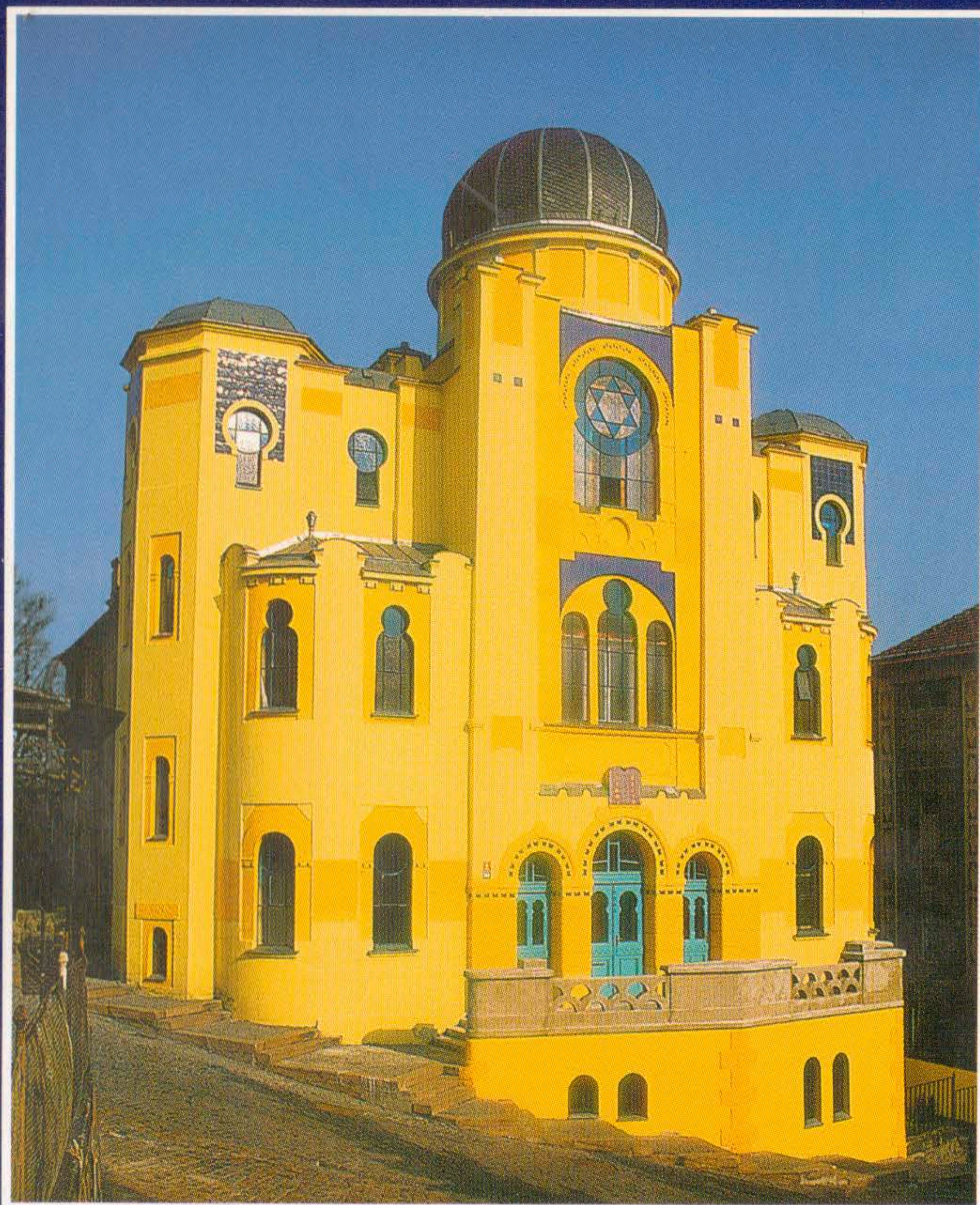




# The Synagogue

in Decin



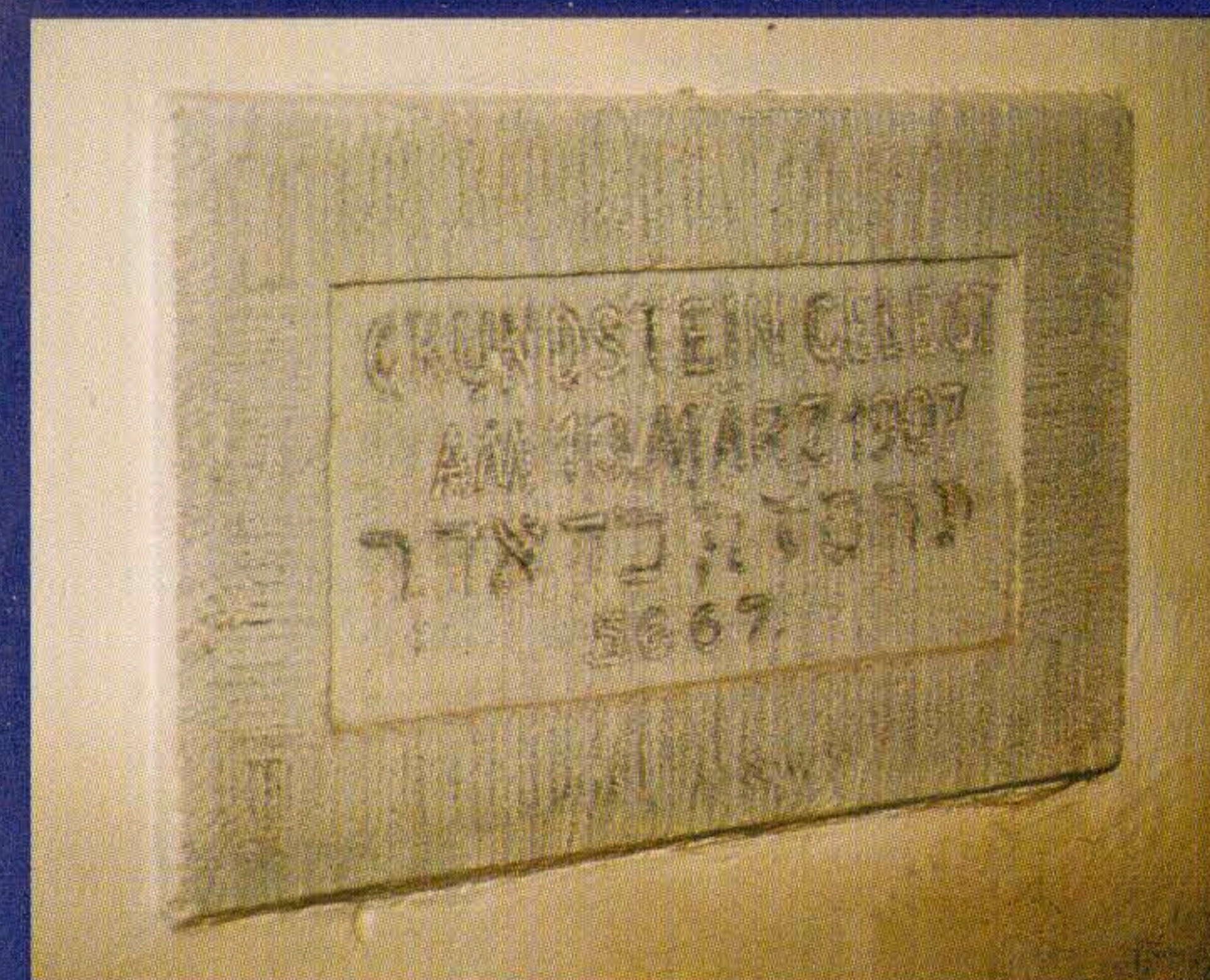


The synagogue - since time immemorial the place of common service of God and at the same time the place of simple human meetings, a natural centre, the seat and undoubtedly the symbol of the respective Jewish community. The Děčín synagogue forms not only a dominant of its close neighbourhood which is not easy to be overlooked but it also attracts views even from the distant centre of the town because of its location on the sloping ground at the foot of the Pastoral Rock. It represents an isolated monument of its kind in the frontier area of northern Bohemia in view of the events related to the Nazi occupation of former Czechoslovakia.

