

# Memorializing in Amiens

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For years, I have been going to Amiens, France, to do historical research. The research has focused on the Protestant movement in the city in the 16th and 17th century.

Last summer, however, I found myself deeply involved in a different project as part of an informal collaborative working on ways to memorialize the Jews of Amiens who were deported during the Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1944.

The collaboration consists primarily of Dr. Guy Zarka, president of the Jewish Community of Amiens, and Cecile Marseille, a municipal councilor in the city, charged with liaising with veterans groups and organizations representing victims of World War II.

Marseille's activity brought her into contact with a survivor of the Shoa at Amiens, a retired academic named Ginette Schulhof whose memoir of Jewish life in Amiens and the deportation of her parents, grandmother and adopted brother remains the best account on the local level of these tragic events.

Marseille decided to create a memorial to Ginette Schulhof's parents and other Jews who were caught in the Gestapo roundup of Jan. 4, 1944, and who were killed at Auschwitz. Her efforts bore fruit in the designation in Amiens of a square in memory of the roundup, and in the dedication of a memorial plaque listing some 20 victims.

Before I arrived in Amiens in the summer of 2011, I read about the square and the plaque and was moved to see that efforts were being made to fill the void of memory that existed in the town concerning this chapter of its history.

However, when I arrived in Amiens in July 2011 and saw the plaque and the square in memory of the roundup, I was disappointed. The square was really on the outskirts of town in an area that wouldn't bear much tourist or even normal pedestrian traffic, and the plaque itself was a rather unprepossessing sort of monument, a laminated rectangle stuck on top of a small, curved blue metal pipe.

Moreover, there were factual errors in the text of the plaque both in regard to the introduction and in regard to the list of names themselves. Of the 20 named individuals who were said to have been deported to Auschwitz on Convoy 66 from Drancy, one in fact was rescued at the Amiens train station, two others were sent to local hospitals, four were released because they were married to non-Jews, one was deported with another convoy and one returned from the camps. Hence, the description, "arrested, deported on Convoy 66 and lost in Auschwitz," proves fully accurate for only 12 of the 20 people listed on the plaque.

Aware of these discrepancies and curious as to the peripheral location of the memorial, I interviewed Marseille. She was already aware of some of the problems. With the input of Giselle Cozette, head of an organization dedicated to the memory of the French Resistance, it was decided to hold a meeting at City Hall to see if we could address some of the problems. There I met Zarka and other Jews and non-Jews interested in this issue.

Out of our collaboration emerged the suggestion, which I was the first to put forward, that the city consider erecting a historical marker on or near the site of the now vanished World War II-era synagogue. This synagogue had been in the center of Amiens, and a marker there could highlight the Jewish presence in and contributions to the city. As such, it could be a means of educating citizens and tourists alike.

Thanks to the persistent efforts of Zarka, the support of Marseille and the municipality of Amiens, funds were allocated to support this concept. Other aspects of the planned project include a daylong conference on the Jews of

the Somme, in cooperation with the University of Picardy, on the day the marker is scheduled to be dedicated (as of now in June 2013), the formation of an archival collection of relevant material, and the creation of a website (these latter two activities under the auspices of the Departmental Archives of the Somme).

A few months ago, Zarka forwarded an email he had received from a British woman, Sara Pittack, nee Goldwater, whose uncle, Raymond Goldwater, had been an officer of the British forces that liberated Amiens in the summer of 1944. Finding the synagogue premises being used for a furniture store, Raymond Goldwater contacted the few Jewish survivors in the city, recovered the Torah and other appurtenances, and organized High Holy Day services. In letters that Pittack made available to our project, her uncle described holding these services in the synagogue after a lengthy interruption: there were 10 or so survivors and 20 or so members of the British expeditionary force. The natives wept with joy, and when, according to Goldwater, he explained the background, tears filled the eyes of the British soldiers as well.

These letters about the life that once filled the vanished synagogue will be among the new materials placed in the Departmental Archives and incorporated into the planned website.

Though an American interloper, I am proud to have helped stimulate the local effort toward a more fitting remembrance of the Jews of Amiens. I hope also to continue my work on the persecuted Protestant minority of the 16th and 17th centuries.

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