

## **“A Synagogue before the synagogues : 12, rue du Cloître de la Barge, 1935-1968”**

A presentation by David L. Rosenberg, originally in French, under the auspices of the Société des Antiquaires de Picardie at the Société d’Horticulture, 58 rue le-Nôtre, Amiens, October 21, 2017

Physical structures are important bearers of meaning and memory. Once they are gone, there is a danger that knowledge about their history may be lost. Ruins, even if they are only ruins, continue to inspire curiosity.

Once upon a time, a synagogue stood at number 12, rue du Cloître de la Barge. It had a handsome façade of sculpted stone and the inscription “Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself” Originally an apartment building owned by the Dreyfus family, it had been remodeled inside and out by architects from Paris. The apartments on the second and third floor continued in use even as the synagogue served as a new focus for Jewish life in the city of Amiens and the Department of the Somme. Funds for remodeling had been raised from the community and an appeal had gone out to other Jewish communities in France.

The inauguration took place on November 3, 1935, in the presence of the Grand Rabbi of France and dignitaries representing other faiths, as well as the leaders of civil and military administration in the department. Jean Moulin, then secretary general of the prefecture, was present. A photograph shows him in the front row with his characteristic fedora.

What do we know about the life that went on within the synagogue? Articles published in the journal *l’Univers Israelite* and filed by Mr. Staal, secretary of the congregation, allow us to look in from time to time:

It is one week after the inauguration on the 17th Anniversary of the Armistice ending the First World War. The interior of the synagogue is decorated in blue, white and red. The President of the congregation, Mr. Louria, and members of the board, a number of whom are veterans themselves, welcome delegations from various veterans organizations. Following the prayer service, Rabbi Fuchs intones a “magnificent patriotic sermon.”

In December 1935, the holiday of Hanukah recalls the victory of the Jewish

revolt against the Hasmonaeans in the 2nd century B.C. E. The Maccabees found the Temple defiled, in their eyes, by practices associated with Hellenistic culture, and they cleansed and purified it by the light of oil lamps, which burned miraculously long. Between the afternoon and evening services, as night falls in Amiens, Robert Lehr, son of the congregation's treasurer recites the blessing over the candles, and the children from the religious school sing songs of celebration in Hebrew and French. Rabbi Apeloig offers a sermon. A buffet meal has been provided by the wives of the board members.

In the summer of 1936, another event worthy of note: on one and the same day, five young men from the congregation celebrate their bar-mitzvah, each reading a portion from the Torah, in impeccable fashion, Mr. Staal insists. Purim celebrates Jewish survival in the face of an ancient genocidal plot. In January 1937, after the story of the holiday is told, Jacques Levine and Jeanine Cario interpret a scene from *L'Ecole de Femmes* of Moliere; the cantor, accompanied on the piano by Mlle Andrée Cario, performs an aria from *Tannhauser*; and the children's choir sings *Hatikvah*, the song of hope for a Jewish homeland, as the audience stands.

Looking back we can see that few if any of the men and women who created the synagogue had been born in Amiens. Some were born in Paris or traditional centers of Jewish life like Alsace and Lorraine; but most of the synagogue's founding generation were immigrants, naturalized by virtue of military service or otherwise. They came from Algeria, Palestine, Poland, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, and the Soviet Union. In their mixture of devotion to the Jewish tradition and the Hebrew language and their patriotism and openness to French culture we see poignantly their determination to straddle two millennial traditions to make a home for themselves and their children. Of course, not all of the persons who later were identified as Jews, belonged to the synagogue. Some remained voluntarily outside the cultic community, although in the end their fates were intermingled.

Within the growing community, an awareness of and alarm at events happening in the world was also expressed. Even before the inauguration of the synagogue, the founders issued a statement deploring Hitler's rise to power. It was only a matter of time before they were confronted with Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria in their midst. The aid that the refugees required was channeled through a philanthropic committee established

almost simultaneously with the creation of the congregational association and headed by the clothing manufacturer André Daniel.

War and occupation disrupted life in the department on a colossal scale. When the mobilization and then the Armistice occurred a number of Jews from Amiens or their sons were in service in the French armed forces, some being noted as prisoners of war. For the Jews of Amiens and the small numbers in outlying towns like Abbeville, Peronne, Albert, Mers-les-Bains, Cayeux, and Ault, challenges were posed on multiple levels. Members of the Jewish community in Amiens were among the tens of thousands abandoning homes and businesses and taking to the roads and highways as the center of the city was practically totally destroyed in the bombardments of May 18-20, 1940. Some who left decided not to return. Some returned and tried to restart businesses, but the regime was in the process of removing all economic activities from Jewish ownership. The survival rate for those who went south and remained there during the war was far higher than for those Jews who returned or never left.