## History of the Jewish community in Podmokly and Děčín

On the basis of archival sources we can presume that sporadic Jewish traders worked on the territory of the present district of Děčín as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The arrival of a greater number of Jewish traders and businessmen was brought about by building up the railway line Prague – Děčín – Dresden – Berlin in 1851. From 1874 onwards Jews met to do their religious rituals in their fellow-believers' flats. The Jewish Community as such was founded on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1887 and it numbered 162 members in the time of its origin. Siegmund Brauner and Karl Heller from Děčín, Gottfried Pick and Moritz Frankl from Weiher belonged to its founders. The first chairman of the Jewish Community was the factory owner Adolf Pächter. He had a garden pavilion built in the area of his button factory as a temporary synagogue not to speak about his other activities. When this space did not suit any more, the synagogue was moved into the armory of that time belonging to the Thun family / now it is the building of the regional archives/, and later into Volkshalle / now Children's House/ in Teplická Street. In 1888 the traditional burial brotherhood Chevra Kadiša was founded and Gottfried Pick was elected its chairman. Chevra

Kadiša overtook the administration of the Jewish cemetery / its area was about 2 000 m<sup>2</sup>/, which became part of the town cemetery in the years 1890 and 1891. Adolf Lederer took up work as the first teacher of religion in Podmokly in 1888. He had worked in Děčín, Podmokly, Jílové, Benešov, Verneřice and Česká Kamenice until he was shifted to Chlumec. Max Freund



*The foundation stone*

was the first rabbi, he died in 1918. Doctor J.Krengel held this office after him for one year. Doctor Oskar Karpelis filled this function from 1919. Adolf Pächter, the above-mentioned factory owner, was the chairman of the Jewish Community for a long time. After his death in 1915 his son Alfred was leading it till 1921 and then the Děčín trader Alois Zirkel overtook the chairmanship. The Jewish Community of Děčín and



*The initiators and the authors of the restoration projects of the synagogue in the years 1997-2001: Vladimír Poskočil and Arch.E. Tomáš Šantavý*

a preparatory committee led by Vilém Markovič and Jan Marek convocated Jews living in Děčín. They appealed to them for the renewal of the activities of the Jewish Community. Vilém Markovič was elected chairman and Jan Marek participated mostly in the elaboration of the history of the Jewish Community of Děčín. The cemetery in Podmokly was liquidated when the area of a factory was being spread. The Jewish Community received as compensation a piece of land at Folknáře where the remains were transferred. The Děčín Jewish Community also takes care of the Jewish cemetery in Česká Lípa. This cemetery was reclaimed and returned to public use as a unique cultural memorial in cooperation of the Jewish Community of Děčín and the representatives of the town of Česká Lípa. Vladimír Poskočil has been the chairman of the Jewish Community of Děčín since 1997. The Jewish Community and the synagogue, baruch ha-Šem, have waited to live new life in spite of irreplaceable losses and suffering of the past years.

## History of the Synagogue

The collection of money for the building of the synagogue was begun in 1892, several years after the foundation of the Jewish Community in Podmokly. A number of Jewish businessmen and patrons participated in it. An association for the establishing of the synagogue was founded in 1901 and then negotiations with the proprietors of pieces of land and real properties began. The Jewish Community had bought from a German physical training club a garden piece of land with a small gymnasium in

