

## History of Jews in Unsleben

Jews are known to be residents in Middle Europe as early as around 3 to 400 A.C. They were intruders just like many German tribes moving around at that time. Later when states began to form themselves, they were considered as foreigners without any civil rights. They were not allowed to possess land, to engage in crafts which were controlled by the guilds. In other words any competition for the traditional old professions should be avoided.

In our country, today called Lower Franconia, the Catholic bishop also was the civil ruler, the duke of the country. Beginning with the 13. century programs occurred in larger cities like Würzburg, which is the capital of Lower Franconia. As a consequence the Duke decided in 1560 that all Jews have to leave the country except for a certain class of more wealthy Jews, whom the Duke needed as money lenders and business men, mainly for export and import of goods. For Christian people at that time it was forbidden to take interest on lending of money and who would do it without? These upper class Jews got protection by the bishop, a monastery or other semi-independent institution.

Leaving the country however did not mean that the Jews had to leave the outside boundaries of Lower Franconia, because it was a patchwork country with many very small islands of the estate of noblemen, who were not dependent on the bishop, but were directly linked to the Emperor. Such a noble man had his estate in Unsleben and therefore had the privilege granted by the Emperor to accept Jews under his protection. That of course was not without compensation and in the 18. century all different kind of duties of about 30 Jewish families amounted to about 25 % of the noble man's budget.

In Unsleben Jewish inhabitants are first mentioned 1545 in the context of a special contribution to finance the war against Turkish aggression. Here every individual family is listed with their assets and their contribution. Only the Jews are mentioned in bulk and their assets and contribution was equal to the poorest family in Unsleben. Therefore we can assume that at that time Jewish population consisted of not more than one or two poor families. At a similar occasion 150 years later still only two families were listed. But from there on a rapid increase occurred. When the castle was sold from the Spessarth-family to another noble man's family the „von Habermann“, already 26 Jewish families are listed under the protection of the owner of the castle. The number of families increased further. In 1810 38 families were under the protection of the Habermann-family. At the same time about 140 Christian families lived in Unsleben. Up to around 1830 Unsleben was a closed town. It had a crossroad with towers and doors on each entrance. Barns built against one another from tower to tower substituted a wall around the town. As a consequence the number of houses inside the town was restricted. Only here and there a few small houses were built in the garden between two houses.

Originally the Jews lived all within the farmyard of the castle. A few houses surrounding the castle originally owned by Christian vassals of the noble man. Step by step they were squeezed out and Jews rented or later also bought the houses. We know that up to five families lived in one house which nowadays is a one family house and number of children was higher than nowadays. These competition for houses therefore was in these early days a matter of irritation and annoyance between Christians and Jews. Even therefore the Jews not only had to pay their contributions to the noble man but also the Catholic priest of the town claimed a New Year's gift from them with the argument that while the Jews occupy former Christian houses consequently Christian young men wanting to found a family have to leave the town, because they cannot find a home here, which was a prerequisite for marriage and citizenship. A decreasing number of Christian families however was a loss for the priest, a loss of fees for services at baptism, weddings, funerals.

The French revolution in the late 18. century with its paroles „liberty-equality-fraternity“ was the starting point of big changes also in the German states. Most important for our

dukedom the bishop was deprived of his secular power and Lower Franconia became after a stae of transition 1816 part of Bavaria. In Bavaria the socalled „Judenedikt“ in 1813 brought certain rights for jews. The independent status of the noble men was no longer acknowlegded. As a consequence the jews had to accept permanent surnames. So far the name of the father was added to the first name of the child(the firstborn male child got the grandfather's first name). The following names have been taken by the Unsleben jews in

1817: Lilienfeld	Gottgetreu	<u>Donnerstag</u>	<u>Kuhl</u>	Rosenberg
Wollmann	Lamm	Dinkel	<u>Gärtner</u>	<u>Mittel</u>
Kalb	Langer	Tuch	<u>Brandus</u>	Baum
<u>Lustig</u>	Thormann	<u>Liebenthal</u>	Hopfermann	Bein
Friedberg	<u>Engel</u>	Mutter	Apfel	<u>Bach</u>

The underlined names were still known in Unsleben in 1932, in addition the follwing jewish names existed in Unsleben in 1932: Blumenthal Brandis Goldschmidt

Kälbermann	Krämer	Moritz	Naumann	Rose
Rosenbaum	Stern	Strauß	Wantuch	

Through the Judenedikt the jews became at least second class citizens, with more rights than befor, but now they also had to contribute with taxes to the state. Evidently they did not trust their new status, because they continued their links and contributions to the castle. Only very few denied to pay their original fees, but around 1830 things have settled and the jews no longer have been double-taxed. In that process the jews had to declare their assets as a base for taxation to the community and state. The major of Unsleben complained that the jews were very slow in filing their tax base and furthermore that they seem to be very poor, but when they aply for citizenship and have to meet the minmum requirements fo it they seem to be very rich, but in 1832 he could report to have all records completed.