The sounds of the bombardment were like an ominous drum roll portending tragedy for the Jews of Amiens and the Somme. French anti-Semitism had its own roots, but German legislation was obsessed with the Jews. Within months of the Armistice, in September 1940, an ordinance requiring all Jews in the department to register at the commissariat of police or the sub-prefectures was published in the Progrès de la Somme, the Journal d'Amiens, and other papers and signified to the leaders of the community. From that time forward, the listing, fingerprinting, registering, and tracking of Jews absorbed an enormous amount of bureaucratic energy for French officialdom (the Germans could not have enforced this policy themselves). At a time when the city had been destroyed and a massive project of reconstruction needed to be undertaken, a bizarrely large amount of time and paper was devoted to depriving a relatively small number of Jewish business owners and homeowners of their property.

With these things in mind let us return for a moment to the synagogue. It is often remarked (though the reasons are debated) that the magnificent Cathedral of Notre Dame survived the bombing. Buildings in some streets south of the Cathedral in the rue Porion or in the rue du Cloître de la Barge, including number 12, also survived.

What was the fate of the synagogue and those associated with it during the

Occupation? Services of course were ended. Leon Louria or others must have taken upon themselves responsibility for removing the holy torah scrolls, for they were later brought out of hiding after the Liberation. Several of the pre-bombardment tenants continued to live in the apartments on the second and third floors. There were two sisters from a family of Polish Jews, Chana and Therese Grinfeder, aged 24 and 20 respectively. In September and early October 1940, when Jews were required to register, the sisters went to the police station and signed the book which indicated their date and place of birth and their length of residence in France. Their address was given as 12 rue du Cloître de la Barge

On the ground floor, however, where religious services had previously been held, something occurred which must have caused the Jewish community heartache and anger: Members of the local PPF, the Parti Populaire Français, a French fascist organization, took possession of the premises and began using it as their local headquarters. As squatters, they occupied the rez de chaussée (ground floor) at least through April 1942.

They were only dislodged, it appears, after the authorities, resolving some legal scruples to their satisfaction, decided that the synagogue building, despite being a lieu de culte (place of worship), could be “aryanized,” that is put up for compulsory sale to a non-Jewish owner. A provisional administrator, Mr. Henry Flet, was appointed in February 1942 to execute the sale. Mr. Louria, President of the religious association, which rented the ground floor from the Société Dreyfus, of course, objected to the project, but his wishes were not respected.

In order to put the building up for sale, the PPF had to be made to vacate. The party members claimed to have spent 2,000 francs of their own money to fix up the ground floor, which they had illegally occupied, and the authorities decided to pay them this amount in order to get them to leave. The troublesome Mr. Louria was conveniently removed as a thorn in Mr. Flet’s side, when Louria was arrested in the rue du l’Amiral Courbet in June 1942 and sentenced to two years of administrative detention in the citadel of Doullens for failing to wear his yellow star in the prescribed manner.

Despite these developments, the synagogue building was not immediately advertised for sale. Instead it was placed under requisition. The Police had been looking around for a larger facility to consolidate their various departments. The French authorities were planning to buy the synagogue

along with some adjacent land, tear it down and construct the new police center. But this plan ultimately fell through.

In the spring of 1942, while the authorities and interested persons were contemplating how to make use of or turn a profit from the synagogue building, a twenty year old University student from Amiens, decided to sketch the abandoned building. In her memoir, *Les hortillonnages sous la grêle: histoire d'une famille juive sous l'Occupation*, published in 1982, the late Ginette Hirtz Schulhof recalled the circumstances of her action:

*“My brother Claude did not have a bar-mitzvah, I knew nothing of the synagogue, up until a day in Spring, 1942 when I undertook in the street to make a sketch of it, already as a kind of witness, and because the Nazis were trumpeting its impending destruction. Pencil in hand, I took in every detail of its façade, my star on the left side of my jacket “of the size of a hand, yellow bordered with black,” bearing the inscription JEW.” It was a dangerous almost derisory exercise, but for me it seemed to fulfill a duty and also to constitute a solitary demonstration. Passersby showed no interest. With rare exceptions, this widespread indifference prevailed when we were being rounded up, and some even took advantage of the situation to pillage and steal.”* *Mercure de France*, 1982, p. 23.

The Grinfeder sisters had long since abandoned the first floor apartment above the synagogue – no doubt the presence of the PPF was determinative. The sisters may have lived for a short time with relatives in the rue Porion before leaving the city entirely. However, flight did them no good. Both were subsequently arrested, most probably in Paris, and sent from Pithiviers in one case and from Drancy in the other to Auschwitz in separate convoys, three months apart, in June and September 1942.

After the failure of the police center plan, the authorities returned in 1944 to the idea of an outright sale of the building. In March, for the time being, a furniture merchant, Mr. Lefroid, was allowed to occupy the synagogue and store his wares. This was two months after thirty or more Jews from Amiens and the Somme, including Mr. Louria, and Ginette Schulhof's parents and grandmother and young boy adopted by the family, had been rounded up and sent to Drancy and on to Auschwitz. Mr. Flet was superseded as provisional administrator of the building by Mr. Rempler of Paris. The building was advertised for sale in the newspapers, but the Director of Economic Aryanization in Paris, felt that the time between the deadline for submission of sealed bids (August 17), and the proposed date to open the bids (August 24) was too short given the unreliability of the mail and uncertainty of

communications.

