

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY FROM PETROȘANI

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Abstract

This paper presents a short history of the Jewish community from Petroșani, showing its fast development and its dramatic decline during the 20th century.

Jewish merchants were the leaders of the markets in the Jiu Valley at the beginning of the 1900 and after the First World War the community had a church, a chapel, a cemetery, a rabbi and other officials. The community has rapidly grown and by 1940 there were approximately 3000 Jews in the county. They usually lived on the main street in buildings with a shop on the ground floor and the merchant's home on the upper floor.

After the Second World War the community started to disband and together with it, its properties and buildings also disappeared. At present the number of Jews who come together in the prayer house is not enough for a ceremonial, and the 300 tombs from the cemetery are the only testimony of the former community.

Keywords: *community, Jews, architectural heritage, cemetery.*

Short history

The first written record about Petroșani appears in the book *"The Journey from Potsdam to Constantinople"* written by the Prussian colonel Gotze, who travelled to Turkey in 1788-1792 and on his way back he crossed Wallachia. About Petroșani Gotze wrote that *"it is a very large village in which I saw a masonry house"*. Historians consider that Petroșani was founded around 1640, when twenty serfs from Petros were colonized in that area. The first name of the settlement was Petroșeni. Later on, in 1856 the Jiu Valley was colonized with population gathered from the entire Austro-Hungarian empire. Romanians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans and French lived in harmony in the area.

The Jewish community from Petroșani exists since 1890, when it functioned based on the statutes approved by the Israelite community. At the beginning of the 20th century the community had a lot of members, three synagogues, and their merchants were market leaders in the Jiu Valley.

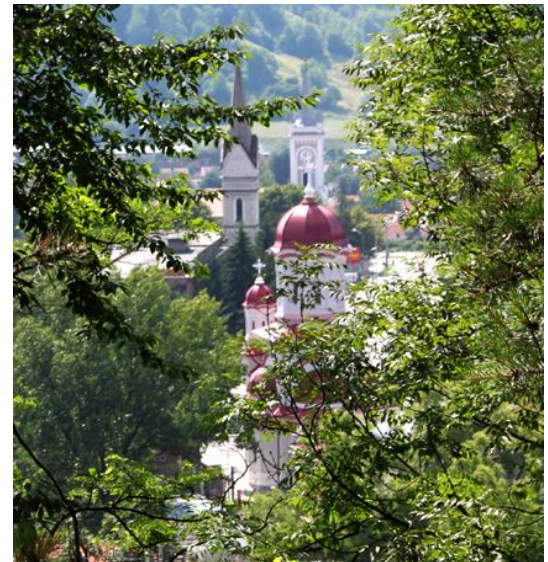


Image 1: Present view with the three churches

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In 1913 the Jewish community tried to obtain its autonomy from the Hungarian Ministry of Culture, but the start of the First World War postponed the official answer. After the end of the war, the "*Autonomous Orthodox Israelite Community from Petrolane*" was founded. The community had 163 members, a church, a chapel, a cemetery, a rabbi and other officials who ensured the well functioning of the religious life.

During the next decades the community has developed very fast, and in 1940 there were 3000 Jews in Petrolane and the neighboring villages of Petrila (Lonea), Vulcan, Lupeni, Aninoasa and Uricani. The Jews were leading the area from an economic point of view. They usually lived in the city centre, on the main street, in buildings with a shop on the ground floor and the merchant's home on the upper floor.

They had different professions, such as shoemaker, tailor, clockmaker, baker, whitesmith, locksmith, painter, woodworker, electrician, soap maker, hairdresser, lawyer, clerk, miner, teacher, doctor, etc. and of course many of them were merchants. Some members of the community became very well known in the area due to their scientific, social, cultural or economic activities.

The community strictly celebrated the traditional holidays, during which the families got together, went to the synagogue and spent time together. In the towns where the community was large enough, they had at least one synagogue, several prayer houses, public baths and schools.

The start of the Second World War brought along the decline of the Jewish community from Petroșani. In august 1941 all Jewish men from the Jiu Valley aged between 16 and 50 were taken to work camps, while the women were taken to a castle in Păclîșa, near Hațeg, and later on to Deva, where they were kept until the end of the War. As the number of Jews decreased, so did the number of their architectural heritage. Most of their synagogues, baths and houses were demolished in the second half of the 20th century, only their cemeteries remain as relics of the former communities, but these are also abandoned, decayed and overgrown with vegetation.

At the 2002 census, Petroșani had a population of 45.195, from which 40.407 declared themselves Romanians, 3.815 Hungarians, 528 Gypsies, 275 Germans, only 25 Jews, 22 Italians, 19 Slovaks, 17 Ukrainians, 16 Polish, 12 Checks, and 59 other nationalities.

Today, the community has less than 30 elderly

from Petroșani.



Image 2: Panoramic view of Petroșani, 19th-20th century.



Image 3: Postcard showing the central market from Petroșani, 19th-20th century.



Image 4: View of King Ferdinand Street, Petroșani, 19th-20th century.

members, and its president is Mr. Marius Rosenfeld. Most of the Jews who lived in Petroșani have died; their descendants converted to other religions and have integrated into the orthodox or catholic communities.

