

The Synagogue in Bingen – Once More a Home for Jewish Life



**In November 2008 Jews founded in the historical rooms of the former synagogue of Bingen a house of learning. They meet for events with jewish themes and jewish festivals.
Jewish life in this building today wins over its destruction.**

The history of the synagogue



The synagogue after a postcard of the year 1905

Architect: Professor Ludwig Levy (Karlsruhe)

Architectural Style: Built in the spirit of the time in the style of Romanesque churches with five turrets made of Vosges sandstone. The building site, a vineyard, was bought by Vintner Feist for 40,000 Marks. The Jewish congregation decided that a new building was needed since the old synagogue on 2-4 Rheinstraße was in a state of disrepair.

Festive Inauguration on September 21, 1905. The officiating rabbi was Dr. Richard Grünfeld. The citizens of the town took an active interest in the inauguration: thus, for example, they flew flags all along Rochusstraße. Approximately 7% of the population was Jewish (more than 700 persons). There was room for about 400 persons in the synagogue. The Torah ark from the old synagogue was transferred to the new one. The City of Bingen donated 6000 Marks for the organ.

33 years of utilization as a synagogue by a thriving liberal congregation. In the right wing there were assembly rooms for the congregants.

Pogrom Night Nov. 9-10, 1938: National Socialists set fire to the synagogue. Rochusstraße was full of people in the afternoon. The fire brigade hosed the adjacent buildings to prevent them from catching fire. Neither the Jews nor their synagogue were protected. The exterior walls, the façade with the Tablets of the Law in Hebrew, guarded by two lions, as well as both side wings survived.

Forced Sale: In March 1939, the Bingen Vintners Association bought the entire plot for 12,000 Reichsmark. 10,000 Marks were charged to the Jewish

community, since it was supposed to pay for the required demolition. The building was no longer supposed to be recognizable as a synagogue. In 1960 it was sold to the District Vintners' Cooperative.

Ruin: for 32 years the former synagogue remained fenced off.

Utilization: For many years the Bingen Vintners Association ran a wine bar with dance music in the right wing of the building. The sign for the tavern was mounted next to the Hebrew Tablets of the Law.

Owners after 1945: All formerly Jewish-owned plots had to be returned to their rightful owners. The Mainz Jewish Community became the heir at law of the Bingen Jewish Community. The city urged the Mainz Jewish Community to clean up the compound.

Acquisition: In the beginning of 1961 the City of Bingen bought the entire compound for DM 2,000 from the Mainz Jewish Community which had in the meantime become very small. For another nine years the property became increasingly dilapidated.

1970: Demolition of the synagogue, the left wing and the portal. The city left only the right wing of the synagogue building in place. In place of the portal and the left wing of the synagogue an apartment building in the style of the seventies was put up. It was part of the zeitgeist not to confront the crimes of the National Socialists and to dispose of the past. The bottom line: the Nazis set fire to the synagogue, and the City of Bingen was responsible for the subsequent neglect as well as the demolition after 32 years.

Utilization and additional misuse of the remaining part of the building: The City established assembly rooms for the fire brigade on the ground floor and built a row of garages for the fire trucks in the back of the compound. On the first floor the rooms in which capitals and vaults were still extant were altered architecturally and later used as an apartment. On the second and third floors apartments were built.

On the exterior wall a picture of St. Florian, the patron saint of firefighters, was painted in folkloristic style. Depicted as a giant with blond locks, he is extinguishing a fire and carrying a banner on which the symbol of Christianity – a cross – is seen. This is an affront to Jews who have begun to assemble in the building again as well as to Jewish visitors coming from many parts the world.

Memorial plaque on the former synagogue since March 1983. The keynote speakers explicitly emphasized that the purpose of this plaque is to unsettle.

