

Cultural Community after the Holocaust

Dear Mr. Hirschfeld,

I am able to inform you that the Housing Committee in its meeting on the 13th of the month granted your application and has given consent to the Jewish Community's having one room for an office and a second room for services in the house at No.9 Laerstrasse.

By Proxy

Wittler

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Renaissance of Bielefeld Jewish Community

Mr Max Hirschfeld, President of the Bielefeld Jewish Community, a man prematurely old and racked by three years of horror in Therisienstadt, gave the opening address. He outlined the history of the Bielefeld Synagogue from its inception in the early part of the 14th century to the erection in 1906 of the beautiful edifice in the Turnerstraße.

With tears in his eyes, he described the happenings of 9th November 1938, when Nazi vandals razed the Synagogue to the ground. Out of a total of 1100 members of the community in 1936 (a number which has nowhere been proven) it had now been officially established that that 400 had perished in the concentration camps at Auschwitz, Belsen and other places. "Their memory lives on", said Hirschfeld, "we are ever mindful of them, and the new Bielefeld Synagogue, by unanimous desire, is dedicated as a permanent memorial to our loved ones: men, women and children who have passed on, never to return."

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A New Beginning after Year of Hatred

Dedication of a Prayer Room in the Cultural Center

Westfalen Newspaper, 17th September 1951

With the dedication yesterday of the prayer room on the corner of Stapenhorst and Bismarck Street, the Jewish Cultural Center in Bielefeld established for the fourth time a new site for religious services. The present hall, on the first floor of this newly acquired house, which on the upper floors has apartments, built by architect Wiethüchter Jun., Qualified Engineer, has room for almost one hundred people. The unassuming wall decoration and the lead mounted, partly colored, windowpanes give it a ceremonious look.

At the beginning of the ceremony, framed by the sounds of the harmonium, the chairman of the cultural center, Max Hirschfeld, greeted the numerous guests of honor. Then he stressed that the joyful occasion was mixed with sorrow at the same time, since today the community numbers only 61 souls.

In ceremonial procession, the Torah scrolls were carried through the room and dedicated by Rabbi Levinsohn (Berlin). After the velvet curtain covered the Holy Ark, the guests of honor of the cultural center conveyed their good wishes.

Rabbi Levinsohn spoke in his sermon with deep moral earnestness about the high purpose that has been given to the Jewish people as mediators of brotherly peace between the nations.

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As a friend and Neighbor/Fellow Human Being

On the death of Max Hirschfeld

Westfalen Newspaper, January 1958

On the death of Max Hirschfeld, the first chairman of the Jewish Cultural Community in Bielefeld, D. Wilm, president of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia, expressed his heartfelt condolences at the same time in the name of the church chairmanship to the board of management of the community.

In his letter of condolence, the President considered the deceased with admiration and expressed his particular thanks for the fact “that Max Hirschfeld had worked together on the board of management of the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation with quiet loyalty and without bitterness in spite of everything that had been done to him and his brothers, and had met with us as a friend and fellow human being.

The longstanding chairman of the Jewish cultural community in Bielefeld had held his post up to his 80th birthday in September of the previous year. A few months before, the mayor had bestowed on him the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in a presentation ceremony in the assembly hall of the Town Hall.

The Federal Republic thanked the 80-year-old with this for his loyal and humane attitude after the war, when he spoke up for an understanding coexistence with those of other faiths in a Christian-Jewish society, in spite of the gravity of what he had experienced during the war years.

On Monday at 11 o'clock, he was laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery next to the Johannis cemetery. Dr. Holzer, the provincial rabbi, dedicated some moving words of farewell. Mr. Schwarz, the chairman of the cultural community, and Mr. Heimberg from the Regional Association of Synagogues, referred to the longstanding good cooperation with their friend Max Hirschfeld. Pastor Deppe saluted the departed man as a noble person, who had looked for and found human contact with those of other faiths above the bond of religious creed.

BIELEFELD,

city in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

Jews there were massacred during the *Black Death*, 1348–49. In 1370 a few Jews again settled in **Bielefeld**. The prohibition of 1554 on Jewish residence in the duchy of Juelich also applied to **Bielefeld**, but Jews resettled there in 1586. Their main occupations were commerce and moneylending.

Jews from **Bielefeld** attended the fairs at Leipzig at the beginning of the 18th century. The cemetery continued in use from 1665, until a new one was opened in 1891. In 1905 a synagogue to seat 800 was consecrated. The Jewish population numbered 65 in 1783 and 800 in 1933.

On Nov. 10, 1938, the synagogue was burned down. At least 500 members of the community perished during the Holocaust.

Only 12 survivors returned to **Bielefeld** after the war. A few Jews settled there from other places, and there were 66 Jews living in **Bielefeld** in 1955. A new synagogue was inaugurated in 1951. The Jewish community numbered 23 members in 1989 and 193 in 2003.

Encyclopaedia Judaica