

THE NENTERSHAUSEN SYNAGOGUE

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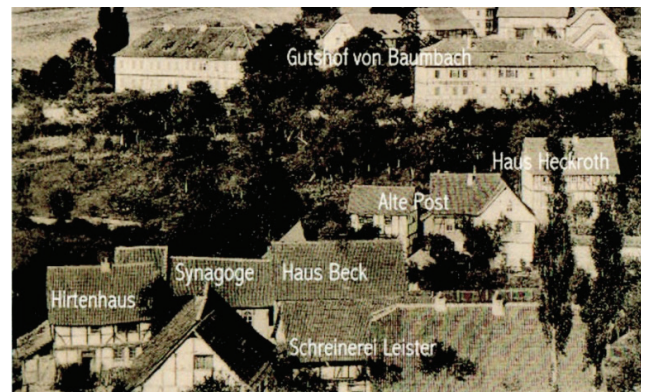
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Synagogue from Nentershausen today



The center of Nentershausen in 1908, looking north¹

NENTERSHAUSEN

Nentershausen is a small village in the State of Hesse, near the geographic center of Germany. Nentershausen lies in the Richelsdorfer Mountains between the Fulda River to the west and the Werra River to the east and belongs to the Kassel administrative district. The city of Kassel is 45 km north-west of Nentershausen. Kassel, with a population of about 195,000, once had a large Jewish community. Today tourism and farming are major businesses in Nentershausen. On December 31, 1971, the neighboring villages of Bauhaus, Dens, Süss, Mönchshosbach and Weissenhasel were combined with Nentershausen into one jurisdiction called Nentershausen. The merged population is about 2,700.



Nentershausen today

COMMUNITY

For all but the last 100 years, the majority of German Jews did not live in cities. In the later part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries the demographic situation changed. Large numbers of rural Jews left their small villages and their rural life for the cities of modern Germany.

Jews had come to Nentershausen as *Schutzjuden* of its local, patrimonial ruler – Baron von Baumbach.² *Schutzjude* in the Holy Roman Empire was a legal status that could be granted German Jews by local noblemen. Through a *Schutzbrief*, the family received the right to settle in a certain place and permission to conduct trade. Jews were craftsmen and merchants who supplied the villages with the goods not previously available locally. Among the Jews of Nentershausen were leather tanners, shoemakers, butchers, tailors, bookbinders, upholsterers, harness makers and so-called *Nothändler*. The Jews of Nentershausen and the nearby villages of Solz and Imshausen functioned essentially as a single Jewish community:

- Together, in 1810 they converted an existing building into their Synagogue.
- By 1835, the combined community had 157 members: Nentershausen 130, Solz 23, and Imshausen 4.
- In 1841, separate access to the women's balcony was created. The balcony would now be reached by a staircase located outside the building. Seating for men would occupy the entire ground floor.
- In 1847, the combined community acquired its own cemetery in Nentershausen and the first burial was held there.
- In 1905, the community had diminished to 99 members (Solz 3, Nentershausen 96).
- In 1925, the last major renovation of the Synagogue took place. During this renovation the ceiling and walls were repainted. The deteriorated exterior walls were repaired. The main prayer sanctuary on the first floor was reduced in size by erecting a wooden wall to create a small room at the rear of the sanctuary.

DESTRUCTION

I have been helping my son-in-law's father Bert Katz write his memoirs. Bert's father Willy was born in Nentershausen on January 19, 1898. The family escaped their home in the fall/winter of 1940-41 via the USSR to safety in Quito, Ecuador. Bert was 10 years old. Fortunately both Bert and his father were mindful of their history and passed it on to their children and grandchildren, the story of their family and its escape to safety. Willy wrote several detailed accounts of these events and also gave several interviews. Most importantly, he also saved many original documents, letters and legal papers. Without Willy Katz' foresight, both Bert's memoirs and this article would not have been possible. Willy Katz' collection of documents, and especially his reminiscences, provided many of the details about the November 1938 Pogrom in Nentershausen.