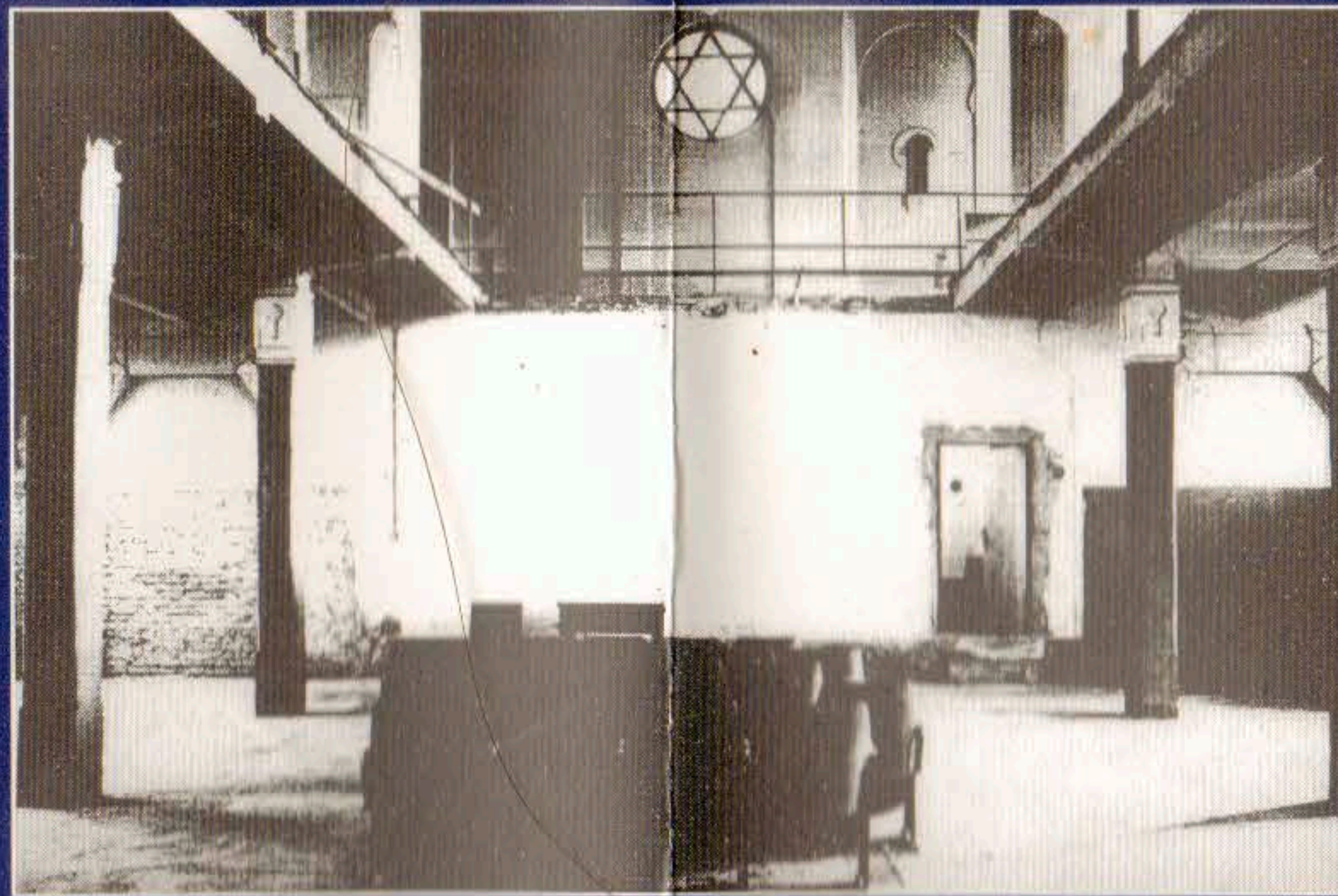
Podmokly had 400 members in 1929. About the year 1930 11 special committees worked for the Community led by Jacob Lamberg and there were 423 members of the Community. After the events of the year 1938 the Jewish community stopped existing.

There are no documents concerning the activities of the Jewish Community immediately after the end of the Second World War. It is not possible to determine precisely from uncompleted materials when and how it was renewed. According to the data assembled by Jan Marek the last divine service took place in 1964. Long years had passed when on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1993