Up til 1816 the jews evidently have been in general very poor. In 1833 the strucure of the professions are listed as: 1 wholesle dealer, 14 craftsmen, 3 farmers and 24 pedlars.

One of the restrictions still valid was that the number of jewish families should not be increased, but there were exemptions. From population figures we can conclude that a lot of marriageable men and females must have been „parked“ within the families. Also this led to the beginning of emigration abroad. One of the first ones was Simson Thormann, who settled in Cleveland/Ohio, at that time half the size of Unsleben. He worked as a trapper and fur trader, he left his girl friend behind in Unsleben. Through his contacts with his home town he initiated the forming of a group of 20 people amongst them his girlfriend under the leadership of Moses Alsbacher that left in 1839, most of them settled in Cleveland and founded there a jewish community. As a farewell message the teacher Lazarus Kohn gave them a document with the names of all the jewish families and their members and he impressively recommended to preserve their confession in the new world. There is a newly built museum of jewish heritage in Cleveland where the beginning of the jewish settlement is documented.

In 1837 the jewish community felt strong enough to improve their situation by building a new synagog and school. The old synagog was a former farm building and was very shaky, there was no extra school building. School teachers went to the children's home to instruct them.They bought from the state one of the grain barns, where farmers had to deliver their natural tax, which was not anymore the case, because natural tax was converted into money tax. They had in mind to use one story for the synagog and the second story for the school. But when they - after 20 years of accumulating the funds to realize their project - in 1850 consulted the architects they did not approve their intentions. So in 1853 a new school was built at a different place and in 1855 the original building was sold to be turned down and has been erected at the edge of the village and the synagog was planned and built on the place of the former state barn adjacent to the second grain barn which afterwards became the grainery of a jewish firm Gebrüder Gärtner, later owned

by the Naumann brothers until they had to sell it in the 1930ties. Costs of the new synagog was 2500 guilders. The weekly wage of a worker at that time was 1 guilder.

In 1856 a cemetery ground was bought one mile east of Unsleben on a hill, a beautiful quiet place. From 1856 until 1942 229 funerals have taken place, 216 gravestones are still saved, 66 of them are anonymous, because the name plates have been destroyed during Nazi time. All these projects have been financed by contributions of the Unsleben jews, only a small portion has been contributed by the state for building the school. The prosperous development after shackles have been removed or at least loosened has made this possible.

The jewish community grew further up til the peak around 1860 with 60 families. From there on emigration to the U.S. but mainly to other places, larger towns in Germany began. The former restrictions jews had to face became less hindering to develop business, participate in education. In 1871 emancipation of jews was granted with two exceptions: Jews could not become lawyers and officers in the army.

In 1906 the israelitic community counted 45 families, in 1935 just befor the exodus began 35 families lived still in Unsleben, as in 1932.

In 1860 the israelitic school had 40 school boys and girls, around 1920 only 10 schoolchildren attended the school in Unsleben, maybe the same number was attending a higher school type, but also number of children in the families has decreased. In the mid thirties 15 schoolchildren are instructed in Unsleben due to the elimination of jewish children from public schools in nearby towns that were send to Unsleben.

Through the hundred years from 1830 to 1930 jews were completely integrated into social life of Unsleben, however not assimilated, because they kept their confession, their habits and holidays. Jews were accepted as neighbors, as citizens as business partners, as employers. This acceptance worked both ways. When Moses and Mathilde Gärtner, the by far wealthiest couple around the turn of the 19./20. century, died they had made in 1912 a foundation, the interest of it had to be distributed equally amongst poor jewish and christian families of Unsleben. In the thirties to be of different confession, even to be a protestant in a otherwise 96 % catholic community was a slight stigma. So not all differences between jews and gois have been wiped out, although many jewish expressions have been taken into the everyday language of all persons, jews had their own jiddish language which has been used by them especially in presence of nonjews, often in business conversation to withhold information from the opponent partner. But jews were accepted not only as members in the various clubs of the village(fire men, verterans, athletics), but also a members of the governing board. They had at least one member in the village council.