NOVEMBER 7-10, 1938: Although many historians have focused on the events that occurred on the night of November 9, 1938, the November Pogroms were not only a twenty-four-hour event nor confined to cities. The November 1938 Pogrom began in the smaller villages of Hesse earlier than in other places and extended over four days. The number of rural Jewish families had dwindled since the Nazis had come to power. Unfortunately for the few who remained, they were easy targets on the November Pogrom, as were their small Synagogues.³

Throughout Germany, violence erupted not in dozens, but in hundreds of communities, the vast majority of them being small villages where only a handful of Jews were present. The list of places in which pogroms occurred includes many unknown even to experienced scholars of German history. These included villages such as Nentershausen, small municipalities, where Germans inflicted violence upon their Jewish neighbors. The assassination of the diplomat vom Rath in Paris was the pretext to initiate pogroms. Nazi thugs set fire and destroyed Synagogues and looted Jewish-owned stores and homes. Many Jews were terrorized and beaten. More than 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps, including Bert Katz' father. The first destructions occurred late in the evening on November 7 in Kassel. Started by a local Nazi official, the riot began when a mob, mostly made up of SA and SS members, broke into and destroyed a Jewish restaurant, then a Synagogue, and then some twenty Jewish businesses. The next night, on November 8, twenty-four villages in Hesse, including Nentershausen, became the scenes of violence.⁴

NOVEMBER 8, 1938:⁵ The Pogrom came to Nentershausen. Mobs led by Nazis in the village looted and desecrated, but did not destroy the Synagogue. The prayer sanctuary was ransacked, its contents thrown out into the street. Torah scrolls and sacred books were burned. But the vandals would not set fire to the building itself, since other neighboring buildings owned by Christians would have been jeopardized had they set it afire. So they tried to collapse the entire building by sawing through the building's supporting central column. Their motorized saw stalled and its blade became stuck during the attempt. Their goal unrealized, the mob fled, fearing the building might collapse. The Nentershausen Synagogue had survived, but was no longer usable. The gold inscription on the wood lintel above the Torah Ark had been defaced and made illegible.⁶



The defaced Hebrew inscription had read "Know before whom you stand."

After they trashed the Synagogue and desecrated its religious contents, the mob continued their destruction at Jewish homes, looting and destroying both the Katz's living quarters and their shoe shop.⁷



Katz home at 2 Elzebachstrasse

The shoe shop was at the left of the building, inside a brick extension, the entrance being at the front under the sign. The entrance to the living quarters was in the center and a baking shed was on the far right. Five new sewing machines for sale were smashed. The Katz' shop also sold bicycles which were stolen during the Pogrom. In the living quarters, the dining room and the kitchen were smashed to pieces, and porcelain, glassware, crystal, pots and dishes were looted. Linens, some clothes and even wet laundry were stolen. In his multiple depositions to the *Oberste Rückerstattungsgericht*, Bert Katz' father stated: »The group's leader and instigator of the mob was the local *Ortsgruppenleiter* Konrad Raub. (Ironically the surname, Raub, means »loot« in German.) He was joined by the baker Georg Wettich, brothers Theodor and Willy Schein, pharmacist Lengemann and two others, Dinter and Regner, whose first names I can no longer remember.« Raub commanded the blacksmith Karl Gebhardt and house painter Heinrich Windedemuth to engage in the looting and pillage, but both declined. »They would not join such a thing!« Earlier in the morning of that terrible day, Georg Wettich had announced to the shoemaker Heinrich Stein, who himself did not participate in the violence, »In the evening it would go badly for the Jews.« Wettich led in the plundering of the Katz's home. Wettich opened Bert Katz' father's business desk. Among other objects, he took the shoe business ledger and loudly declared in Heinrich Stein's presence that he would now see »who had done business with the Jew Katz.«

The family sought refuge in the attic while the mob looted the house and shoe store below. Behind the door at the top of the stairs they piled furniture and other heavy items. The looters discussed setting the house afire. The hiding place would not have helped much had they set fire to the house as they wanted to do after looting. Bert Katz recalled that earlier, at age six, he had seen a massive barn fire. Now he was terrified. Fortunately the looters were talked out of it by some of their neighbors and several other decent, brave and kind-hearted townspeople, who Bert Katz believes knew that the family was hiding inside the house.

To protect his family in the attic against harm and ensure the mob would not change their mind, Bert's father went out of

the house with his four-year-old twin sons. He was kicked by his own apprentice shoemaker, Justus Kesten, who also had played a leading role in looting the Synagogue. In spite of the neighbor's protests, Bert Katz's father was beaten. »That we came away with life itself, we owe to the Nentershausen Mayor Schwanz, the shoemaker Ewald Moeller and the carpenter Johann Bergling. Herr Schwanz was so ashamed about this painful act of vandalism to our home and to our furniture, he sent a carpenter, who made enough makeshift repairs of our furniture for us to use.«⁸

Mayor Schwanz, Police Sergeant Zimmerman and several neighbors were both decent and very brave men in 1938 Nazi Germany. Despite their actions being clearly visible to other Nentershausen residents, they were unafraid to help the distressed Jewish family!

The local *Ortsgruppenleiter* Raub, also a shoemaker, had in his possession over 120 pairs of stolen shoes. The next day, Police Sergeant Zimmermann recovered the stolen shoes.⁹ They were seized and delivered to the Mayor's office who returned them to Bert Katz's father. Their value was 1,800 Reichsmark. A business competitor, Raub had also taken shoe-making equipment. Self-serving thefts were common during the Pogrom looting.

