

# The Alsace-Lorraine Memorial in Schirmeck



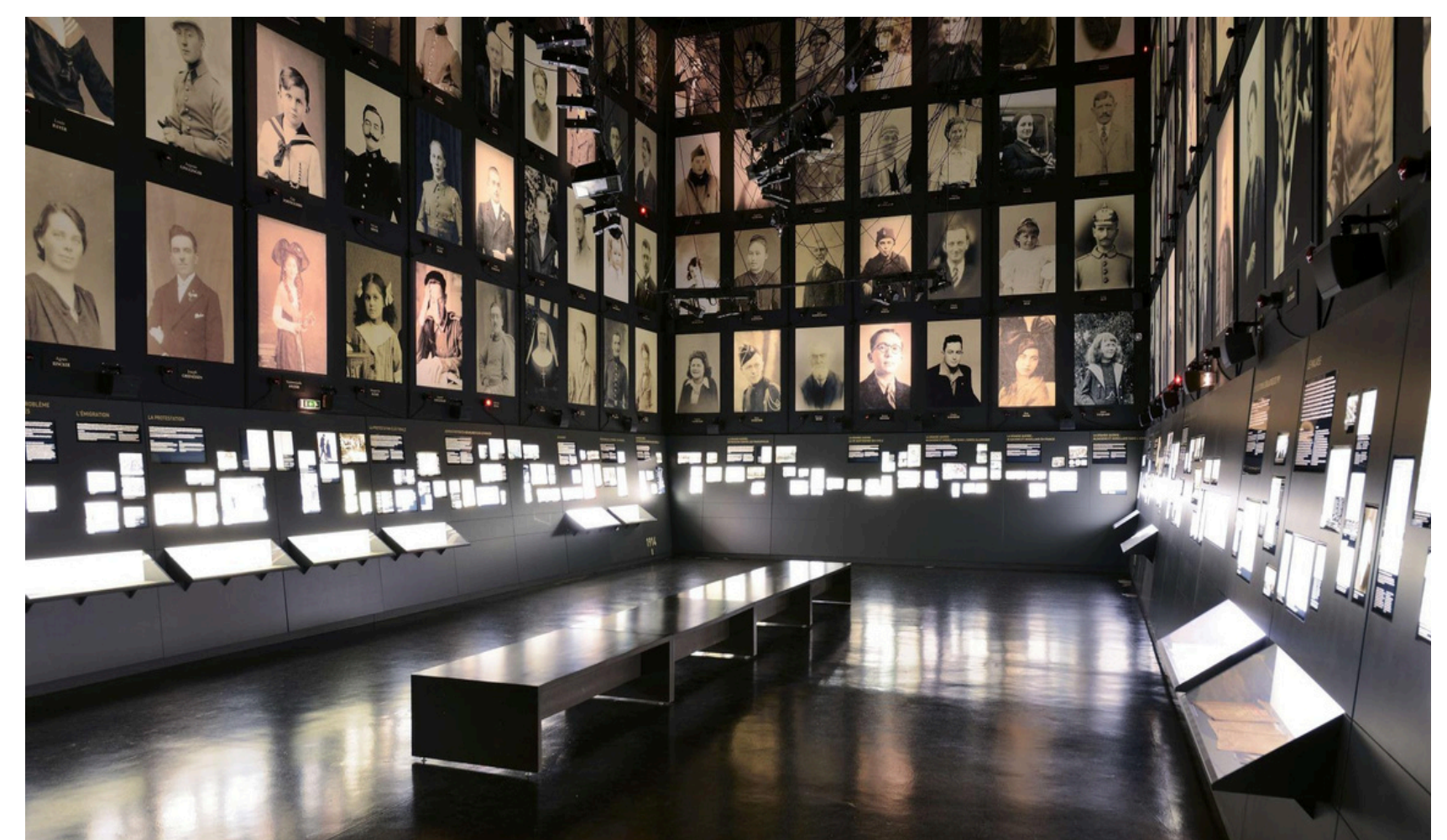
In Schirmeck, a small village in Alsace, stands the Memorial of Alsace-Moselle, which was opened on June 18, 2005, by French President Jacques Chirac. This Memorial was created as a place of memory and learning. It has two main goals: to explain the complex and sometimes painful history of the region, and to honor the people who lived through it. The choice of Schirmeck is not random, because the Memorial is located on a hill facing the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. The architect, Jean-Michel Wilmotte, designed a simple and serious building using raw materials like concrete, glass, and steel. This style reflects the importance of the subject without being too heavy. Inside the Memorial, visitors go on a dynamic journey through history, with recreated period settings, sound effects, archive documents, and video testimonies.