The unreliability of communications may have been intensified by the landing of the allies on the beaches of Normandy in June 1944 and their sweep inland. The question of the sale of the synagogue building became a dead issue only days after the bids were to be opened, when, on August 31, British forces entered and helped liberate Amiens.

And here we have an interesting and unusual story, which is now documented on the website of the Departmental Archives of the Somme. Lt. Raymond Goldwater, a Jewish chaplain attached to the British Army, wrote a number of letters home, mostly to his brother Stanley in England, describing his experiences as part of the expeditionary force. In Amiens, as he writes to his brother in September, he helped reinstitute and lead services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The services were attended by a half dozen members of the Jewish community who had somehow survived the roundups along with Jewish soldiers in the British army. The survivors wept, Goldwater writes, and when he explained that this was the first service held in the synagogue in more than four years, the British soldiers wept as well. The synagogue apparently functioned from that time on as the cultic center and community center, which it was before the war. For a time, Jacques (Isaac) Louria stepped into the role of his martyred father Leon and tried to get the authorities to speed up the process of returning despoiled Jewish properties to the survivors or their heirs. Lucien Aaron, taken in the roundup of January 1944, but saved from deportation, compiled a list, to be found in the Archives of the synagogue, of those who had died in deportation to the camps. Based on this list, a memorial tablet, which also contained ashes taken from Auschwitz, was placed in the synagogue in a ceremony held in June 1947. The tablet was later transferred to the synagogue of the Port d'Amont and has now been placed in the new synagogue (synagogue III), which will be dedicated tomorrow.

In the two decades following the war, the congregational association was headed first by Simon Lehr, one-time Treasurer, who had been present at the dedication in 1935, and then by Mr. André Levy. Services were now oftener attended by newcomers from Algeria and Tunisia, Sephardic, rather than Ashkenazi Jews. Antisemitism continued to rear its ugly head as graffiti were sprawled across the façade of the building in 1967 at the time of the Six Day War. Shortly after, Jews were the target of a craziness which resembled the blood libels of the Middle Ages – the so-called Rumeur of

Amiens, according to which Jewish merchants were abducting Christian women and selling them into slavery after first making them disappear in the dressing rooms of their stores. Was this, one wonders, a kind of projection onto Jewish store owners of crimes committed against Jews and their businesses during the Occupation?

In around 1968, the synagogue building at 12, rue du Cloître de la Barge, was razed, along with other buildings on the block to make way for a development project. A second synagogue was inaugurated at the Port d'Amont in that year. Tomorrow, October 22, 2017, yet a third synagogue, a new one, will be inaugurated just down the street from synagogue II, and the latter will in turn be demolished for a development project.

However, also tomorrow afternoon, Mayor Brigitte Fouré, on behalf the city of Amiens and Dr. Guy Zarka on behalf of the ACIS, will dedicate a plaque attesting to the significance of the synagogue that once stood at 12, rue du Cloître de la Barge. Ms. Sophie-Laure Zana excellently devised the inscription. The attainment of this plaque was one of the main objectives in the formation of the Association Presence Juive dans la Somme in 2011. Thanks to Mme Fouré's leadership, this goal has now been attained.

After expressing my deep appreciation to the Société des Antiquaires de Picardie and particularly to Mme Kristiane Lemé and Louise Dessaigne-Audelin and also to Messrs. Pascal Montaubin, Aurelien André, and Dr. Alain Carlier of the Society, and my great debt to Mr. Olivier de Solan, for support over the years and in regard to this text, I wish to conclude my presentation with a series of images of the Jews of the Somme in 1942. I discovered these images on microfilm at the Memorial of the Shoah this past summer and was astonished because for many of the individuals, notwithstanding much research, I or we had never seen their faces. It is important to recognize that these were real people and in that spirit I would like to briefly show these images – the photos were attached to fiches maintained by the police and the sub-prefectures and sent to the prefecture as one of a seeming endless succession of lists designed to keep track of the Jews. Some of the fiches still bear the marks of updating in terms like “interned“ or “disappeared,” scrawled diagonally across the pages. I will point out as appropriate individuals with connections to the synagogue.

The proposed inscription for the plaque devised by Sophie-Laure Zana:

« Au n°12 de cette rue se tenait la Synagogue d'Amiens, inaugurée par Jean Moulin en 1935, spoliée et profanée de 1940 à 1944. A la mémoire des Juifs français ou réfugiés de la Somme qui fuirent la ville et à ceux qui, raflés et déportés entre 1942 et 1944, furent assassinés à Auschwitz parce que nés Juifs. Ne les oublions jamais.

Note: The actual inscription on the plaque that was dedicated on October 22, 2017, condensed somewhat the above text.