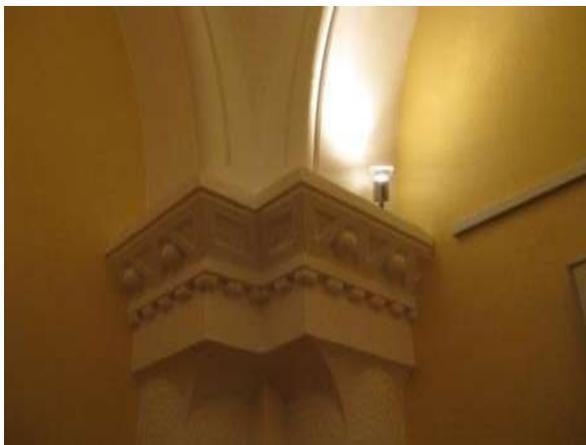
In the year 2000, Bingen citizen Isaac Botler, a former citizen of Brazil, brought up the idea of establishing a "Museum for the History of Jewish Bingen" in the former synagogue, and developed plans for the project. He was turned down by the AKJB.

A group of Jewish quota refugees (Dr. David Berlimble, Ludmila Kanapliova, Maya Rozenberg) tried in 2006 to acquire assembly rooms. The City referred them to the cultural center. At a planned event with a rabbi the group ended up out in the street.

Vacancy of the apartment on the first floor: On April 8, 2008 the last tenant passed away.

August 2000: the idea was born to redecorate the vacant apartment, in which capitals and vaults are still visible and which is of symbolic character for Jews. The aim was to make it usable multifunctionally as a place for getting together, for commemoration, workshops, exhibitions, celebrations and prayer for the Jewish citizens whose number has been increasing again since the nineties.

Letter to senior mayor Collin-Langen on September 18, 2008 about the matter.



Negative reply in the name of the municipality, along with the information that there were plans to redecorate the vacant apartment as office space for the fire brigade.

Establishment of “TIFTUF – Association for the Promotion of Jewish Life in Bingen Today” on December 14, 2008. Dr Menakhim Shterental, deputy chairman of the Jewish Community in Mainz, had advised the TIFTUF initiative to establish an association. The goal was to fill the dilapidated apartment on Rochusstraße with Jewish life again.

A signature campaign for TIFTUF’S initiative yielded 175 signatures which were presented to the municipality. Nevertheless, the request was turned down. Now haste was of the essence, before the City could create architectural facts on the ground.

Informing the citizens in press, TV and radio on December 30, 2008.

Second letter by TIFTUF to senior mayor Collin-Langen on January 3, 2009 with the request for a meeting.

Meeting with senior mayor Collin-Langen on January 9 to discuss the utilization of the historical building. TIFTUF agreed to the City’s suggestion to architecturally subdivide the building and leave part to the fire brigade for office space. Moreover, TIFTUF agreed to share the remaining smaller part with the “Association Jewish Bingen” (“Arbeitskreis jüdisches Bingen”, AJKB).

Second Discussion with representatives of the City of Bingen: on February 25, 2009, the City reaffirmed its readiness to convert the rooms into two apartments. The fire station received the two thirds in front; the back part with the remaining capitals and vaults was allocated to the associations TIFTUF and “Study Group Jewish Bingen”. The City covered the costs of the renovation.

Presentation of the renovated rooms by senior mayor Collin-Langen in the name of the City of Bingen on November 8, 2010. “We have learned something new”, she emphasized. For “TIFTUF – Association for the Promotion of Jewish Life in Bingen Today” it is especially meaningful to be able to get together for Jewish-themed events in the remaining historical tract.

First Jewish celebration in 73 years in the former synagogue: On December 5, 2010 TIFTUF celebrated Hanukkah in the newly renovated rooms and founded a house of learning. Due to the large number of members in attendance there was barely enough seating to accommodate everyone. On occasion of the

TIFTUF – Association for the Promotion of Jewish Life in Bingen today. Mail: TIFTUF@gmx.de, www.tiftuf.org

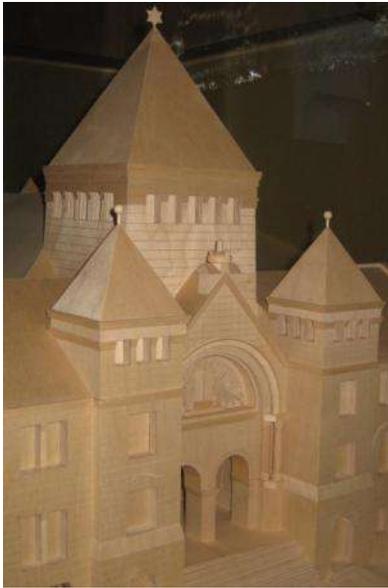
“Feast of the Rededication of the Temple”, which is another name for Hanukkah, Jewish life was given room in this building once again.



