

Tennessee Holocaust Commission

**This document was prepared using information from the Anti-Defamation League viewer's guide to the film *Weapons of the Spirit* and information from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website.*



Children sheltered in the children's home of Les Grillions, directed by Daniel Trocmé standing in the back row at the center

WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

This is the story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a small mountain village in south-central France, and how its citizens responded to the Nazi terror against the Jews.

During the dreadful years of the Nazi occupation of France (1940-1944) many French collaborators in parts of the country delivered 75,000 Jews, including 10,000 children, into the hands of the Gestapo.

Despite this the mostly Huguenot residents of the area of Le Chambon, quietly and matter-of-factly, took in and saved Jews who came to them for shelter and refuge. Not a single Jew who came to this village was turned away or turned in.

WHO IS THIS ABOUT?

The rescue efforts in this village were led by Pastor André Trocmé of the Reformed Church of France, his wife Magda, and his assistant, Pastor Edouard Theis, who along with the residents of these villages offered shelter in private homes, in hotels, on farms, and in schools. They forged identification and ration cards for the refugees, and in some cases guided them across the border to neutral Switzerland. These actions of rescue were unusual during the period of the Holocaust insofar as they involved the majority of the population of an entire region. Below you will find a description of the witnesses to this rescue effort in the order that they appear in the film *Weapons of the Spirit*.

Pierre Sauvage, the filmmaker and narrator: "A Jewish baby had the good fortune to see the light of day in a place on earth uniquely committed to his survival."

Henri and Emma Hérítier, the peasant couple who sheltered the village forger and other Jews and helped the filmmaker's family. Mr. Hérítier: "When people came, if we could be of help..."

Georgette Barraud, who ran a boarding home that took in many Jews: "It happened so naturally, we can't understand the fuss."

Charles Gibert, the old villager who sings the local Huguenot hymn.

Lesley Maber, an English teacher who moved to Le Chambon before the war: "People who seem very ordinary can do great things if they're given the opportunity."

Madeleine Dreyfus, the French Jewish relief worker who always succeeded in placing Jewish children in the farmhouses of the area.

Marguerite Roussel, the Catholic woman who, like the other members of the area's Catholic minority joined actively in the rescue effort: "We never analyzed what we were doing. It happened by itself."

Magda Trocmé, the widow of the pastor André Trocmé, pastor of Le Chambon during the war: "If we'd had an organization, we would have failed."

Marie Brottes, the Christian fundamentalist for whom the Jews were "The People of God... And the Jew, truly, had fallen among thieves."

Adolphe and Aline Caritey, whose home was the headquarters of the armed resistance in Le Chambon.

Oskar Rosowsky, the Jewish teenager who forged false I.D.'s for all who needed them.

Marguerite Kohn, the Orthodox Jew who remembers that her neighbors respected her faith.

Pastor Edouard Theis, the assistant pastor of Le Chambon during the war: "The Christian faith merely had to be applied."

Roger Darcissac, director of the public school who told authorities there were no Jewish students there: "It was the human thing to do."



Picture of Pierre Sauvage



Henri and Emma Hérítier of Le Chambon in 1944



Friends of Le Chambon



Picture of Madga Trocmé with her husband Pastor André Trocmé

WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?

TIMELINE OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE STORY

1933- Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany. Dachau, the first concentration camp, is established. The Enabling Act which suspends civil liberties becomes law. First anti-Jewish decrees begin with the burning of books written by Jews and anti-Nazis. Jewish professors are expelled from universities and Jewish artists are prohibited from practicing as artists.

1935- The Nuremberg Laws are introduced at the annual Nuremberg Rally of the Nazi Party in Nazi Germany. These laws proclaimed that Jews could not be German citizens, marry "Aryans", fly the German flag, hire German maids, and prevented "Jews" from participating in German civic life.

1936- Jewish doctors in Germany are barred from practicing medicine in government institutions.

1938- The Anschluss or Annexation of Austria by Germany takes place.

