.

1908 Chaim Jehuda Leib Rothschild departs from the city of Friedrichstadt in Latvia. After spending some time in Sweden, he settles in Christiania (Oslo). Two years later he is joined by his wife Beile and their four children. The eldest is their daughter, Rebekka. The family comes from a humble background and is very religious.

1917 Brothers David and Harry Century emigrate from England to Norway. The Century family originally came from Warsaw, when it was part of Russia, and moved to London in 1905. The family members did not have British citizenship, and the young men were therefore obligated to do military service in Russia during World War I. On their way to Russia, the brothers jumped ship in Christiania (Oslo).

1924 David Century marries Rebekka Rothschild. He is employed by a wholesale grocer and later works as a textile salesman. Rebekka is a homemaker.

1925 Their daughter Berit is born.

1928 Their daughter Celia is born.

1942 The family flees to Sweden. They settle in Uppsala, where the daughters attend the Norwegian high school. David finds work in a government statistics office and also serve with the Norwegian police force.

1943 David writes a letter to Quisling in which he expresses concern about the fate of the Norwegian Jews who are being deported.

1945 The family returns to Norway, and David builds up his own textile business with Rebekka's help.

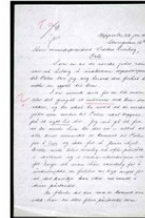


◀ Father has gone to Norway:
Latvia, 1908

Beile Rothschild with her children. Her daughter Rebekka stands to the right. The photograph was sent to the father in Norway, who had found a place to live near the Aker River in Christiania (Oslo). He earned his living as an itinerant peddler.

▼ David Century hiking in
Jotunheimen, 1919

Berit (daughter): «My father was sports and loved the outdoors. He often went for hikes in the mountains with his brother. He completed high school five years after he came here. That was hard work for him because he had to learn Norwegian and work full time besides.»



▲ Letter to Quisling,
dated Uppsala, January 26, 1943

While in Sweden, David wrote to Vidkun Quisling, expressing his concern about the fate of the Norwegian Jews who had been deported. His letter included the following:

«I must assume that you meant what you said [in a newspaper interview] – that all these people have come to Poland in order to live and not to be tortured to death. The latter is so often stated in newspapers and radio broadcasts outside of Norway that it is difficult to suppress a feeling of deep fear that there may be some truth to these assertions.»

The letter from the National Archives



◀ The Century Family
Oslo, 1931

Berit: «Mother came from a very religious home, while my father's father was almost anti-religious. But in our home we lived somewhere in between. We followed the kosher dietary laws, lived a Jewish lifestyle, but were not Orthodox. My father was interested in traditions, but had a more relaxed attitude to it all than my mother.»

Photograph: Jan Bratås



◀ Home again
Oslo, 1945

Berit: «It was good to be home again, but our apartment was empty. The Nazis had taken everything we had. A Nui family was living here when we returned. We brought some furniture with us from Sweden, and we found a few of our belongings in some storage areas. In this picture we were beginning to get things in order. Father had turned the bedroom into an office and was setting up his sales business.»



► Friends on a ski outing, 1948

David (right) and Rebekka (third from the left) on a Sunday outing with two other couples, the Lundes and the Spilkes. Frida and Oskar Spilke were close friends of David's parents, and had David for three weeks before the family fled to Sweden.



◀ Berit and Celia, Oslo, 1932

Daughters Berit and Celia at home in the family's apartment on Indøstgaten in Oslo.

Photograph: Jan Bratås, NABU

Earning a living

THERE WERE FEW CAREERS open to the new immigrants. They lacked capital, had little education, and had not yet learned the new language. Many of them started out as itinerant peddlers (*hozirer*). They traveled around the countryside with a sack over their shoulder filled with wares people needed. Many of them got to know their customers so well that they and their families rented rooms from the farmers during summer vacations. But traveling around the country with wares on their backs, far from their families, was a hard life. Most of them dreamed of saving up enough money to open their own shops.