In 1932 35 families lived in 28 houses:

	original house-no.	street and house-no. after 2004
Bach Maier	111	Hauptstr. 14
Bach Moses	8 3/4	Hauptstr. 32
Blumenthal Maier	63 1/2	Am Mühlgraben 3
Brandis Adolf und Emil	11	Schloßgasse 1
Brandus Julius u. Siegmund	16	Schloßgasse 11
Brandus Nanni	56	Streugasse 17
Donnerstag Bernhard	77	Streugasse 16
Engel Aaron	56	Streugasse 15
Goldschmidt Jettchen	79	Enggasse 20
Kälbermann Arthur	8 3/4	Hauptstr. 32
Krämer Sally	54	Streugasse 15
Kuhl Gabriel	19	Schloßgasse 17
Kuhl Heinemann u. Justin	15	Schloßgasse 7
Liebenthal Heinrich	171	Hauptstr. 38

Liebenthal Fritz	171	Hauptstr. 38
Julius Otto Liebenthal	171	Hauptstr. 38
Liebenthal Lina	13	Schloßgasse 5
Lustig Bernhard	49	Streugasse 7
Mittel Emanuel	74	Streugasse 18
Mittel Josef	44	Streugasse 8
Mittel Karl I	45	Streugasse 10
Mittel Karl II u. Siegfried	70	Mühlenweg 2
Mittel Kuno	81	Geiersgasse 3
Mittel Max	49	Streugasse 7
Mittel Selli	47	Streugasse 12
Mittel Simon	117	Hauptstr. 18
Mittel Sofie	42	Streugasse 4
Mittel Theo	108	Hauptstr. 8
Moritz Max	171	Hauptstr. 38
Naumann Max	115	Hauptstr. 13
Naumann Jeanette	86	Geiersgasse 1
Naumann Ludwig	87	Enggasse 18
Naumann Nathan	76	Streugasse 16
Strauß Isaak	71	Mühlenweg 1
Wantuch Martha	76	Streugasse 13

35 Household, 28 Houses

Unsleben is divided by the main road running from Bad Neustadt to Mellrichstadt in a western and eastern part. Jews lived apart from a few houses along the main road only in the eastern part where also the synagog and the school, also the castle as the former protection authority, was situated.

The peaceful and friendly living together abruptly was disturbed by enactments and commandments of the Nazi government, which came into power early in 1933, to discriminate jews. Any intercourse private or commercial between jews and aryan – non jews – was forbidden. This has not been followed immediately in Unsleben. But from year to year people became more and more discreet, because there were of course also fanatic followers of the Nazi party amongst the inhabitants and it became normal to denounce neighbors, if they did not behave conformly with the commandments. The consequence was the chance to end up in Dachau(the first concentration camp).

These change in relationship with their neighbors and friends, business partners was hard to understand by jews and was very violent to them. But on the other hand the sytem was so efficient in controlling their population and so radical in their penalties for non-conformity, that most people accommodated to the situation, to listen to an enemy radio station was already a reason for death penalty. It was too late for a rebellion against the system.

The goal of the Nazi government was to get rid of all jews in Germany by various restriction set up for them. Emigration between 1933 and 1938 however went slowly. Mostly single persons left. Finally november 1938 was there. The execution of a member of the german embassy in Paris through a jew of Poland was the signal for an evidently earlier prepared nationwide action against jews. Synagogs were set on fire, male jews preferably richer jews should be arrested or even sent to a KZ. The goal was to force out jews and get ahold of their property, since the government was planning and preparing for war and there was a need to finance it. In Unsleben the synagog had alraedy been emtied by the jews in September. The Tora rolls had been hidden in a neighboring barn. The synagog was not set on fire, this would have been too dangerous for houses around it, but the interior has been damaged. The benches have been taken out. The catholic priest tried



The earlier emigrants could sell their houses directly and use the money. Later emigrants simply left their homes and they have been taken over by a nationwide organisation and have been sold cheaply mostly to local people, many of them otherwise would not have been able to live in an own home. After the war a jewish organisation claimed the difference of the devaluated price of the property to what would have been a normal price. This was misunderstood by the new owners and they complained that they had to pay the property they bought twice a new issue of emotions against the jews for most of the affected ones.

It is true that people in Unsleben saw that jews have been disgusted living there and emigrated and they saw the deportation of the last ones, but most of them were unsuspecting of what was awaiting them. Therefore after the war, when the truth became piece by piece evident, people became speechless and ashamed. And this state continued until the last ones that had consciously experienced this period have died out.

What remains as a permanent remembrance is that the meeting hall of the community once was the synagog of a jewish community and the existing of a cemetery, which serves as an demonstration object for children as early as in the kindergarten. To remember us on what once has been possible in our village and what never again may happen the community set up a monument honoring the victims of the Holocaust.

After the war few jews have visited Unsleben, went through the streets, looked at their former homes and visited the cemetery where their parents, grandparents, maybe even their partner was buried. Most of them did not contact the local people. In 1999 for the first time a group of about 40 persons, four of them born in Unsleben visited Unsleben and have been heartily welcome by the community authorities and the population. To day the community is happy to welcome visitors, relatives of former Unslebener jewish families and to show them the places where their ancestors lived and where many of them found their eternal rest.