



The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP)

BOLIVIA – DOCUMENTS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

It is estimated that in 1917 only 20 to 25 Jews lived in Bolivia, and by 1933, at the beginning of the Nazi era in Germany, there were only 30 Jewish families. The first tide of Jewish immigration came in the early 1930s, with an estimated 7,000 new immigrants by the end of 1942. Approximately 2,200 emigrated, however, from Bolivia by the end of the 1940s. Those who remained settled in La Paz, with communities arising in outlying cities such as Cochabamba, Oruro, Sucre, Tarija, and Potosi.

In 1939, Bolivia's liberal immigration policy was modified, as in other Latin American countries. This modification was in keeping with the policy of barring entry to nationals of Axis powers. In addition, a certain amount of discontent arose with the discovery that most of the Jewish immigrants who had entered the country on an agricultural visa were actually involved in commerce and industry. In May 1940, all Jewish visas were suspended indefinitely; nevertheless, immigration did continue. After World War II a small wave of Polish Jews who had fled to the Far East after 1939, but abandoned Shanghai in the wake of the communist takeover, arrived in Bolivia. The major part of the group remained in La Paz, and was incorporated into the existing community.

These years in the Jewish community were marked by difficult economic conditions, especially for those who did not own businesses. Between January 1939 and December 1942, \$160,000 were disbursed for relief by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and by the Sociedad de Proteccion de los Inmigrantes Israelitas.

By the fall of 1939, when immigration had reached its peak, organized Jewish communities gained greater stability in Bolivia. The first organization to be founded was the Circulo Israelita (1935) by East European Jews, followed by the German Comunidad Israelita. Under the auspices of the Comite Central Judio de Bolivia, various communal services were established: the Hevra Kaddisha, the Cementerio Israelita, Bikkur Holim, the old age home, WIZO, and Macabi. The La Paz community founded and maintained the Colegio Israelita, a comprehensive school with kindergarten, primary, and secondary grades. Its student body became mixed because the high level of the school attracted non-Jewish students. In the 1950's and 1960's there was a mass emigration by Jews from Bolivia due to political upheaval, and Jewish education was one of the prime victims of the emigration trend; Jewish student enrollment, especially in the lower grades, declined drastically.

Outside of La Paz, the community of Cochabamba, which had a Jewish population of about 600 in the mid-1900's, was, and is, the second largest in the country. Its history is inextricably linked with its founder, an Alexandrian Jew named Isaac Antaki, who arrived in the 1920s. He established a large textile factory and also built a synagogue to serve the Ashkenazi and Sephardi community. The Jewish population of the city reached its peak after World War II, but large numbers emigrated in the 1950's. The community never managed to establish a Jewish school, only a kindergarten exists.¹

¹ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Bolivia.html>. Jan. 6, 2014.

The CAHJP possess only a few documents from the Jewish communities in Bolivia
 - all from the German speaking community in Cochabamba "Comunidad Israelita".

Rec. no.	Organization	Description	Dates
BO/1 o.s.	Landesverband der Jüdischen Gemeinden Boliviens	<i>Macabi und Mitteilungsblatt des Landesverbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden Boliviens</i> , 3. Jg. Nr. 35 German	Dec. 1945
BO/2 o.s.	Federación Sionista Unida en Bolivia	<i>Jüdische Rundschau vom Illimani. Semamario para toda la Colectividad Israelita en Bolivia</i> , no. 7, 13, 14, 16 (copies and originals) German	1947
BO/3 o.s.	Publications	<i>Die Zeit. Boletin Informativo para la Colectividad Israelita</i> - Halbmonatsschrift herausgegeben von Martin Bielski, Cochabamba (13 editions, copies and originals) German, Spanish	1948 - 1952
BO/4	Comunidad Israelita Cochabamba	Booklet marking the 10 th anniversary of the community: "Festschrift der Comunidad Israelita de Cochabamba Bolivia 1939-1949, 5699-5709" German	1949
BO/5	Asociación Israelita Cochabamba ² (Comunidad Israelita y Círculo Israelita)	<i>Mitteilungsblatt der Asociación Israelita Cochabamba</i> (single editions) Spanish	1971 - 1988
BO/6	Asociación Israelita Cochabamba	- Manuscript of the article "Chronik der 'Comunidad Israelita' de Cochabamba, beginnend im Jahre 1946: Die Geschichte unserer Synagoge" - Manuscript of the article in a local newspaper (1947): "La primera sinagoga de Bolivia se inauguro en nuestra capital" / בית-הכנסת הראשון בבוליביה - Correspondence between the CAHJP and the president of the "Asociación Israelita Cochabamba" regarding these articles and other material (1968-1971) German, Hebrew, Spanish	1947, 1968 - 1971, no date
BO/7	Asociación Israelita Cochabamba	Photos of the exterior and interior of the 1947 inaugurated synagogue, including the memorial plaque at the entrance	no dates

² The community changed its name from " Comunidad Israelita" to "Asociación Israelita Cochabamba"

BO/8	Newspaper clippings and articles	Newspaper clippings in newspapers from Argentina regarding the Jewish life in Bolivia Yiddish	1965
BO/9	Newspaper clippings and articles	2 papers on Jewish life in Bolivia: - <i>Colectividad y vida comunitaria judia en Bolivia</i> - Socobo, <i>Sociedad Colonizadora de Bolivia: Agricultores Judios</i>	ca. 1990