In November of 1938, Kristallnacht referred to as "The Night of Broken Glass" takes place. A decree is issued forcing all Jews to transfer businesses to Aryan hands. All Jewish pupils are then expelled from German Schools.

1939- Germany invades Poland. Jews in German occupied Poland are forced to wear distinguishing badges.

1940- Germany invades Holland, Belgium, and France. The Vichy government in France was established.

1942- The Germans occupy Southern France in November.

André Trocmé protested the mass roundup of Jews in Paris at Velodrome d'Hiver in July in a public sermon on August 16, stating that "the Christian Church must kneel and ask God to forgive its present failings and cowardice."

1943- French police arrested Pastors Trocmé and Theis, as well as the headmaster of the local primary school, Roger Darcissac, and interned them at the camp in Saint-Paul d'Eyejeaux, near Limoges. French authorities released the three men after 28 days, and they continued to operate until late within the year when rumors of re-arrest sent them into hiding.

On June 29, the German police raided La Maison des Roches, a residence for young adult men. The Germans arrested 18 students and the Jewish students were sent to Auschwitz. Some of the students came back and others were never accounted for. The German police also arrested the director, Daniel Trocmé, Pastor Trocmé's cousin, and deported him to Lublin/Majdanek concentration camp, where he died.

1944- Roger Le Forestier, Le Chambon's physician, who was especially active in helping all people, was arrested and killed by orders of Klaus Barbie in the massacre of St. Genis-Laval.

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was liberated by the Free French First Armored Division on September 2-3.

1990- The State of Israel recognized all of the inhabitants of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and those nearby villages collectively as "Righteous Among the Nations".

2004- On July 8, French President Jacques Chirac and Simone Veil selected Le Chambon-sur-Lignon to deliver a major speech on racism.

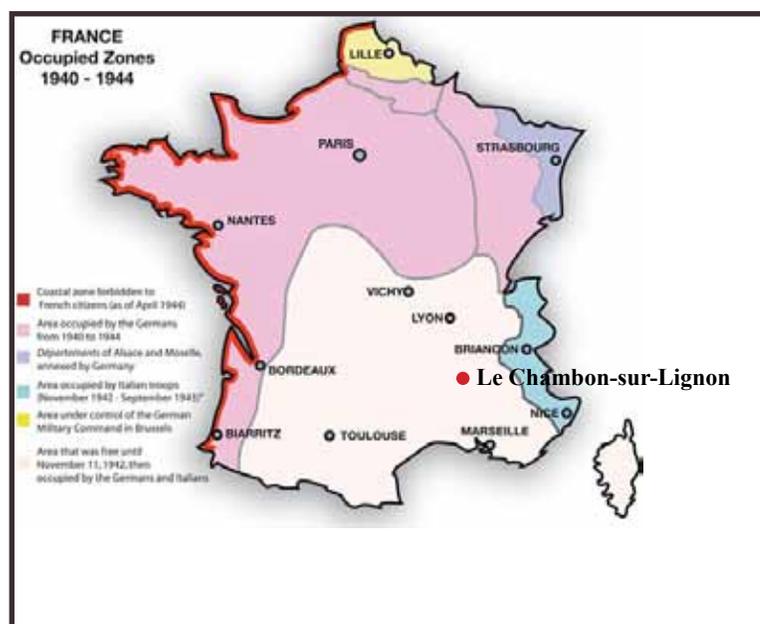
2007- In January, French President Jacques Chirac and Simone Veil in the name of the French government headed a nationally televised ceremony in the Pantheon in Paris. This ceremony honored all of the French rescuers both known and unknown including including those of Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon. A plaque was placed on the wall of the crypt of the Pantheon to honor the rescuers.

In December of 2007, the Israeli government honored Le Chambon and its neighboring villages by erecting an engraved stele in a small rock garden in the Yad Vashem memorial park.

WHERE DID THIS HAPPEN?