January 27, 2011, “Day of Liberation of Auschwitz and Memorial Day for the Victims of National Socialism”. TIFTUF projected a photograph of the former façade from 1905 onto the exterior wall of the building, which is becoming an annual tradition.



A model of the imposing former Bingen Synagogue was built by students of architecture from the Technische Universität Braunschweig. On occasion of the presentation of a copy of this model on January 28, 2006, Dr. Josef Götten said, "There is occasion to think about establishing a museum in the historical rooms". The "Association Jewish Bingen" gave the model a place of honor in its rooms. In addition, photos by Karl Berrenberg of the interior of the synagogue as well as the documentation of a deportation of Bingen Jews were put on display.



The great tower with the star of David



Members of TIFTUF mounting a mezuzah on the door post of the House of Study



The acquisition of a piano was very meaningful to TIFTUF members – now they can make music again in the building of the former synagogue



As a keepsake, TIFTUF mounted a large photo of **the Bingen Wedding Rock** from the 17th century, which today is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, in its place. At weddings, the bridegroom would break a glass on it. Thus, on the happy occasion of a wedding the destruction of the Temple is recalled.



Menorah by Liliana Rothschild at the TIFTUF House of Study.

Goal: The façade of 1905 should be painted on the exterior wall of the remaining part of the building. TIFTUF will promote this idea.

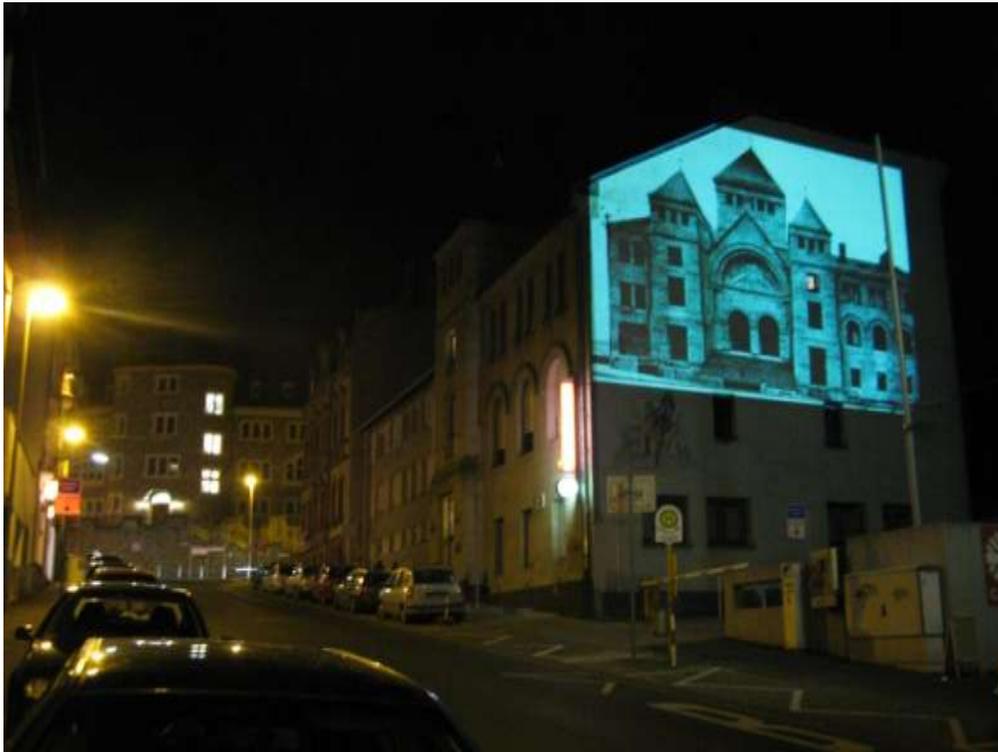


Photo: M. Berg

Text: Dorothea Dürsch, translation: Barbara Schmutzler, 2012

Additional information:

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