



Persecuted, murdered, forgotten - Jews from Poland in Nuremberg

Preface

Ever since I worked on the “Memorial Book for Nuremberg’s Victims of the Shoah” I had in mind to do research on a chapter of the local Jewish history that is almost forgotten, the lives and the persecution of Jews from Poland. The following presentation merely is an intermediate result of this effort, not supposed to be an academic treatise but to remember these people, their specific culture - and their suffering.

My special thanks for their support and advice go to Mrs. Lea Schwarz, nee Wassermann, Mrs. Rebecca Segal and Mr. Herbert Kolb. In addition Mrs. Lea Schwarz provided her childhood memoirs to me, a most valuable source for my research.

Nuremberg, February 2000

Gerhard Jochem

The immigration to Germany

Jews from Galicia, then a province of the Austrian-Hungarian empire and the Russian occupied central Poland immigrated to Germany since the turn of the 20th century. The motives for leaving their homeland were both the fear of repeated pogroms and the better opportunities offered by the expanding German economy.

After Russian armed forces had invaded the eastern provinces of the Habsburg monarchy in August 1914, the number of immigrants to Germany grew enormously. The figures for Nuremberg were compiled by the local “Gewerbepolizei” (commercial police) in a report dated November 17, 1917. According to this 828 “Galicians” lived in Nuremberg at the time consisting of 133 families with 452 children and 110 single persons (29 males and 81 females). Of these male aliens, 69 worked as salesmen, 49 as storekeepers, 6 as traveling salesmen, and 4 as business assistants. There were also 4 tailors, 3 butchers, 2 shoemakers, 2 watch-makers, 2 workers and 1 rabbi among them. The female immigrants made their living as storekeepers (26), selling clerks (7), tailors (7), traveling saleswomen (5), clerks (5), embroiderer (1), maid (1) and worker (1). Except for 2 Roman Catholics and 3 Protestants all the immigrants were Jewish.



Add of the tailor Seiwel Dorembus in an Nuremberg newspaper 1928. Seiwel and his also Polish born wife Gittla Esther, nee Wolfstein, were deported and killed by the Nazis.

Due to their particular status the Nuremberg police registered the 215 “Russian Poles” separately: 38 families with 101 children and 42 single individuals (32 males and 10 females). 196 were Jewish, 10 Protestants, and 9 Roman Catholics.

Remarkable a larger percentage of this group compared to the “Galicians” worked in crafts (26 craftsmen, 3 female milliners, 1 female tailor). The professions of the rest were salesmen (19), storekeepers (18), 3 male and 2 female industrial workers. It is quite likely that these 1019 people were the all time high of the Eastern Jewish population in Nuremberg because immediately after the war a wave of expulsions swept over xenophobic Bavaria. This means that the Eastern Jewish community in Nuremberg never would have been more than 12 % of the Jewish population here (in 1918 8,575 members) and 3 tenth of a per cent the overall population (1918: 332,310). Though this group of people was small by number it soon became the hated concept of the enemy for the local anti-Semites.

Social life

In her own words, Mrs. Lea Schwarz outlines the story of her family: “Our father's family came to Germany from Gorlice, Poland in 1901 when he was three years old. They fled in the hope of avoiding the Polish pogroms. Our mother's family came from Rzeszów in 1914. They left Poland in fear of the invading Russian army, whose soldiers rampaged and raped young girls. My mother was 18 years old at the time. Both of our parents were well-educated and spoke German fluently, without a foreign accent”.



A coffee table at the Zahn family's home around 1938, from left to right:

- Dora *Scheindling*, nee Aron, born Aug. 18, 1887 in Ulanów (Western Galicia). Last address in Nuremberg: Untere Kieselbergstraße 13. In Poland since June 1, 1939. Killed in 1940.
- Feige Jenta *Neumann*, nee Silber, born Oct. 13, 1895 in Czudec (Poland). Last address in Nuremberg: Imhoffstraße 7. In Poland since June 8, 1939. Missing.
- Frieda *Aron*, born Dec. 2, 1911 in Nuremberg. Last address in Nuremberg: Untere Kieselbergstraße 13. In Poland since June 6, 1939. Missing.
- Jenny *Zahn*, born April 10, 1933 in Nuremberg. Last address in Nuremberg: Imhoffstraße 7. Missing.
- Josel Cirel *Zahn*, nee Blutter, born May 10, 1896 in Sokolów (Poland). Last address in Nuremberg: Baerenschanzstrasse 61. In Poland since 1939. Missing.
- Siegfried *Zahn*, born July 6, 1920 in Nuremberg, emigrated to Great Britain April 17, 1939 (?).
- Minna *Weisbard*, nee Weisbarth, born Feb. 26, 1895 in Brzesko (Western Galicia). Last address in Nuremberg: Imhoffstraße 7. In Poland since July 21, 1939. Declared dead May 8, 1945.

