

The first moments of German Jewish immigrants in Rio de Janeiro

Since the 1930s German Jewish immigrants have found in Rio de Janeiro a safe harbour. In the new country, these refugees have faced a series of legal adversities which compromised their permanent establishment. Through the foundation of the „União Associação Beneficente Israelita“ in 1937 they are granted a permanent expression of their existence in the city.

The history of the União Associação Beneficente Israelita (Jewish Beneficent Society) goes back before its foundation in 1937 and has its origins in the mid 1930's, with the arrival of the first Jewish refugees from Germany to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. They are assisted and accommodated by a group of activists of different origins, especially from Eastern Europe, already domiciled in Brazil, in the old headquarter of the Relief Society, at Joaquim Palhares street, in the former Jewish neighbourhood Praça XI. Over 100 refugees are housed there, while others are put up in inns and private homes. In 1933, a small group of German Jewish immigrants gets together into a club they name "Centro 33" in the Marques de Paraná street, to exchange experience and information, but also to revive cultural e religious habits of the lost homeland. In the year to follow they organize by their own means the first religious services for the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kipur.

The need for governmental recognition for the assistance work for the immigrants – to assure their subsistence in the new country as well provide them with legal advice due to the political issues in Brazil and in Germany –, endorsed the foundation of the União on February 24th, 1937. Many refugees had an irregular status in Brazil and had so far a tourist visa. In December 1937, as the situation of the irregular status of tourists urged, 40 people a day required legal advice at União. In August 1938, when the possibility of officialising their stay, there were 50 to 70 advice seeking people per day. In 1938 and 1939, with the change in the immigrants' profile – initially young men who managed to escape Nazi Germany, then however their recently arrived parents and grandparents – the União needs to make new arrangements and creates an elderly home, which is still today the main task of the institution.

MISSION

Heritage and History AG is a history research and editorial production company based in Zurich and specialized in the register of personal and community events of the different German speaking Jewish populations in Europe, which immigrated to Brazil during the 20th century, as a result of the persecution of the national socialist regime. The majority of these populations were already domiciled for centuries in regions in today's countries in Central and East Europe, such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia. A fundamental task of this research is to bring out the cultural, scientific and economic contribution of these immigrants to the Brazilian society which offered them a new home.

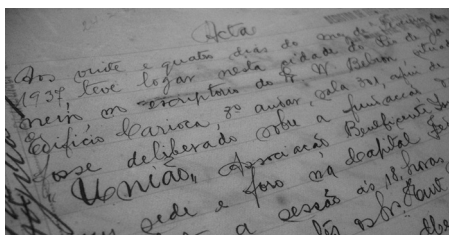
Heritage and History wants to constitute a collection of documents, photography and Judaica objects from the assets of the families which immigrated to Brazil. In this collection, there will also be testimonials and video recordings of the immigrants and their descendants. This work of archiving and researching is also performed by a local team of specialists with researchers, archivists, translators and photographers, with the support of Heritage and History. Along this process, the collection will generate a centre for documentation, information and reference, based in Rio de Janeiro.

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Protocol of foundation of the União on February 24th, 1937



Sisterhood ladies at the elderly home of the União, still at 92 Alice Street, knitting for the needy in Germany during the II World War, prob. 1942



Synagogue of the União at the new home at Santa Alexandria Street, Rio de Janeiro