



Casale Monferrato, population 36,058 in 2011, a town and commune in the Piedmont region of NW Italy, and part of the province of Alessandria, is situated about 60 km E of Turin on the right bank of the Po, where the river runs at the foot of the Montferrato hills. [Synagogue](#) .

Jewish Community Casale "YouTube" video produced by our community of Casale, on the occasion of European Day of Jewish Culture on 4 September 2011 [at bottom of page] [video](#) and community [website](#)

. We also invite you to join our network through Facebook. Source:

[Comunità Ebraica Casale](#)

. [October 2011]

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[Synagogues Without Jews](#) : photos "Amidst the castles, orchards and vineyards in the Piedmont region of Italy, towns such as **Casale Monferrato, Asti, Vercelli** and **Cuneo** contain exquisite and at times dazzling synagogues, empty, for the most part, of worshippers. Jews expelled during the years 1306 to 1394 from France moved steadily into the Piedmont region through the nearby alpine passes. In 1430, the Duke of Savoy tried to check the growing Jewish presence in his duchy by forbidding close proximity to Christians or the construction of new synagogues. Jews bore the burdens of extortionate taxation and the imposition of badges on their outer clothing. Expulsions from the towns and region were a recurring threat. For their part, although they wished to be rid of Jews, the rulers were obliged carefully to balance that desire against the benefits of Jewish commercial activity in their towns and the extortionate interest rates imposed by Christian Lombard bankers. This tension continued until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with its legal and civil emancipation of the Jews. In 1560, the functioning Casale

*kehillah*

received quasi-legal status in a charter of privileges from the Gonzaga Duke, Guglielmo, allowing Jews to engage in commerce, "to keep a synagogue, and to worship according to their customs and ceremonies." The synagogue was relocated to its present location, 44 Salomone Olper, expanded and completed in 1595. It was expanded in 1663 to accommodate the

*kehillah*

of 960 persons and expanded again from 1853 to 1866. Beginning in the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup>

century, Piedmont's Jews gained prominence in commerce and the crafts, notably in the textile industry. By the 18<sup>th</sup>

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century, they owned silk and cotton mills in Casale and elsewhere even as their political and legal status fell. The House of Savoy annexed the Monferrato district in 1724 and decreed the crowding of Jews into ghettos. Casale fell to the Revolutionary French Forces in 1799, to a great rejoicing among the Jews. They attained full civil rights in 1800, but lost them with the French defeat to Vittorio Emanuele I in 1814 and were returned to the ghettos. That ended a short period of religious and cultural revival.

With Rabbis' encouragement and bankers' support, Jews associated themselves with the budding *Risorgimento* movement. They shared the aspirations for a united Italy, liberated from the reactionary Austrian regime and the petty city tyrants. Significantly, the revolutionary movement was also opposed to anti-Semitism. Much of the political activity occurred in Piedmont. Under the pressure of protagonists for the Jewish cause, the King of Sardinia extended civil rights to Jews and other non-Catholics. The Casale

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commemorated these political gains by affixing two gold inscriptions commemorating the "Statuo Albertino" by King Carlo Alberto on March 29, 1848 and the National Parliament on June 9, the 332<sup>nd</sup>

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anniversary of the establishment of the world's first ghetto in Venice. When the King opened the ghetto's gate that day for the last time and lifted all legal discrimination, he promised "to remove all earlier interdictions, granting freedom to all the Jews in the sub-Alpine, Piedmont Kingdom, that they should forget the injustices and pain of former edicts and become free men in their homeland. In their love for her shall they ever prosper." The Jews celebrated by building grand synagogues, such as in Turin, and in extensive renovations of the older synagogues in Asti, Cuneo and Casale Monferrato, the Jewish intellectual center of the north. Nevertheless, the Jewish communities paid a hidden but heavy price for freedom. Within a generation of the emancipation, assimilation made devastating inroads. The

*kehillah*

in Casale declined from a high of 869 persons in 1839 to a pre-World War II count of 160.

Despite the support of Piedmont Jewry for the nascent Fascist party, the Fascists actively

promoted anti-Semitism and the destruction of Italian Jewry. Fewer than half of the pre-war 4,000 Piedmont Jews survived the racial laws, transports and battles of the 1940's. The Casale synagogue was ransacked; many ceremonial silver objects were stolen and never recovered. Adriana Ottolenghi one of the leaders of the small but devoted *kehillah* recalls: "In the last decades before the war, most of the Jews were merchants. On the High Holidays, the majority of the stores on the main street were closed. Now we open the synagogue to serve tourists and our few members only once a year, on Yom Kippur." Jews of northern Italy and those formerly of Casale, rabbis from Milan, Genoa, Turin and Trieste and local clergy and town officials---all were among nearly 500 guests at the 400

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anniversary celebration of the Casale synagogue on Sukkot 5755, (1995). The weeklong festivities included a regal dinner, conferences and a concert of Sephardic Jewish music from ancient, pre-expulsion traditions." [February 2009]

CEMETERY: [via Cardinal Massla](#) dates from 1732 with about 200 burials.

CEMETERY: [via Francesco Negri 10](#) dates from 1904.