Lea and her sister Friedl were born and raised in Nuremberg. Sensitive she realized the discrepancies not only separating Gentiles from Jews but even among the established German Jews and the newcomers from Poland: “In those days German Jews did not mix socially with Eastern European Jews, but our family had a group of extended family and close friends of the same background. Our parents seemed to be the nucleus of that group of charming, vivacious people. Our father was consulted about everything from hanging drapes to business matters. Our mother was the one they looked to for writing letters. Whether it was in Polish or German, she was one of a very few who had the ability to handle such a task.

I remember, after my sister and I were in bed, we frequently heard much laughter coming from our ‘good room.’ It was a combination living and dining room where the group usually gathered. On these occasions, my sister and I would sneak into the kitchen and eat some of the open faced sandwiches our mother had prepared for the guests. Stimulated by the sounds coming from the dining room, we went back to our room and had a ball throwing pillows at each other and carrying on as children will. Often our father would appear at the door after a while and tell us to go to sleep”.

The Eastern European Jews in Nuremberg developed a paralleling structure of institutions and organizations, partly because of common interests in religious and social matters, partly as a reaction to the invisible trench separating them from the Germans.

Trying to find the reasons for the majority's restraint one has to keep in mind that besides the foreign origins and different religious traditions there also had been a difference in the social status of the members of those two groups. Only a few people with roots in Poland succeeded in climbing to the level of the upper middle class, where most of the German Jewish families Nuremberg belonged prior to the Wall Street crash in 1929. The most prominent example of such a career is Adolf Jacobowitz, born in 1885 in the Polish town of Mikolai, who from 1920 until his sudden death in 1930, was the head of the world famous "Mars-Werke" bicycle company.

Indifferent to the difficulties their parents might have had in associating with each other on a private level - the Jewish community supported needy Eastern Jewish members to the best of its means - the youngsters did not share those problems. Obviously, the Jewish sports club "Bar Kochba" provided the best opportunity to meet each other and for the youngsters of Polish descent to achieve some respect from the local establishment. Athletes, like Isidor "Isi" Schneeberg, Gisa Kalter or Scharika Bergmann, often appear in the winners' lists of the Bar Kochba competitions in the early 1930s.

Gesamtausschuß der Ostjuden „Achi-Eser“ e. V. Nürnberg.

Letterhead of the General Council of Eastern European Jews in Nuremberg "Achi Eser"

The attitude of the Germans

Reading the public records of the 1920s and 1930s in Nuremberg, no one can come up with another impression than pure anti-Semitism. In comparison with today's criteria for the treatment of any minority the standards even in pre-Nazi Germany were, to say the least, questionable. Two Nuremberg judges delivered the most striking evidence of their arrogance, irrational prejudice, and chauvinism in a memorandum from April 23, 1918: "A progressive assimilation of the Eastern European Jews to the German way of life and the German legal and commercial principles, we consider to be impossible, due to the peculiarities of their race".

Particularly in the statements of the authorities regarding applications of Polish born citizens to become naturalized, the entire catalogue of anti-Semitic slanders had been spilled upon the applicants. Because the internal correspondence was classified, the public servants and police officers could be very outspoken about their views: To them all Eastern European Jews were filthy, dishonest, cowardly and restless wanderers without any patriotism. Due to this perception none of the 35 applications I checked was approved for naturalization.

The story of Mendel Nussbaum

The tailor and salesman Mendel, called Max Nussbaum, had been born April 20, 1885 in Ruska Wies near Rzeszów in Galicia. He attended the German elementary school in Rzeszów from 1892 until 1898. In 1898 he became a business apprentice in Rzeszów. From 1906 to

1908 he served his term with a “kaiserlich-königliches” infantry regiment in Jaroslaw and qualified for noncom.

In 1909 Max Nussbaum moved to Nuremberg where he married his wife Johanna, born in Westheim in the Lower Franconian county of Hammelburg. The couple lived at Obere Kanalstraße 31 and had a son, Berthold, born 1913 in Nuremberg.



