Central Consistory of The Jews of France

(Consistoire Central des Israelites de France), representative body of French Jewry, established in 1808, which was historically responsible for Jewish religious life in France.

When Germany occupied France in mid-1940, the Consistoire moved its headquarters from Paris to Lyons, in the unoccupied zone. At first, the Consistoire leadership counseled French Jewry to cooperate with the anti-Jewish restrictions set in place by the Vichy government, in order to preserve their dignity. At the same time, the Consistoire protested the racial laws, and opposed the establishment of the Union of French Jews, an organization set up by the Vichy government to represent French Jewry.

The Consistoire was not dissolved by the Vichy authorities; throughout the war it kept its synagogues open and promoted welfare activities. In October 1943, when the SS intensified its campaign to deport Jews from France, the Consistoire agreed to join forces with immigrant and Communist Jewish organizations in order to present a united front against the Nazis. In 1944 the Representative Council of French Jews was established, headed by Consistoire president, Leon Meiss. This new umbrella organization represented all of French Jewry until the liberation of France. (For more on Vichy, see also France.)