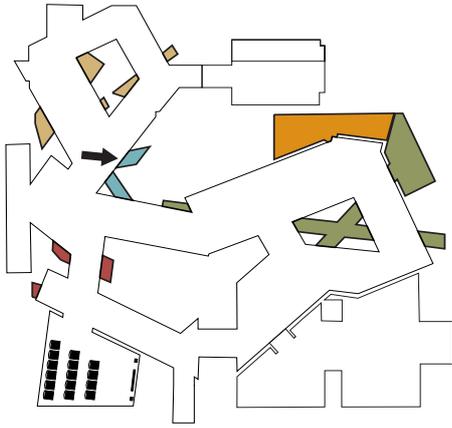


MITZVAH

The Danish government succeeded to avoid special Jewish laws when the country was occupied by the Germans in 1940: No yellow star, no exclusion from business or confiscation of property. After the government's resignation in August 1943, the plenipotentiary Werner Best decided to "solve Denmark's Jewish problem". Information was leaked that an action against the Jews was imminent, and most Danish Jews were warned in time. Approximately 7,000 Danish Jews were sailed to safety in Sweden. Only 481 Danish Jews ended in the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and most of them lived to return home.

One cannot overestimate the value of the rescue of the Danish Jews to the image of occupied Denmark abroad. In time, the story has acquired mythical dimensions. But many factors contributed to the success of the rescue, including German duplicity.



THERESIENSTADT

On the surface, Theresienstadt seemed like a normal society with a labour market, a postal service and its own currency, but in reality hunger, squalor, illness and uncertainty dominated the inmates' lives. Maintaining human dignity and integrity was a daily challenge. Packets and letters from family outside served as both practical and moral support. The deported Danish Jews did not know about the Nazis' assurance to the director of the Foreign Ministry that Danish Jews would not be sent to other camps.



Telegram from Christian X on the occasion of the recipient's return from Theresienstadt via Sweden.



The camp had its own currency, Moses Money, but what could be bought was highly limited, and the necessities of life were scarce.



Newcomers were allowed to write home on pre-printed, censored postcards. Later, the Danish Social Ministry arranged a large-scale Red Cross operation under which food packages were sent to the camp. Here are receipts for letters and packets sent to Theresienstadt. The sender was usually an unknown "packet giver".



"Every moment I felt a sting, followed by intolerable itching. I tossed and turned, sat up, lay down again, but it was no use". Ralph Oppenheim in *Det skulle så være. Dagbog fra Theresienstadt* ("It Was Meant to Be. Diary from Theresienstadt").

Bedbug collected as souvenir on the way to the waiting white buses, which drove Danish Jews to Sweden in April 1945. Portrait of the collector, summer 1945.



Any circumvention of the morally degrading rules that governed life in the camp was a small victory for the inmates. Here someone succeeded to secretly sew a teddy bear for a little four-year-old girl.

The wooden boards found their way to the carpentry workshop in Theresienstadt, where they were clandestinely saved from destruction along with similar boards from European synagogues.



Mica. Many of the women interned in Theresienstadt were forced to work in the Mica Mill splitting mica for the important war electro-industry.



A Czech Jew sold this prayer book to a Dane for a couple of slices of bread. The new owner died in Theresienstadt, but the prayer book went with the white buses to Sweden, and was later presented to his grandchild on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah in 1947.

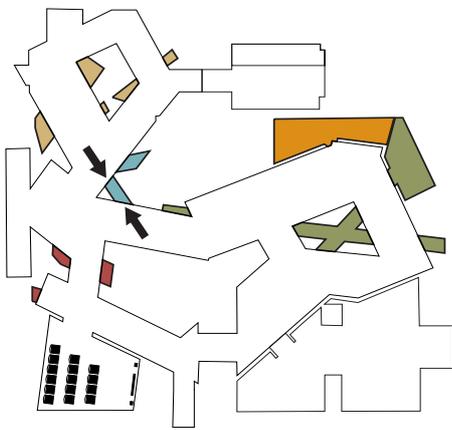
Private collection.



Diary pages written in Theresienstadt. It was difficult to get hold of paper, and it was forbidden to keep a diary. Here, an accounting book was used. Its closely inscribed pages bear witness to the writer's fears, thoughts and longings.



Upon arrival at Theresienstadt, the Danish Jews were given a yellow star, which had to be attached to their clothes and worn at all times.



ESCAPE TO SWEDEN

Pack a suitcase, lock the front door for the last time and set out for the unknown. Most Danish Jews were caught unawares by the need to escape. Many found a place to stay and contacts for transportation through their personal network. After a short time, the Danish resistance movement systematised the escape routes and introduced fixed tariffs. At the crucial moment, Sweden relaxed its strict immigration policies and accepted the Danish refugees from Nazism.



When it became clear that the Danish Jews were about to be arrested, Jews got busy organising their escape and safeguarding their property by authorising others to make decisions for them in their absence.



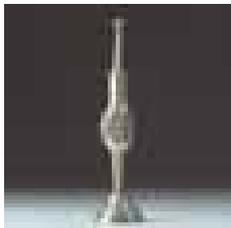
Gentiles with two Jewish grandparents were classified as "Misclings of the first degree" by the Nazis. This meant that they were subject to the same rules as Jews.



Briskly sewed “vest” for banknotes.



Diary belonging to a boy describing the flight to Sweden and his sojourn there. Private collection.



Buying an escape to Sweden could be costly, and in some cases ritual objects were used as payment.



Diary given to the writer’s grandchild in the hectic October days of 1943 with the words “here is my entire life”. The grandchild buried the diary in a biscuit tin by a Danish summer house and recovered it after returning from Sweden. The writer died two weeks after giving the diary to her grandchild in October 1943. Private collection.



Many personal accounts exist about the hectic days of October 1943. One of these accounts was written in this little almanac, which also contains brief notes about the stay in Sweden.



Many Danish Jews went to Northern Zealand by train, from where they were sailed over the Sound to Sweden. Some bought return tickets for the train to avoid arousing suspicion.



There is still great gratitude towards Sweden for receiving the Danish Jews.



Danskeren reported news from Denmark and about the progress of the war.



The Danish Jews who had been deported to Theresienstadt arrived in Sweden with the white buses in April 1945. Here they were provided with guidance for Danish refugees in Sweden.



In Sweden, there was rationing during the war, just as in Denmark.



When the Second World War ended, the Danish Jews returned to Denmark. The journey home was organised to avoid everybody arriving home at the same time.



In Sweden, Danes could demonstrate their nationality by wearing this small emblem.



Emblems and arm bands from the Danish Brigade, which many Jews served in. The photograph shows soldiers from the brigade celebrating their homecoming at one of the rides in Tivoli.



After a while, the Danish Jews established themselves in Sweden. Many learned to speak Swedish, and their children went to Swedish schools during the exile, which lasted for one and a half years.