Those skilled in a trade could begin to work as shoemakers, watchmakers, tailors, etc. A few had special expertise in the tobacco trade and were invited to Norway to work. One of these, Moritz Glott, started his own business, which grew until he became one of the leading tobacco manufacturers in Norway. He provided jobs for many new arrivals. It was common practice for Jews to help each other get established since there was little help to be had outside the Jewish community.

The immigrants were determined that their children would have a proper education. As early as 1910, this statement appeared in the newspaper *Aftenposten*: «We have observed several examples of the children of Russian and Polish Jews attaining positions here in Norway as military officers, physicians, dentists, lawyers, etc.»

▼ Celebrating Passover at fishing stations in Lofoten 1900-1910

Working as an itinerant peddler created many practical problems for religious Jews. They were often far from home on important holy days and had to observe their religious traditions as best they could. Unleavened bread (*matzo*) and other requirements for observing Passover (*Pesach*) had to be sent to them, and they took cooking interests with them. According to custom, they feasted, sang, and recited prayers, and their singing could be heard throughout the local fishing station. Curious fishermen often came to listen to their singing and to taste the ritual bread.



▼ Cigar-maker Cemach Oster and family Berlin, 1884

Tobacco manufacturer Leopold Oster discovered Cemach Oster's talent for making cigars in a basement shop in Berlin. Leopold invited Oster's expertise, and brought him to Norway in 1886. He was eventually put in charge of Leopold's factory.



▲ Deliciosa on Karl Johan Oslo, ca. 1925

Deliciosa was one of Oslo's more luxurious fruit and tobacco shops, furnished with mahogany and crystal fittings. Leopold Oster stands in the doorway of the shop that was his life's accomplishment and pride. The son of Cemach Oster, Leopold founded the establishment and kept it going until the Great Depression of the 1930s forced him to close it.



▲ Violinist Jacques Malinjak Trondheim, ca. 1925

Jacques Malinjak (1885-1945) was born in Warsaw, and studied at the local music conservatory. He came to Trondheim with his family in 1918. Malinjak was invited to the city to found and direct the orchestra in the popular Palmshaven restaurant. For a time, he was also concertmaster for the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra.



► Leopold Goldfarb's menswear shop Bergen, 1920

Many Jews were in the clothing business or in other small private enterprises. In 1941-42, approximately 800 such businesses were in operation among a Jewish population of about 2,300. On the left are Goldfarb's children Mary and Sids. Sids later became widely known in Norway as Peder, a popular newspaper cartoonist (Anders Gangi).

On the right: Sids' brother, Peder.



Key dates 1814-1945

1814 The Constituent Assembly gathered at Eidsvoll and confirmed a Norwegian Constitution. It also gave further powers to the King. The first Jewish immigrant from Poland arrived in Norway.

1839 Henrik Wergeland submitted his first proposal to the Storting for the Jewish Question. He suggested that Jews should be granted the same rights as Christians.

1851 Article 2 of the Norwegian Constitution was amended to state that all citizens, regardless of religion, were equal before the law.

1852-1880 The first Jewish immigrants to Norway. About 20 people arrived from Denmark and other countries.

1881-1890 Jewish immigrants from Denmark and other countries. About 100 people arrived in Norway.

1891 The Jewish Community in Christiania (Oslo) was established. It was the first Jewish community in Norway.

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1895 A new wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe and many Jews immigrated to Norway.

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This exhibition tells the story of Jewish immigration to Norway from its very beginning until 1945. It depicts the lives of people who fled from terror and persecution, and who looked for a land where they could sleep safely at night.

The exhibition also describes their encounter with a culture that was foreign to them and their struggle to get down roots in a new country. The people who came to Norway had a strong desire to become part of a nation. They wanted to become ordinary Norwegians, a desire that was often met with hostility. It was a double-edged sword. They discovered that they would pay a price for being different, and that anti-Semitism was not dead.

The exhibition ends with 1945, since the year marks the end of the Holocaust. For the Jewish population of Norway was a disaster. About a third of the Jewish population was killed in the Holocaust. The war people wanted to look ahead and build all human resources to rebuild Jewish life and society in Norway.

The theme *Jewish settlement throughout Norway* (Polish text)