After the Pogrom, the Jews in Germany were required to pay for the cost of their looted properties. Bert's father had to deliver 1,200 Reichsmark, his grandfather 2,400 Reichsmark. After the Pogrom, a local resident, Johannes Krause, bought the Synagogue building from the Nentershausen municipality together with an adjacent shepherd's house for 600 Reichsmark. After demolishing the shepherd's house, he converted the former Synagogue into a garage for his trucks. Large openings were cut into the street-side of the building to allow the large vehicles to move in and out. In 1987, only the Synagogue building was sold to be dismantled and moved to the Hessenpark Open Air Museum. His family still owns property today.



Former Synagogue building as used by Krause's business

There had been 439 Synagogues in the State of Hesse. 40 percent were destroyed during the November Pogroms, 16 percent were demolished after 1945. 44 percent of the former Synagogue buildings survived, however in either a state of disrepair or repurposed. »They are in those places where no Jews are left!«¹⁰

AT PEACE

After World War II, Willy Katz returned to Nentershausen several times – where he had been born, grown up, married, and started a family.¹¹ During his first visit, he went to the local pub, moving from table to table. There sat his former fellows, playing cards, drinking beer and brandy. Greeting them by name, he shook hands with them, one by one. He still knew them all, because as long as he was away – he had not been away. Only one of the beer drinkers and card players, he seemed not to know in this first return to his old home – his former apprentice Justus Kesten. This was a surprise. So when Kesten asked the visitor if he did not know him, Willy Katz replied, »Yes, of course I know you.« But he did offer to shake hands. »Because then [during the November Pogrom of 1938] you kicked me in the ass.«

In 1980, at the age of 82, Willy Katz made his last visit to Nentershausen. Willy Katz and his wife Martha still had Christian friends in Nentershausen. »They were good people, very good people.« Of course, he had not forgotten who had been the ringleaders and looters during the November Pogrom. He still could recall them all by name. The local farmers had tried to persuade and reassure, »Willy, stay here, Adolf will not last long, nothing is as bad as it looks.« But it was. Willy Katz visited the former local *Ortsgruppenleiter* and schoolmate at his deathbed. »They spoke for the last time without bitterness,« Katz assured Schwarz. A thousand memories, good and bad, still bound him to his Nentershausen birthplace where he knew every tree, every lane and every family. The graves of his mother, grandparents, schoolmates and childhood friends are all in Nentershausen. Nentershausen was his home. Classmates of Willy Katz had included Mayor Schwanz and the local *Ortsgruppenleiter* Raub. Both had lost a son in WWII. »We all have to thank Adolf,« said Willy Katz, and he smiled a little. »I would have preferred to have stayed in Nentershausen, surrounded by sons and grandsons and great-grandsons, speaking the familiar local Hessian dialect.«

RESTORATION

»At the Hessenpark in Neu-Anspach near Frankfurt, there is an over 200-year-old building. It ought to be in Nentershausen, but it is here in the museum. It has found a new life in its new home – rescued, restored and completely rebuilt after years of mistreatment, ruined by its Christian owners. The small Synagogues in the rural villages of Germany were the local symbols of the Jewish minority in a Christian majority sea.«¹²

MAY 22, 1985: Herbert Krause, the son of the 1938 buyer, obtained permission to demolish and replace the former Synagogue building, which had deteriorated severely, at a »convenient opportunity.«¹



The reconstructed and repaired sign over the Torah Ark

The building was in such a state of disrepair and decay that permission was given to tear it down. The *Deutsche Altertumsbehörde* and the *Landesverband der Jüdischen Gemeinden in Hessen* gave their consent for demolition. In granting the demolition permit, authorities wrote, »... considering the most recent use of the building, any reconstruction as a Synagogue was no longer feasible.« The Torah Ark and part of the ceiling with its painted Stars of David would be transferred to the new *Heimat-und Bergbaumuseum*. The Synagogue's fate seemed sealed. However, it happened differently. The Synagogue was spared.

Due to extensive newspaper publicity throughout Hesse – the building was declared an historic treasure. In the summer of 1986, the Hessenpark Open Air Museum intervened. In November 1986, an agreement for removal and reconstruction at the museum was reached. The Synagogue would be rebuilt in its original splendor as part of the Hessenpark's community – exhibiting 400 years of rural life in Hesse.