WW I Memorial at the Jewish cemetery in Nuremberg. 15 of the 177 fallen Jewish soldiers from Nuremberg served in the Austrian-Hungarian army.

On August 15, 1930 Max Nussbaum applied for naturalization. He justified his application to the authorities as follows:

“Because of bravery I received the silver bravery medallion in 1915. On September 6, 1915 until which time I was incessantly in the line of fire, I was wounded, and because of my injury, came into Russian captivity. Until November 1915, I received treatment in an armed forces hospital in Moscow, and after that was deported to Siberia as a POW. There wasn't any difference made between German speaking POWs in Russia, but all the German and German Austrian POWs were sent to Siberia because of their German nationality. Prisoners from other countries, in most of the cases, were lucky enough to stay on European soil. The Russians made the Germans suffer for their nationality. Hundreds of thousands lost their lives because of slavery, inhuman treatment and insufficient provisions. They starved, succumbed to epidemics or were killed by a ruthless bullet.

Although we had to witness how the poorest of our comrades who tried to escape were shot when they got caught again, I myself attempted to escape on April 13, 1920. After incredible efforts I succeeded, and returned via the port of Vladivostok (Siberia), Japan and America to my hometown, Nuremberg, on October 1, 1920.

After the overwhelming reception at the station by members of the federation for the protection of German war and civilian prisoners I had to experience the bitterest disappointment of my life. When I went to the registration office, I was told that I had become a Polish citizen due to the occupation of my native town by the Polish satellite state.

This was especially hard for me to understand because I had been raised as a German, had only attended German schools and served in the German-Austrian army to defend our common fatherland together with regiments from the Reich, to which cause we put our blood and our lives at stake. I will never ever consider myself being Polish and remain German until I

draw my last breath ... My wife and my son, both Bavarians by birth, only know their German fatherland and their Bavarian country. Who wants to force my boy into the service with enemy armed forces making it possible that he once will have to fight his own brothers? I cannot imagine that any authority in Germany wants to make this happen.

In consideration of my outlined situation and thinking of the constant promise to us veterans 'the gratitude of the fatherland is granted to you,' I ask all agencies in charge of my case not to turn down my application but to accept me as a citizen of the Bavarian state, to which I think I belong".

Obviously Max Nussbaum considered his forced Polish citizenship as a tragic mistake of the authorities and was confident to convince the officials by the detailed report on his wartime experience. At first the agencies involved reacted to his application with stone cold, standard procedure, but at least they were impartial: They checked on the accuracy of his story by asking witnesses who confirmed it, then they investigated his financial situation. The officers found out that Max Nussbaum had a perfect reputation. His men's ready-to-wear-clothes business went well, even though the German economy suffered the hard and long lasting blow of the global financial crisis. He employed two to three home workers and earned at least 300 to 400 Reichsmark a month.

Even the Nuremberg-Fürth police, in other cases never reluctant to voice xenophobic and chauvinistic prejudices (e.g. "X. is a typical Eastern European Jew"), couldn't find anything negative about the applicant. In their report of Oct. 21, 1930 they noticed, with pleasure, that "though Nussbaum strictly observes the rites of the Israelite religion, he, however, has adapted himself to German standards and culture" - as if this had been a contradiction.

In the view of the Nuremberg police maybe no other applicant came as dangerously close to naturalization as Nussbaum did. He could have been a role model for an almost militant German so how to prevent him from becoming a citizen of this country? They had to display their last trump: The statement of police headquarters dated Nov. 4, 1930 destroyed Nussbaum's hopes - and most likely his faith in his beloved fatherland: "Nussbaum does not apply to the criteria of the resolution no. 3604 B 32 of June 30, 1921 'guidelines for the naturalization of foreigners'. Neither in civic, cultural or economic regards would his citizenship be a valuable increase to the population ... His application cannot be approved".

Two and a half years after his failed application for citizenship Max Nussbaum and his wife left Germany. The situation of the Jewish inhabitants of Nuremberg originating from Poland had changed by then dramatically. They had become a fair game to the Nazis now in power.

After January 30, 1933

Shortly before "Machtergreifung" 56,480 Jewish Polish nationals lived in Germany. Though their legal position as foreigners was even weaker than that of the German Jews, for most of them a 'return' to Poland was a thing out of question. Especially for the younger generation it would not have been a return, but rather an emigration to a foreign country never seen before and without being in command of the language. For them, Poland was at best a part of their family's history.