*An archival photograph from the year 1938*



*The state of the Synagogue after its assignment in 1994*



*The nave of the synagogue*

today 's Žižka Street and the firm Putz and Weber built here a synagogue in the oriental new art style at the cost of 100 000 Austrian crowns in 1907. Rabbi Max Freund consecrated the newly built synagogue on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1907 with the following words: "This day is the highest the community can celebrate. Not for pride or glory but in honour of God who created the new Temple. It is the mission of the community to hold faith and to hold it for future generations". Is there anything to add? These words have not lost their validity even after years. A big lustre made of plumbous crystal and produced by the firm Palme from Kamenický Šenov became the adornment of the synagogue. The rolls of the Torah placed in an artistically treated Torah ark – aron ha-kodeš – were its most substantial components. Eleven pews in two rows enabled 110 men to take part in divine services. The balcony, assigned to women, was accessible by means of a winding cast-iron staircase. The shammes's flat was situated on the second floor. The Podmokly synagogue escaped the fate which afflicted a lot of synagogues in Bohemia, especially in former Sudetenland. The mayor of Podmokly in that period JUDr. Anton Kreissl / he died on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1945/ is said to have intervened personally for its preserving during the "crystal night" maintaining that its setting on fire could damage the neighbouring houses. His successor Julius Stumpf /1939 – 1942/ was also asked under constant pressure to have the building destroyed. It is important he did not do so whatever motives might have led him. One day he argued that there was a lack of manpower, another time he argued for the possible use of the building. The synagogue, rid of all religious symbols, served in the period of occupation as a warehouse of "wehrmacht", from 1941 as an aircraft modelling department of Hitlerjugend and later as a military warehouse again.

Nearly no materials from the post-war period have been preserved concerning the activities or the use of the synagogue. Some contracts represent exceptions. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 1966 a synagogue committee concluded a contract of the hire of the synagogue for the period of 25 years with the district National Committee. The district archives were removed into the synagogue one year later. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 1987 the Jewish Community sold the synagogue to the District National Committee in Děčín at the cost of 100 000 Czechoslovak crowns. In 1993 the District National Committee gave back several rooms of the synagogue to the Jewish Community for its use. On 14<sup>th</sup> June 1994 a deed of covenant was signed on the basis of which the District



*Aron Ha-kodeš, the Torah ark*

National Committee donated the synagogue to the Jewish Community of Děčín. The synagogue was in a considerably miserable state. All its equipment of the interior had disappeared, unfortunately including the most substantial part – the Torah. Only blank walls have remained. On 18<sup>th</sup> April 1996 the State Institute of the Care of Historical Monuments put down the synagogue on the Central List of Cultural Monuments of the Czech Republic. The district archives moved from its rooms on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1996.

In 1997 a decision was made to start total reconstruction of the synagogue so that it might serve again both cultural and social purposes of the Jewish community and of the general public. Vast work of reconstruction was begun in that year and has been going on since then. The chief problem has been how to provide financial means. The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, the District Office in Děčín,





*The seniors' clubroom*



*The lounge*



*An exhibition*

the Municipal Office in Děčín and a lot of bigger or smaller sponsors from our country as well as from abroad have contributed to pay repairs made until now.