Les Alsaciens et Mosellans ont changé 4 fois de nationalité entre 1871 et 1945. Par une scénographie immersive, le Mémorial Alsace-Moselle dévoile l'histoire de ces territoires et de ses habitants, de 1870 à nos jours.



## The Portrait Room

In a darkened room, dozens of anonymous faces are shown on the walls. They are Alsatian and Mosellan people who lived between 1870 and 1945. They remind us of the difficult history endured by the inhabitants—the separated families, the resisters, and the "Malgré-nous", who were forcibly conscripted into the German army. Small red lights are lit throughout the week next to the faces of these women, men, and children, serving as a solemn tribute to their memory and a reminder never to forget their suffering. In this room, panels and archival documents outline the region's timeline during this period, highlighting the several political changes people experienced. The people of Alsace and Moselle changed nationality four times between 1871 and 1945. Through an immersive exhibition, the Alsace-Moselle Memorial tells the history of these regions and their people, from 1870 to the present day.



## The station platform

This room perfectly recreates the atmosphere of a train station at the end of the 19th century. This room, with its life-size passenger wagons, shows the choice imposed on the inhabitants after the Franco-Prussian war: stay at home but become German, or leave and keep French nationality. This was not a simple administrative choice, but a real uprooting. Whole families were divided, some choosing fidelity to France, others adaptation, by constraint or pragmatism, to the new power. We can also recall the fate of Alfred Dreyfus's family. He was born in Mulhouse into a perfectly French Jewish family who chose to stay French and thus decided to flee Alsace.



## The Alsatian Street During the Second World War

In 1940, Alsace-Moselle was annexed by Nazi Germany. A reconstruction of an Alsatian street shows the brutal changes. The lights become harder, the settings colder. We enter in a space that shows the harshness of the new conditions of life for Alsatians: schools impose the German language, portraits of Hitler have become obligatory in administrations and public places. The whole of the public space is Germanized, as shown by the wall with street name plaques: the Rue de la République becomes Reichsstraße, for instance. On the ceiling, tricolor flags are replaced by Nazi flags...

The urban landscape changes to impose a new identity, even on daily landmarks.

But the resistance is there, in all its forms. By refusing to speak German, by clandestine networks, by posters pasted in haste or by simple gestures.

The Memorial helps us understand the difficulty of life under German occupation, between acceptance, submission and refusal.



Among the many fates told by the Alsace-Moselle Memorial, the one of Alfred Dreyfus's family is particularly emblematic of the painful choices imposed after the annexation of 1871. Like thousands of Alsatians and Mosellans, the Dreyfus family had to decide between staying in Mulhouse, now German, or leaving to keep their French nationality. Most chose exile, leaving their homeland in fidelity to France, but one of Alfred's brothers decided to stay in Mulhouse to preserve the family company, thus accepting, in spite of himself, to become a German subject. This intimate dilemma, this fracture at the very heart of families, deeply resonates with the memory that the Memorial carries: that one of men and women confronted with impossible decisions, often in pain and silence. Through the Dreyfus story, it's the entire complexity of Alsatian and Mosellan identities that the museum highlights, between national fidelity, family attachment and forced pragmatism.