The development in Franconia is spotlighted by an experience Mrs. Schwarz had made: "On weekends we took long hikes into the forest and often walked from one village to another. We carried our lunch in a small backpack, and on the way we stopped to pick wild berries and flowers. For the evening meal we usually stopped at a 'Gasthaus' (Inn). On one of these occa-

sions, we hiked to a town called Pottenstein. This must have been in 1935 or 1936. With us were David and Gretl Yoskowitz, and Leo and “Roisele” Fallmann ... As we sat at this long table in the Inn at Pottenstein, we noticed a man in civilian clothing standing at the side of our table and focussing a camera to take a picture of us. My father, who had blond hair and blue-green eyes that did not fit the stereo type of a Jew, got up and asked this man what the meaning of this was. The man replied, “Aren’t you, a pure Aryan, ashamed of socializing with all of these Jews? I am taking a picture for the ‘Stürmer’. My father replied: ‘First of all, I am not an Aryan. I am also a Jew, and this is my family. Secondly, I have a Polish passport. I would like your name so that I can report to my consulate that you have been harassing us!’” The man put his camera away and left. Needless to say, that was only a bluff. Poland has a long history of anti-Semitism. The Polish consulate would not have lifted a finger for a Jew, not even for one with a Polish passport”.

The deportations of October 1938

In 1938 the Polish government was in fear that her Jewish citizens, who were coming under more and more pressure in Germany, would come to Poland in massive numbers. For this reason, Poland proclaimed an ordinance by which most of the Jewish Polish nationals in Germany would have become stateless. The Nazis used this Polish ordinance as a pretext for arresting about 17,000 Polish Jews in the entire Reich and to ship them to the German-Polish border, in order to get rid of them.

The raids lasted from October 26th to 29th, when the Poles suspended the threat of immediate expatriation. After days and nights of being pushed around between Germany and Poland, Polish authorities allowed the deportees to enter their territory. Refugee camps were opened, the largest of them at Zbaszyn, 70 km southwest of Poznan. The German government even allowed a limited number of Jews to return to Germany, in order to dissolve their businesses and to take their families with them. This regulation proved to be a deadly trap when German “Wehrmacht” attacked Poland on Sept. 1, 1939.

Mrs. Schwarz first had to witness the abduction of her father, and then was deported herself, along with her mother and sister: “n October 28, 1938 there was a knock on our door in the middle of the night. There were two Gestapo men outside; they told my father to get dressed and come with them. Our questions were unanswered, and we were not told what this was all about. The following morning we found out that both grandmothers, our Uncle Chaim and Tante Annie, as well as all of our relatives and friends had been picked up, except mothers with children ... The following evening at 9 o’clock they came for my mother, my sister and me. They brought us to the ‘Palace of Justice’ (where later the war crimes trials would be held) and put us in jail. There were about twenty people to our jail cell, with one toilet for all.

In the morning we were put on trucks, taken to the railroad station, and loaded onto trains going to the Polish border. There were mothers with babies who were crying - there was no milk for them - and I don’t remember getting any food except for a square of cheese the night in jail, probably towards morning. By the time we arrived at the border, it was after midnight on October 31, and the Polish authorities did not allow the train to pass. The train stood for hours. When it finally began to move again it was going back in the direction from which it had come. After three days we arrived back in Nuremberg and were allowed to go home. However, the first transport, the one our father was on, never returned. They were taken off the trains in ‘No Man’s Land,’ an area between the German and Polish borders with the Poles shooting at them, not allowing them into their country, and the Germans behind them, chasing

them. There was nowhere to go, but to set up camp right there. It was near a town called Zbaszyn. They were able to write to us from there, and life went on as well as possible ...



Nurembergers at Zbaszyn refugee camp, winter 1938/39 (picture kindly provided by Mrs. Schwarz).
From left to right: Leo *Fallmann* (victim of the Shoah), unknown gentleman, Rosa *Fallmann* (victim of the Shoah), Mr. *Auerbach*, Leopold *Zahn*, 2 unknown gentlemen, Chaim *Kupfermann*, Anni *Kupfermann*, Simon *Wassermann* (victim of the Shoah), unknown lady, Regina *Holzer* (victim of the Shoah), unknown man with hat, Berta *Holzer* (victim of the Shoah), unknown young man.