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon is a small village on the Plateau Vivarais-Lignon in the département of Haute-Loire of Auvergne, a hilly region of central France (the Plateau is 3,000 feet high). Until November 1942, it lay in the Unoccupied Zone of France. The history of Le Chambon and the environs influenced the conduct of its residents. Centuries before, the French villagers had been persecuted because they were Huguenot (Calvinist) Protestants. Many in Le Chambon regarded the Jews as a "chosen people" and scouts escorted those who were endangered 300 kilometers to the Swiss border, the same "underground railroad" that their persecuted Huguenot brethren had traveled centuries earlier.

Map of France During World War II



Map of French Internment Camps



France 1940-1944. France During World War II. After the fall of France and the establishment of the collaborationist vichy regime, over a quarter of the country's 300,000 to 350,000 Jews were forced into squalid, French-run internment camps. Most of these internees (many of them foreign-born refugees) were later deported to "the East," primarily Auschwitz, where they were murdered.

WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?

The Holocaust was the planned, systematic attempt by the Nazis and their supporters to annihilate the Jewish people, and to eradicate every vestige of Jewish Life and culture from the European continent, and ultimately from the world. The Nazis called this "The Final Solution of the Jewish Question." During World War II, millions of people throughout Europe were swept into the Nazi net of death. However, the Nazi assault against the Jews was unique in that it involved the mobilization of all the resources of the state and the most advanced science and technology of the time toward a single goal, the total annihilation of a group of people. Throughout occupied Europe, Jews were rounded up, isolated from the rest of the population, stripped of their possessions, brutally concentrated into makeshift ghettos, and ultimately deported to slave labor and death camps. No Jew was exempt, regardless of age or status. All shared the same fate.

Nazi single-minded efficiency, combined with the collaboration of sympathizers and the widespread apathy of bystanders in countries they conquered, was abetted by the silence and indifference of the Allies fighting the Germans. The final result was the murder of 6 million Jews- two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe.

But even in a time as brutal and hopeless as this, there were people who, at great risk to themselves, tried to save Jewish lives. Yad Vashem, the memorial museum in Jerusalem, records the names of over 8,000 men and women who saved Jewish friends, neighbors, and strangers. In most cases these rescuers worked alone or in small groups, fearful of discovery by neighbors and acquaintances who might not hesitate to report them to the Gestapo. Yet in Le Chambon and surrounding villages many residents, protected by the elevation and the isolation, managed to shelter thousands of Jews fleeing from the Nazi terror.



Standing in the center Magda Trocmé and survivors, next to the tree in the Avenue of the Righteous, Yad Vashem

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

EXHIBIT

Holocaust Poster Series, Created by ADL's Braun Center for Holocaust Studies.

VIDEOS

Avenue of the Just. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, [..].

The Courage to Care Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1986.

BOOKS

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"The Courage to Care [Paperback]." Amazon.com: The Courage to Care (9780814774069): Carol Rittner, Sondra Myers: Books. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 July 2012. <<http://www.amazon.com/The-Courage-Care-Carol-Rittner/dp/0814774067>>.

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"I Will Never Be 14 Years Old" Francois Lecomte
<http://www.beachlloyd.com/pdfs/BLPmaterials_here&abroad.pdf>

"Tell Them We Remember: The Story of the Holocaust with Images from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum". Boston: Little, Brown, 1994. Print.

"We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France During the Holocaust [Hardcover]." Amazon.com: We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France During the Holocaust (9780813214931): Patrick Henry: Books. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.amazon.com/We-Only-Know-Men-Holocaust/dp/0813214939>>.

Zornberg, Ira. Classroom Strategies for Teaching about the Holocaust: 10 Lessons for Classroom Use. New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1983. Print.

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n.d. Web. 30 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/DG100-150/dg107Trocme.htm>>

"Holocaust History." *Le Chambon-sur-Lignon*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 July 2012. <<http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007518>>.

"Le Chambon." *Le Chambon*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 July 2012. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Chambon.html>>.

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"Holocaust History." *Le Chambon-sur-Lignon*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 July 2012. <<http://www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007518>>.

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