The Jewish community from Petroșani – families and professions

The following families used to live on the main street of Petroșani:

- The Fucs family were carpenters
- The Simenthal family were high standard tailors
- The Marek family were the owners of the electrical plant and had a two storey house with an inner courtyard and a fountain
- The Horvath brothers were the owners of a butcher's shop
- The Biber family owned a clothing shop
- The Weiss brothers had a large grocery, lived in a two storey villa located above the shop. They were selling everything, from vegetables to sweets; hence their shop was called a "colonial store" or a "universal store".
- Another Weiss family owned a jewellery shop that was selling silver
- The Schretter brothers had a clothing shop and were the main merchants in town. The younger brother was elected mayor of Petroșani, as an independent.
- The Hertz brothers owned a shoe shop
- The Ranghewürtz family owned a pharmacy
- The Biber family had a store where they were selling perfumes, photo equipment, musical instruments, etc.
- The Goldstein family had a clothing store. On the advertisement sign there were four men trying to tear apart a pair of pants, thus showing the endurance of their merchandise
- The family of engineer Abraham organized the Ihud of Petroșani and the Keren-Kaimet
- Mr. Hoffman was a bank director
- The Pick family lived together with the family of lawyer Halmos in a beautiful villa located on the river Maleia. The daughter of Mr. Halmos was a well known pianist.
- The Vamos family, the father was an accountant and had two children, a son, Ervin and a daughter, Lili
- The Isac owned a bar, being the only Jewish bar owners in

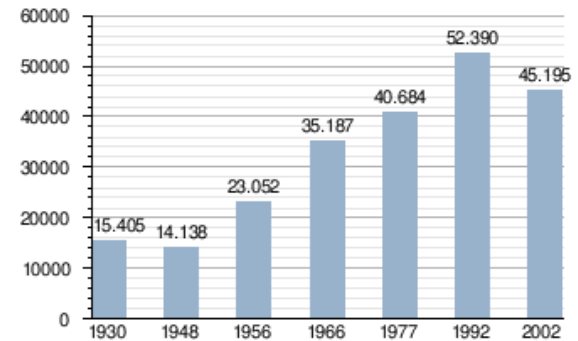


Image 5: Demographic evolution of the population of Petroșani at the different censuses.



Image 6: Postcard showing a panoramic view of Petroșani, 19th-20th century.



Image 7: View of a street from Petroșani, 19th-20th century.

Petroșani

- Musen Deri was the owner of a shoe shop
- The Feldmann family, the father was an optician
- The Taub family used to own a shoe shop. After they moved to Israel he became a bank director.
- Paul Rotman was a painter
- The Leb family, the father was a carpenter
- The Schwalb family members were tailors
- The Kardos family had a clothing store
- The Rubb family, the father was a clockmaker. The oldest son became a clockmaker, while the youngest moved to Cluj and became a doctor. The father was the town's humorist.
- The Reismann family was the owner of a pharmacy. There were two pharmacies in Petroșani, both owned by Jews.
- The Weiss family had a porcelain and glass shop
- The Nagy family, the father was a shoemaker
- The Lustig family owned a women's hat shop and a flower shop
- Doctor Weiss lived with his two unmarried sisters
- The Banden family had a colonial shop

Families which lived in other parts of Petroșani:

- Mr. Schwartz was vice-president at the Ministry of Labor
- Doctor Hermann had two sons, both moved to Cluj where one of them became a doctor and the other one a chemist
- The Fischer family owned a colonial shop in the miner colony
- The Vertes family was the owner of a terracotta stove factory
- Tiberiu Horvath became the vice-president of the Investment Bank after the war
- The Grossman family had a building material warehouse. He was the main provider of materials for the coal mines. The son, Gaston Marin, was a veteran in the French Resistance, and between 1949 and 1962 held important positions in the Ministry of Energy and in the State Committee for Nuclear Energy

Architectural heritage

At the beginning of the 20th century the Jewish community from Petroșani owned a large number of buildings, three synagogues, a chapel and a cemetery. Most Jews lived on the main street, in two storey houses with shops on the ground floor.



Image 8: Postcard showing Kossuth Lajos Street from Petroșani, 19th-20th century.



Image 9: Postcard showing King Ferdinand Street from Petroșani, 19th-20th century.



Image 10: Postcard showing the main street from Petroșani, 19th-20th century.

After the Second World War the community has almost disappeared and so did its built heritage. The synagogues were demolished and today the community's only patrimony is the prayer house, located at no.8 Gelu Street. The number of Jews who gather here is not sufficient for a ceremony. Ten men are required to be present for a ceremony, while today there are only three or four who visit this place.

The prayer house is located on a quiet street, close to the city centre and it is surrounded by a beautiful garden. The building was constructed as a dwelling house and the only sign that indicates that it belongs to the Jewish community are the stars of David from the iron window railings. The prayer room is furnished with the elements required by the ceremonial, but entering the room one can sense that it is not being used very often.



Image11: The prayer house.



Image 12: The prayer house, view from the street.



