

THERE USED TO BE SYNAGOGUES...

Rendered by Arina Artiukhova, April 2018

Self-edited

Nowadays, probably few Khersoners can imagine that on the spot where the Executive Committee of Korabelny (former Komsomol) district and the planetarium are, there used to be three synagogues in one and the same yard. A high stone fence protected their territory, so that it was not possible to make out what was happening inside. The synagogues occupied the space between Vorontsov street and Torgoviy district (former 21st January, now Torgovaya street), and sided with the neighboring building of the former City Duma (now – The Shovkunenko Art Museum).

Today the younger residents of Kherson take this district's modern look for granted. However, it is worth remembering how it used to be here before.

The Staro-Nikolaev synagogue, founded in 1780, was situated where the planetarium is located now. The religious establishment was closed and equipped as a gym in 1928. Later it was rebuilt into the House of Sanitary Culture. Along with sanitary education work, mass sanitary education lectures took place in the house regularly. Dr. Zank managed the house. Afterwards he worked in Kiev. During the Great Patriotic War, the doctor was not able to evacuate and the Nazis hanged him.

On 14 May 1960, after a capital alteration of the former Staro-Nikolaev synagogue's building, the first planetarium in Southern Ukraine was opened here. By day, you can dive into a mysterious world of a starry night in this place. You can follow the routes of the orbs and see how night begins and ends. The planetarium was established when it was expected not only to spread knowledge about outer space, but to carry out antireligious advocacy as well. The planetarium proper was located on the first floor of the building and on the ground floor there was a cinematography hall for 180-200 people.

At present, after the recent renovation of the former cinematography hall, on the northern side of it they fitted a door instead of the window: the door leads into a shop. The building of the planetarium also houses the Orion café.

Among all the Jewish synagogues in Kherson the most impressive one was the biggest Novo-Nikolaev synagogue. It had spires – extensions, imitating gothic style. This synagogue was built in 1840 in the style of late classicism according to the architect Karl Akroyd's (1787 – 1835) project. He was born in London, and was admitted to Russian service in 1827. From 1829 to 1857 he served as an architect in the Black Sea Admiralty Board in Nikolaev. The religious establishment was closed, just like all other synagogues in 1926 at the pretext that there was “a request from the local community”. At first, the former synagogue was re-equipped into the House of Jewish working culture (the head of the club was Chudskiy), and later, in 1930, it was rebuilt into the cinema “Spartak”. A summer cinema was built near it. In the end of the 60s, after the demolition of the cinema, the building of the Komsomol (now Korabelny) District Executive Committee took its place.

Between the Staro- and Novo- Nikolaev synagogues there was one more synagogue deep in the yard – Ben-Gamedrash. After its closing in 1927 this building was used as the House of Folk Art. Later, before the Great Patriotic War, there was the Ukrainian Fair of Cotton Production. After the war, this building was also levelled to the ground.

During Kherson's occupation the Nazi cracked down on the national avengers severely. In 1942 near the cinema “The Spartak” 10 soviet patriots were hanged. A memorial stone with the following inscription was set at the site of the execution: *“On this spot in January-August 1942 Kherson underground activists were put to death by the Nazi occupants”*. It was there, where the third synagogue was located.

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