

Shining light on France's forgotten Shoah history: Amiens, 2017

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By **DAVID L. ROSENBERG**

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This year, there were two notable developments in my project to concretize the historical reality of the Shoah in a part of France where efforts to memorialize the fate of the Jews had previously been scant.

In July, at the Documentation Center of the Memorial of the Shoah in Paris, I discovered a roll of microfilm containing thumbnail portraits of 42 Jews from Amiens and the department of the Somme. The photos were taken in 1942 and affixed to government identification cards.

I had been researching these individuals for five years but had never encountered an image of many of them.

For the first time I saw the face of Leon Louria, founder and president of the synagogue association, who had been sentenced to two years imprisonment for failing to wear his yellow star in the prescribed fashion.

I saw the visages of the Polish-born Jews Sara Lewenberg and her husband Abraham, a barber. He had been arrested and deported in July 1942.

At the time, a merciful doctor certified Sara Lewenberg's need for medical care, but the authorities waited for her release from the hospital in Amiens, and she was taken to Drancy by train under armed police escort in October.

I discovered a picture of the young Ginette Schulhof, 19 at the time of the photo, about the moment she had braved retribution by publicly sketching the façade of the Amiens synagogue.

On Jan. 4, 1944, when her family was decimated, she was fortunate to escape with her younger sister and brother over the rooftops of Amiens.

I first met her in 2012 and was privileged to know her for the few years before her death in 2015.

A second development of significance occurred this summer.

I learned from Dr. Guy Zarka, current head of the Amiens Jewish community, that the city of Amiens had agreed to our proposal that a commemorative plaque be erected at the site of the World War II synagogue.

This building at 12 Rue du Cloître de la Barge had served the Jewish community of Amiens beginning in 1935, but had been razed in 1969 as part of a development project.

The synagogue was the product of a growing community, many of whose participants came to Amiens from other parts of France or other countries. The synagogue had been despoiled during the Occupation, though services were restored in the fall of 1944 following the liberation of the city by British and American troops.

Mayor Brigitte Fouré and the city of Amiens had agreed to unveil the plaque on the same day, Oct. 22, 2017, as a new synagogue, the third in the series, was being inaugurated at another location.

Having been instrumental in proposing the plaque for the synagogue and researching its history, I wanted to be present at the unveiling.

Friends at the local historical society — the Society of Antiquaries of Picardy — decided to organize a symposium on religious buildings in Amiens in the 20th century, and invited me to give a presentation on the history of the war-era synagogue the day before the unveiling. This seemed an excellent opportunity to contextualize the event.

The *Courrier Picard*, the regional newspaper, published a prominent article, which called attention to the upcoming symposium and explained its connection to the unveiling of the plaque.

On Sunday, Oct. 22, I stood alongside the mayor, the prefect of the Somme and Mme. Sophie-Laure Zana, a colleague who had proposed the language for the plaque, to offer remarks at the unveiling.

In my comments, I explained how the existence and location of the old synagogue had come as a surprise to me and other researchers when we learned about it in 2011.

We hoped that a plaque marking the emplacement of the synagogue, in the center of the city, would recall and inspire interest in the history of the building and the fate of the people for whom it was a focus of life and learning.

The plaque, in bronze raised letters at the end of a newly painted section of wall, reads, under a Star of David: “At number 12 of rue Cloître de la Barge stood the first synagogue of Amiens, inaugurated in 1935 by Jean Moulin, despoiled and desecrated between 1940 and 1944. To the memory of the Jews of France, rounded up and deported between 1942 and 1944, assassinated at Auschwitz because they were born Jews.

“Let us never forget them.” **PJC**

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