

History

Cape Verde, an archipelago of ten islands, lies in the Atlantic Ocean about 300 miles off the coast of Senegal, West Africa. As a result of over 500 years of Portuguese colonial rule, Cape Verdeans are predominantly Catholic. Jews from Morocco and Gibraltar began immigrating to Cape Verde in the mid-1800's for primarily economic reasons.

Hebrew and Portuguese inscriptions on the tombstones in the small Jewish cemeteries indicate that the majority came from the Moroccan cities of Tangier, Tetouan, Rabat and Mogador (now Essaouira) bearing Sephardic names such as Auday, Anahory, Benoliel, Benros, Benathar, Brigham, Benchimol, Cohen, Levy, Maman, Pinto, Wahnnon and Seruya.



Jewish headstone in the capital, Praia

Today, Cape Verde has virtually no practicing Jews due to widespread assimilation. Yet, descendants in Cape Verde, Portugal, Canada and the U.S. speak with pride of their Jewish heritage and are involved with the Project. Sofia de Oliveira Lima, a descendant of the Wahnnon family, is CVJHP representative in Praia.

The Descendants and CVJHP

The Project works in conjunction with the descendants of the Jewish families of Cape Verde to accomplish its goals. Many descendants throughout the world are collaborating on various aspects of the Project such as providing oral testimonies, technical support and financial assistance.



Descendants of Cape Verdean Jews in Lisbon, Portugal

An organization called the Cape Verde-Israel Friendship Society (AMICAEL) was formed between Cape Verde and Israel in 1994. An AMICAEL subcommittee is also cooperating on the Project.



Descendants of Cape Verdean Jews in Praia



Penha de França Cemetery, a dilapidated Jewish burial site on the Island of Santo Antão

Project Background

The seeds of the Project were sown in the late 1980's while Carol Castiel, now CVJHP President, was managing a scholarship program for Portuguese-speaking Africa. From her Cape Verdean students, many with Jewish surnames, she learned of the Jewish cemeteries throughout the Islands. Castiel's travels to the archipelago in the 1990's coincided with a resurgence of interest in Jewish roots on the part of many descendants who were pressing for restoration of the dilapidated cemeteries. Since then Castiel has contributed her time and effort to interviewing descendants, publishing articles and making presentations about the Jewish presence in the Islands. With 501(c) (3) status granted in 2007, the Project can more effectively achieve its goals of preserving the cemeteries and telling the story of Cape Verde's Jewish heritage.



Village of Sinagoga (Portuguese for Synagogue)

Mission Statement

The Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project (CVJHP) aims to honor the memory and explore the contributions of the many Sephardic Jewish families who emigrated from Morocco and Gibraltar to Cape Verde in the 19th century.



Wahnon family in Cape Verde, circa 1898. The first democratically elected Prime Minister of Cape Verde is a descendant of this family.

Project Goals

- Restore and preserve several Jewish cemeteries in the Cape Verde Islands.
- Publish a book about the Jews of Cape Verde based on archival research and testimonies of descendants.
- Encourage Jewish tourism to Cape Verde.
- Educate future generation about the Jews of Cape Verde.

Need for Action

- The Jewish burial grounds in Cape Verde are in dire need of repair.
- The story of the Jews of Cape Verde and their descendants has yet to be fully researched and documented.
- Future generations should know about this unwritten chapter in Jewish/African history.

"The Government of Cape Verde endorses the objectives and goals of the Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project...we feel that the work of the Project can have a significant cultural and economic impact for the Republic of Cape Verde."

**-Jose Maria Neves, Prime Minister,
Republic of Cape Verde**

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Please help us preserve and document this neglected chapter in the history of the Jewish Diaspora by making a tax deductible contribution to the Project. CVJHP is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

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CAPE VERDE

JEWISH HERITAGE PROJECT, INC

Preserving Cape Verde's Jewish heritage by restoring and maintaining Jewish burial grounds, honoring the memory of the Jews and their descendants, educating future generations about the Jews of Cape Verde and encouraging Jewish heritage tourism.

