

The Old House of Worship in Jaunjelgava

(Analysis of a photo)

The earliest pictures of the buildings and streets of Friedrichstadt were postcards published between 1905 and 1910 by the local photographer M. Reinfeld.

In 1915-1917 the town was occupied by the German army. At this time, more postcards with the views of the town, which was already badly destroyed, were published for the needs of the military field post. The total number of city views earlier than 1920 does not exceed 20. From them, it is possible to form a far from complete picture of the city at the beginning of the last century. Therefore, literally every photograph from that period is of great interest.

... In the state of Schleswig-Holstein in the north of Germany lies the town of Friedrichstadt. Its history is similar to that of Friedrichstadt Kurland (Jaunjelgava). Both towns owe their names to the dukes. Both were founded on the waterways in the middle of the 17th century. Today, each has a population of just over 2,000. The Jewish communities that once contributed to the development of both towns were swept away in the fires of the Holocaust.

Many years ago I found this photo on the German Friedrichstadt website.



It shows scattered documents, books, ornate synagogue furnishing, disorderly pews, a round metal-clad stove and a women's balcony. The commentary on the photo said that it was the demolished synagogue of their town and suggested that the image dates from the Nazi era.




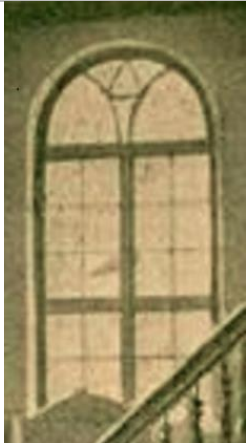
When I compared this photo with a contemporary image of the synagogue in Friedrichstadt Schleswig, I found that the proportions and the design of the window

frames were different. This raised doubts about the accuracy of the commentary on the website. I communicated these doubts to the authors of the website. In response, a representative of the municipality admitted that they had no proof and that it was possible that it was another synagogue. And after a while, the photo was removed from the website.

So I had a puzzle on my hands. It does not look like the synagogue in Friedrichstadt Schleswig. But maybe the windows were different many years ago? Or maybe it's a synagogue in another town in Germany... or is it OUR synagogue, in Jaunjelgava?

Recently, the same picture appeared in an online auction. It turned out to be a postcard from the German field post of 1916. The *date* of the picture therefore had nothing to do with the time of the Holocaust. On the back it read: "Interior view of the synagogue in Rigasche Straße in Friedrichstadt". This made the *location* clear, as Rigasche was one of the main streets in Friedrichstadt (Kurland). And the reason for the disorder in the rooms also became clear. As we know, all the Jews were expelled from Friedrichstadt by the Russian authorities in the spring of 1915, after which the town lay at the front line for a long time. Therefore the photo showed us not a malicious pogrom but the chaos caused by the deportation of the Jews and the subsequent bombardment of the town.

One question remained unanswered. There were two places of worship in Rigasce str. – the Heymann’s Synagogue, and so-called "Old house of worship". Pictures of both can be found in the published collection of rabbi Nathan Barkan. Again, the answer could be derived from comparison of shape and design of the windows.

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| Friedrichstadt, Schleswig-Holstein | Jaunjelgava. Heymann’s synagogue | Jaunjelgava. Old house of worship. (exterior) | Jaunjelgava. Postcard of a synagogue on Rigasche str. (interior) |

This picture is particularly interesting because interiors were rarely photographed at the time, especially during the war. It cannot be ruled out that this is the earliest depiction of the interior of a religious building in Friedrichstadt.



The Old House of worship in Friedrichstadt – Jaunjelgava. 1920-ies