

Rosenberg to speak at T.E. on research work in Amiens

August 16, 2013, 2:32 pm



David Rosenberg

Temple Emanuel of South Hills will offer a knight to remember this Selichot, 5774, as historian, Darfur activist and recently knighted David Rosenberg addresses the congregation.

Rosenberg will be speaking about his work preserving the history of the Jews of Amiens, France, many of whom were rounded up and deported to concentration camps during World War II.

For the last 40 years, Rosenberg, of Mt. Lebanon, has been researching the history of persecuted minorities of Amiens, a town about 90 miles north of Paris.

This summer, the French government acknowledged his efforts by conferring knighthood upon him, naming him Chevalier dans l'ordre des Arts et Lettres (Knight in the order of Arts and Letters).

"I was just incredulous," Rosenberg, a retired historical archivist from the University of Pittsburgh, said of the knighthood. "It's an honor. It came out of nowhere, but it came out of the work I've been doing, helping this city take stock of its minority history."

Rosenberg began his work in Amiens in the 1970s, researching the history of the Protestant movement there in the 16th century. Since 1978, he has published numerous scholarly works on that history.

But while he was ensconced in Protestant research work there in 1995, something caught Rosenberg's eye as he was attending High Holy Day services at the town's small synagogue: a memorial plaque on the wall dedicated to the

“deportees of the Jewish community.”

He didn't know the story behind the plaque, but he noted it in his journal.

Sixteen years later, he decided to “start poking around” and learn what happened to the Amiens Jews during World War II. He found out that on Jan. 4, 1944, they were victims of le rafle, one of several roundups aimed at reducing the Jewish population in occupied France.

Feeling the calling to preserve the stories of those Jews murdered as a result of le rafle, as well as the history of the once-vibrant Jewish community of Amiens, Rosenberg went to work.

He has spent the last few summers in Amiens gathering information about those Jews who used to live there, their community and their lives, assisting France's Archives of the Departement of the Somme in creating a website documenting their history.

Rosenberg is contacting the descendants of victims of le rafle and encouraging them to add whatever memorabilia they have to the Archives. Much of this information can be found on the website, which was launched last month.

“The idea is to make sure that people are aware there were Jews in the city,” he said. “Not just victims, but they lived there.”

Rosenberg has more work to do in tracking the story of the Jews of Amiens, and he hopes to receive financial support from the French government to help him continue his research.

His upcoming presentation of his research during Selichot at Temple Emanuel will serve as a “meaningful prelude to the High Holidays,” said its spiritual leader, Rabbi Mark Mahler.

“For decades now, the Selichot programs at Temple Emanuel have varied in theme,” Mahler said, but all have been “contemplative,” providing inspiration for the upcoming holidays.

“David's will be the perfect presentation for Selichot,” Mahler said.

While Selichot is traditionally a midnight service, the minchag (custom) at Temple Emanuel is to begin earlier in the evening.

The evening will begin 7:30 p.m. on Aug. 31, with a dessert reception, followed by the Selichot service at 8:15 p.m. Rosenberg's presentation will begin at 9 p.m.

(Toby Tabachnick can be reached at toby@thejewishchronicle.net.)

READ MORE:

- local