## Present Time

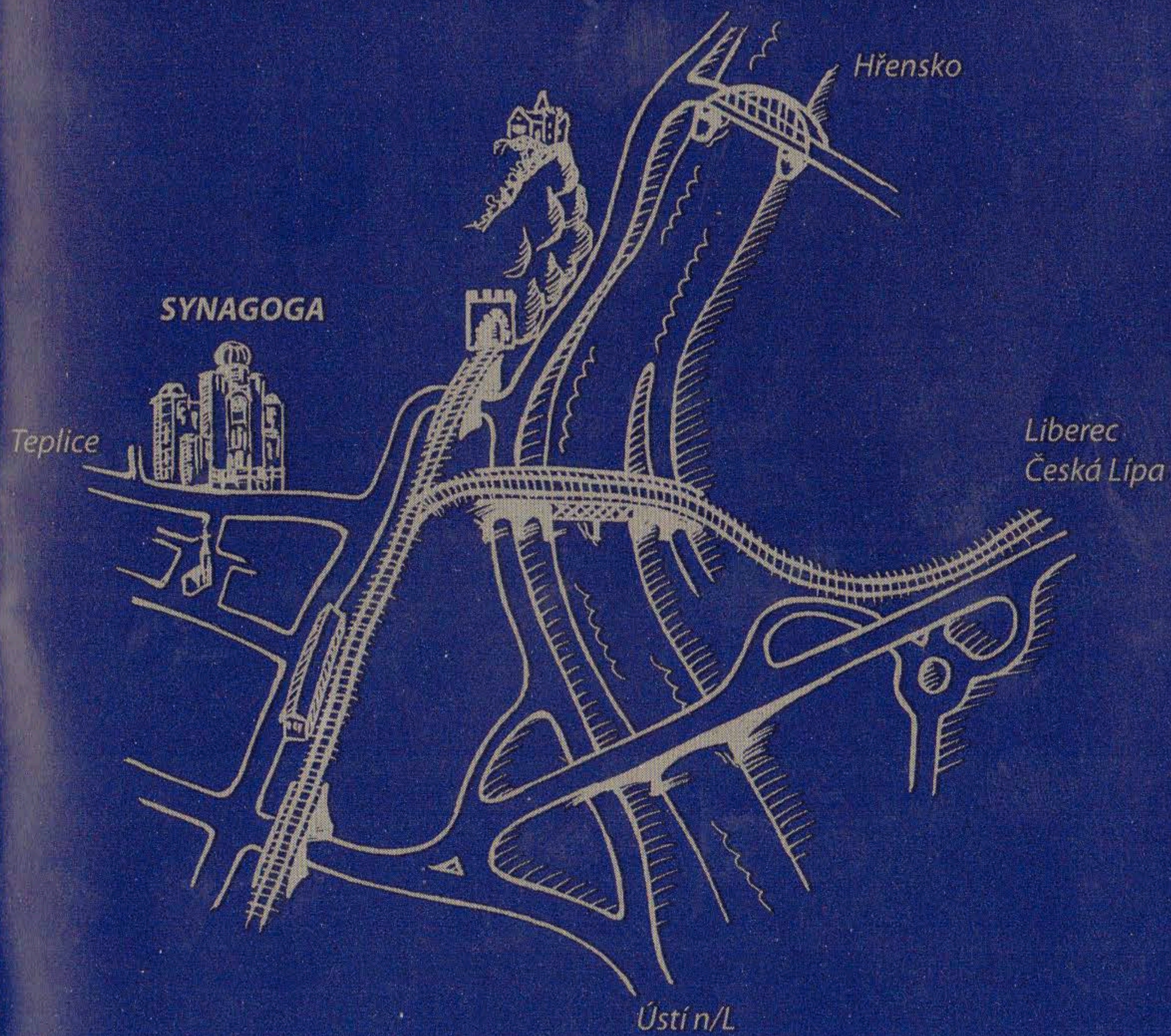
The life of no Jewish community is imaginable without keeping religious traditions. Judaism with liberal tendencies – which is the case of Děčín – represents its most proper contents. Therefore the Děčín Jewish Community tries to arrange for its members celebrations of the most significant Jewish feasts such as e.g. Rosh Hashana /New Year/, Yom Kippur /Day of Reconciliation/, Sukkot /Feast of Tabernacles/, Chanukah /Feast of Lights/, Purim /Feast of Lots/, or Pesach /commemorating the liberation of Jews

from Egyptian slavery/. Guest rabbis and other personalities /e.g. rabbi Thomas Salomon or Pet Tobias from London or the Czech – British writer and newspaperman Benjamin Kuras, Chabad Lubavitch from the Prague Chassid association – rabbi Manis Barash and others/ help to prepare the celebrations as well as to solve problems relating to the religious life of the community in Děčín.

The Jewish Community takes an active part in educational and instructional activities for children and youth in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and the Instructional and Cultural Centre of the Prague Jewish Museum. In the framework of this project instructional programmes and lectures are held, meetings, excursions and various cultural events are organized. A lot of interesting concerts /often with international participants/ have taken place in the synagogue as well as exhibitions /prepared in co-operation with such institutions as the Terezín Museum, the Prague Jewish Museum, the Embassy of Israel etc./. The Děčín Jewish Community also organizes and arranges popular international sports events HAKOACH. The number of participants approaches to 100.