One day in July of 1939, we received a telegram from our father. It said he was on his way home from the Polish border. They were given the choice of going into Poland or returning to where they had lived. Those who had no immediate family remaining in Nuremberg, like our grandmothers, aunts and uncles, returned to the villages they had left so many years before, hoping they would be safe there.

After nine months in a camp at the border, our father came home. Needless to say, we were in ecstasy. We surely thought that the worst was behind us now, and it would not be long until we would get our immigration visas”.

After the raid on Poland: Internment and ruthless killing

On September 7, 1939 German authorities issued an order that every male Polish citizen older than 16 years, within the Reich's borders, had to be arrested. These men were brought to a concentration camp after Poland's surrender. The Polish adults and men from Nuremberg were shipped to Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, the town of Goethe and Schiller. The crimes inflicted on them there were coincidentally eye witnessed by another Jew from the Nuremberg region, Hugo Burkhard from Hüttenbach, who had been incarcerated in Dachau and Buchenwald for several years and later succeeded in emigrating to Shanghai: “Upon their arrival they had to undress themselves naked in front of the barracks, icy-cold water was poured upon them and then they were brushed with a scrubber brush. Many of the older deportees suffered an immediate death by exhaustion or pneumonia. The Polish inmates were not allowed to go to the infirmary. Their food was insufficient. They received a fraction of the other prisoners rations”. According to Burkhard’s report approximately 1,700 Polish prisoners entered Buchenwald after October 1939. In February 1940 only about 300 of them were still alive.

Among the deportees from Nuremberg was Simon Wassermann, Lea’s father: “Our father was sent to Buchenwald. He was able to write to us from there every two weeks. The letters

were all censored. We learned to communicate by writing one thing and meaning another. Our mother went to the Gestapo and asked what it would take to get my father released. She was told that if he could leave the country, he would be released. Tante Fanny, who was in Italy at the time, was able to procure a visa to Siam (Thailand). It was counterfeit and bought on the black market; however it would have helped him to get to Italy.

Our mother went almost every day to the Gestapo to push for our father's release. It took a lot of guts on her part, because if the Gestapo didn't come looking for you, nobody went looking for them. Our hearts were in our shoes every time until we saw her home again. By that time many families had received containers of ashes of what had once been a husband or a father ... One day in April, 1940, we received a telegram that originated from Munich. We were scared out of our wits, but when we opened it we found a marvelous surprise. Our father was released and on his way home. It was like a miracle. He was the only person I know of to have been released at the time. It was also the first day of Passover. I will never forget how he looked: His head was shaved and we could see every bone in his body. He told us that before he left the concentration camp, he had to sign a paper to the effect that he would not speak to anyone about what he had seen or experienced there; we knew not to ask him".

Starting November 1941 the Polish families still living in Nuremberg were included in the 'regular' deportations. Most of them perished in the concentration camps.

Last traces in Polish ghettos

The fate of those Nurembergers who were deported to Poland in October 1938 and stayed there in most of the cases is completely unknown - besides the fact that they did not survive the Shoah. It only happened recently that Mr. Peter Landé, consultant to United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, provided documents to me which prove that several Nurembergers were inmates of the Krakow ghetto in 1940. They disappeared from the records when the bone mills of the Holocaust started to grind.

Die Zeugen erklären folgendes:

... *Rumstein Samson* ... geboren am *15. X. 1906* ...

in *Nürnberg* ... Stand *ledig* ...

Beruf *Raufhauer* ... aus *Nürnberg* ...

derzeit wohnhaft in Krakau *Bozowa 16/18* ...

zuständig nach ... ist uns persönlich bekannt. *6/17*

Wir bestätigen die Personengleichheit obiger Person mit untenstehendem Lichtbild.

Obiges erklären wir, zwecks Erteilung eines Personalausweises von seiten der jüdischen Gemeinde in Krakau in Angelegenheit der Umsiedlung des (der) Genannten von Krakau nach ...

Die Richtigkeit obiger Angaben bestätigen wir durch unsere eigenhändigen Unterschriften:

... *Fuchs im Reg.* ...
Als Zeuge

... *Antoni Kupfer* ...
Als Zeuge

... *Samson Rumstein* ...
Antragsteller



Application for an identity card by the Nuremberg born Samson Rumstein, Krakow 1940

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