Image 13: The prayer house, view from the garden.



Image 14: The prayer room.



Image 15: The prayer room.

The Jewish cemetery

The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani is located at no.11 Cireșilor Street, in the vicinity of the former police station, on the top of a steep hill that during winter time is difficultly accessible. The 8463 square meter area is surrounded by a wire fence. The cemetery is a silent remnant of the former community, which is visited only when one of the few members goes to the other side.

The cemetery dates back to 1880 and comprises approximately 300 graves. The gravestones are relatively simple, with few decorations. They are rectangular or pyramid shaped and the writing on them is in Jewish, Romanian or Hungarian.



Image 16: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – general view.



Image 17: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – general view.



Image 18: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 19: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 20: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 21: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstones.



Image 22: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstones.



Image 23: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 24: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 25: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstones.



Image 26: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 27: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 28: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 29: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 30: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 31: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 32: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 33: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.

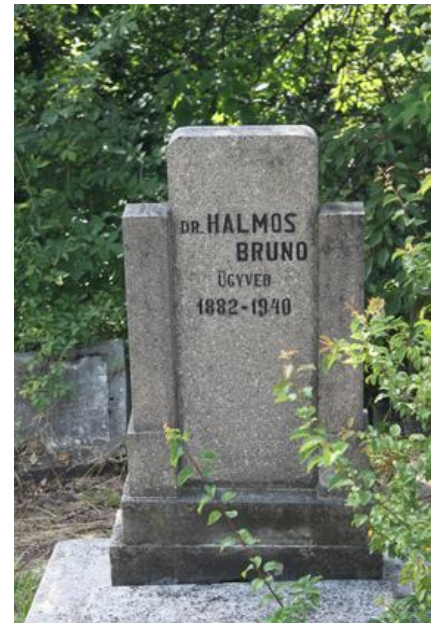


Image 34: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 35: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 36: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.



Image 37: The Jewish cemetery from Petroșani – tombstone.

Personalities

Oscar Roșeanu (born on May 2nd, 1923, in Petroșani)

Oscar Roșeanu, also known as Oszkar Rosenfeld, studied the violin, graduated the Conservatory in Cluj and played with the semi symphonic orchestra from Petrila.

His father, Martin Rosenfeld, was a highly respectable person who worked in the coal mines from Petroșani for 46 years. His mother, Frida Rosenfeld studied in Petroșani and worked as a cashier in a perfume shop.

The Rosenfelds lived in a large brick house in the miner colony from Lonea, at no. 14 Nicolae Iorga Street, being the only Jewish family on that street.

In 1940 he was forced to leave the high school from Sibiu due to the anti Jewish laws, and he moved to the Israelite school where he was in the same class with the future rabbi Ernest Neumann. In 1941 he was taken to several work camps, first to the Deva-Brad railway, then to the Matca-Paulis canal and later on to Moldavia to dig ditches for laying cables between casemates, where he worked until the end of the war.

After the war he graduated from the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Physics and Chemistry and in 1947 changed his name from Rosenfeld to Roșeanu. After graduating he taught



Image 38: Oscar Roșeanu, in the 1970s.

mathematics, and one year later he managed to transfer to Petroșani

as a physics teacher. In 1948 he was invited to hold a speech at the founding of Israel, where he showed an outstanding oratorical talent. In the same year he was appointed school inspector in Deva.

In 1949 he was sent to the Danube - Black Sea Canal as chief of the public education department in the area, being in charge for several towns, like Cernavodă, Medgidia, Ovidiu, Poarta Albă, Capul Midia etc. He was responsible with ensuring the necessary teaching equipment and organized daycare facilities for the worker's children. For this activity, in 1950 he was decorated with the Labor Medal by academician Constantin Parhon and was appointed a general inspector in the Education Ministry in the same year.

He held Marxism-Leninism lectures in different universities for 10 years, but due to his Jewish origins he was transferred to the Spiru Haret high school from Bucharest where he worked as a chemistry teacher until his retirement in 1986. During this time he made two educational films, "*Chemical compounds*" and "*How to solve chemistry problems?*" he designed and built the prototype for the chemistry laboratory furniture that was implemented in several schools in Bucharest and the surrounding counties. He was also the editor of the "*Vlăstarul*" school magazine founded by Mircea Eliade, a former student of the high school.

Rosenfeld, Marius (born on February 8th, 1955 in Brăila, co. Galați)

Marius Rosenfeld is the son of the late tennis player and table tennis coach Marcel Rosenfeld. He studied at the theoretical high school from Brăila and graduated the Table tennis coach school in Bucharest.

He moved to Petroșani in 1975, where he worked as a table tennis coach at the School Sports Club, continuing his predecessor, Eduard Goghesi's tradition in discovering and training young talents. For 13 years he trained and guided professional sportsmen who obtained good results in the national competitions.

When the table tennis section was closed down, he trained as a mining extraction stage hand and started working at the Dâlja Mine, from where he retired after 20 years of activity.

Since 1999 he is in charge with the problems of the Jiu Valley Jewish community.



Image 39: Marius Rosenfeld, Petroșani, 2011.

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