*A cultural event*





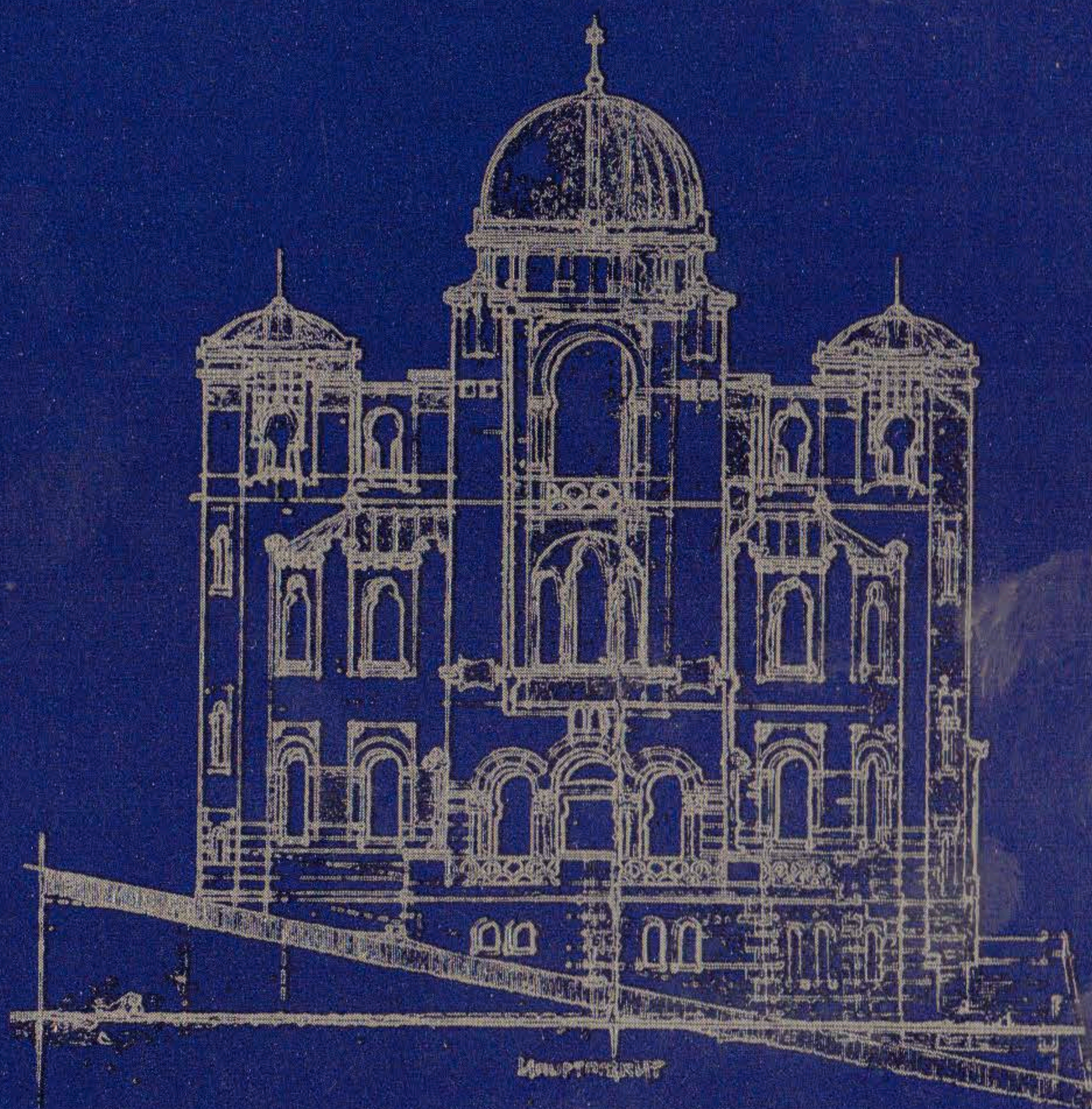
As it has been said at the beginning, the synagogue is a natural centre of every Jewish community. The Děčín Jewish Community becomes not only a significant religious and instructional centre for its nearly 140 members but it also takes up a more and more considerable position on the cultural and social map of Děčín.

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*The synagogue in 1907*

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