



Jewish Life in the Town of Sighet

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Sighet

Sighet, the city where Livia was born, is a city in Northern Transylvania. Located at the confluence of the Tisza and Iza rivers, the city is in a hilly area surrounded by mountains. Sighet has significance in European Jewish history beyond its size. Though the documentation is unclear, it seems that Jews have lived in the area, called Maramures, since around the 13th century. In fact, as early as 1352, the Hungarian King Louis the Great recognized Sighet as a crown city.

This presence increased considerably at the end of the 18th century, when an influx of Jews from both East-Central Europe and the Russian empire occurred. These immigrant Jews settled both in the countryside and the larger towns and cities of the region. Their presence was seen in trade in a variety of agricultural endeavours, including cattle, agriculture, timber and the sale and production of alcohol. Integrating easily into the customs of the region, these Jews quickly learned Romanian and Hungarian, while amongst themselves Yiddish remained their language of choice.

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The city of Sighet in the beginning of the 20th century.



A Jewish cab driver waits with his horse in Sighet, 1936.

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A regional census from 1728 counted a mere 9 Jews. In 1787, 1214 Jews were counted, while soon after, in 1804, some 3000 Jews were in the region. Jewish presence in the province increased throughout the 19th century, and by 1930, well into the 20th century, some 100,000 Jews were counted in the province. Sighet, which evolved into an administrative and cultural centre of the region had a Jewish population of over 10,000, representing around 40% of the city's population. Other ethnicities present included Romanians, Hungarians, Ruthenians and Germans.



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In 1780 the Jewish community obtained official permission to build a synagogue.

A Jewish family in Sighet.

Proceeding from a project commenced by Hapsburg emperor Josef II, a Jewish educational system was begun, and Jewish schools could be established. In 1840, Jews were allowed to own property, not least because Hungarian authorities understood the economic significance of Jewish commercial activity.



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Group portrait of members of the Jewish community of Sighet in front of a wooden synagogue.

By the 19th century's third decade, Jews were firmly established in most aspects of Sighet's commercial and religious activities, and Jewish life flourished. Educational institutes such as *heders* and *yeshivas* were established alongside synagogues, Hebrew printing houses, and social organizations for men and women, trade organizations.



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Religious life was an essential part of Jewish life in Sighet.

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Jewish charities helped the impoverished, including young mothers and children, refugees and even promoted the advancement of Jewish sporting activities. In Sighet educational activities were based on the Jewish religious life, though learning about agriculture and trades such as weaving was also supported.

Most Jews in Sighet continued their way of traditional Jewish life. Wearing traditional clothes common to east-central Europe remained highly visible and young Jewish women often married early.



Children exercise in a summer camp in Sighet for indigent children.

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Young Jewish men in Sighet learn the trade of weaving.



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Jewish children in Sighet.
According to the given information
this photo was taken in the 1940s.

Many prayer houses existed, and Jewish men maintained an active presence in existing synagogues. Many aspired to actually meet a rabbi they revered at least once a year. At times it seemed that Sighet was like a “big synagogue”. Many Jews in Sighet belonged to the Hassidic movement that was founded in the beginning of the 18th century in Eastern Europe. The word Hasid means “piety”.

Starting in the inter-war period (1918-1939), Jewish life in Sighet flourished, reaching heights never before seen in both the social and economic life of the city and its surroundings. All of this was to come to an end when World War II began, and ended.



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Rabbi Teitelbaum, leader of the Hasidic Jews of Sighet on a visit to the cemetery.



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Members of the Samson soccer club in Sighet.

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Text: Alina Marincean, The Elie Wiesel Memorial House, Sighet/Lena Jersenius

Fact checking and translation: Paul A. Levine, Ph.D., History

Graphic design: Cecilia Undemark Péterfy/Karl Gabor