

The Jews in Jászberény

Jews could not settle in Jászberény for a long time. The article twenty-nine of the law of 1799 enabled Jews' housing throughout the country, but the Jász and the Greek merchants who lived here, resisted for years. They were allowed to settle down only from 1850. After the first "swallow" called Gábor Buck who was a merchant from Aszód, other Jewish families started coming, mainly from Aszód, Gyöngyös and Pécel. They were mostly engaged in trade and land lease, but there were also innkeeper and craftsmen among them. The Jewish community organized soon their institutions, in 1850 they required burial ground from the city council, one year later one of their teachers received settlement permit, in 1854 they also elected rabbi in the person of József Natonek. In the year of 1852, they already had a meeting house, which proved quickly small for the growing community. In 1870 413 Jews lived in Jászberény, and by 1880 their number had grown to 733.

In 1944, 100 of 627 citizens of Jewish descent in Jászberény served in the army as military forced laborer. On 13th of May 49 people from six villages in the region of Jászság were settled in the ghetto of Jászberény which stood in the area bounded by the (today known as) Dózsa György street - Zoltán street - Zirzen Janka street - Táncsics Mihály street - Bercsényi street. On 30th of June there were 494 people in the ghetto, they were transported to Monor and then to Auschwitz; the vast majority were lost.

After the Holocaust, the 1950s and 1960s brought the decline of the community in Jászberény – in 1949 it had 140 members - and finally the dissolution of it.

The Synagogue

In 1886, Schwarz Herman came up with the idea of building an independent synagogue, for this purpose the plots of the Jankovich and Beleznyay families were purchased on the corner of the current Dózsa György and Bercsényi street one year later. The plan of the building -prepared by engineer Károly Kovács -, was selected by a tendering. The construction works were awarded to the company Ursitz L. and Son. The costs were estimated at 25-26 thousand forints, the community started collecting, thus Jónás Moskovitz, the president of the community donated 500, Gábor Buck and Ignác Neuberger 200-200 forints. The City Council of Jászberény contributed an amount of 1,200 forints along with Albert Apponyi, the Member of Parliament from Jászberény, who contributed an amount of 50 forints to the construction costs. The seats of the church were also sold out in advance, the missing amount was provided by a loan from the People's Bank of Jászkerület.

The construction started in the winter of 1889-1890, due to the loose soil, an extraordinary foundation was required, so the plans were modified several times.

The synagogue was taken over by the community on 10 September 1890, on that occasion the Chief Rabbi of Szeged, Immánuel Lőw gave a solemn speech. In addition to city leaders, representatives of other denominations appeared at the ceremony. The dedicated house of worship was built in Moorish-style with a long nave interior, the main facade was symmetrical, with two spherical domes. The capacity of the synagogue could have been about 5-600 people. In 1912, the house of worship had grown by an organ, moreover, a choir was formed in it. In 1922, a memorial plaque with the list of Jewish victims of World War I was donated to the Synagogue, in 1947 more memorial plaques, containing the names of the victims of the Holocaust in Jászberény were placed in the building.

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After the Holocaust, the 1950s and 1960s brought the decline of the community in Jászberény – in 1949 it had 140 members - and finally, the dissolution of it. The Synagogue had been increasingly neglected and due to this fact, in 1965 it was sold to the City Council for 325 thousand forints, with the request to use the building for cultural purposes. In 1967, the memorial plaques were placed in the Jewish cemetery. In 1968 the Synagogue was demolished, and the building of the city library was erected on its site in 1970. According to the plans of László Sáros this building was rebuilt in 2005, whose architectural elements evoke permanently the former synagogue.

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