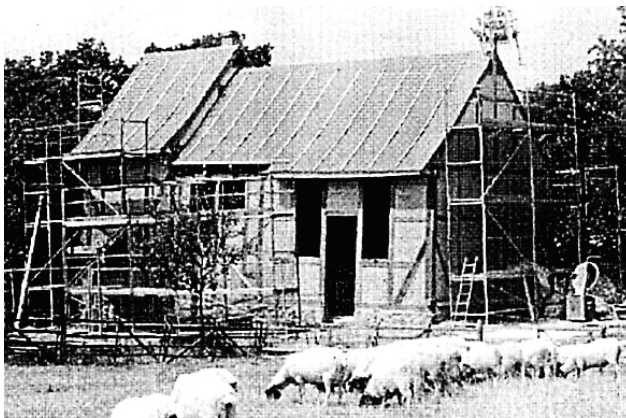


The Synagogue before being dismantled and rebuilt in Hessenpark.

AUGUST 29, 1987: Official approvals were given to remove the Synagogue from its original location and restore it as part of a Hessenpark village. Herbert Krause sold the building for the symbolic price of one Deutsche Mark for relocation and reconstruction at the Hessenpark Open Air Museum. Krause was relieved, »he had gotten rid of his dilapidated box.«¹

The Hessenpark began its work. In May and June 1987, a full onsite assessment was made. The building was dismantled piece by piece, during which a box full of documents was found. With modern methods, such as infrared imaging, the original decoration and paint colors were uncovered. The building was dismantled by museum staff and shipped to the Hessenpark. A section of the original ceiling with Stars of David and the front of the Torah Ark were delivered to the *Jüdisches Museum in Frankfurt/Main* for preservation.

NOVEMBER 1988¹: The ceremonial laying of the stone for the Synagogue was held.



JUNE 23, 1992: The Synagogue reconstruction was making progress. On the eastern wall of the Synagogue is the Torah Ark for the Torah scrolls – stored behind closed doors covered by a parochet (embroidered curtain). Between the Torah Ark and the front seats is the Bimah (reading desk) where the person leading the prayer stood with his Siddur (prayer book) opened in front of him. The Torah scroll was placed on the same table when read.

Above the Torah Ark, there are two tablets with abbreviations denoting the Ten Commandments. On the lintel is the Hebrew inscription, »Know before whom you stand.« The Ner Tamid (eternal light)¹³ hangs from the ceiling. In 1886, a Mikvah¹⁴ had been built in the Synagogue basement. Workmen dismantling the Synagogue found the Mikvah filled in with earth. As a part of the reconstruction, it was rebuilt in its original place as it had once been.

JULY 16, 1996: The reconstructed Nentershausen Synagogue with its original 1925 decorations, colors, furnishings and Mikvah was dedicated. The dedication ceremony took place in the presence of many prominent German government and religious dignitaries. The Hessenpark management expressed their thoughts:¹



Interior prayer sanctuary of the reconstructed Synagogue

»This small reconstructed house of worship is to serve as an example of the way in which the Jewish communities of the rural towns in Hesse had worshipped prior to the time of the pogroms of the Nazi Era. It serves an important purpose for the Hessenpark, namely a lesson for all who know too little about the history of the Jews in our country. It bears testimony today to the Jewish life that once existed, although it is in its original form but not used as intended, it will help others learn about the reasons that led to this diminished reality...

To prevent the disgrace of repetition:

We want to keep alive in our memory so that the dark era in German history will never be forgotten. We want to keep alive in our memory, in our historical consciousness, to learn from yesterday for today and tomorrow. We want to keep alive the memory to help us handle the dark periods of our history here. Jews had lived in Nentershausen for nearly 300 years. Fighting adversity, they created a space for their school, for a small Synagogue. They had friendly relations with their Christian neighbors. January 30, 1933, changed almost everything. The Nazi inhumanity had seized power. So that was then. And what about today? Responsibility remains. We cannot escape our history. We have to acknowledge it. What to do? There must be a lively dialog with the Jewish people. We must accept our responsibility for the Jewish people, for the people of Israel. We also need solidarity with those who are working to remove persecution. We must not retreat into a comfortable private and silent life when injustice occurs. We have a special responsibility. We have to fight against any injustice, against any cruelty. Especially after the Holocaust no one is allowed to stand on the sidelines when humanity is at stake. We must always be alert about the bad things that could happen again. The evil spirit is still stirring in many corners. If we stand up, then this day of remembrance of the horror, grief and shame can turn into a day of promise. The construction of this humble, beautiful Synagogue at the Hessenpark is a modest but important contribution to memory, to exhortation, to knowledge and to hope.«

NOVEMBER 9, 1988: Previously, a service took place in the Protestant Church of Nentershausen to commemorate the November Pogrom of 1938. The Synagogue building had been removed and taken to Hessenpark Open Air Museum a few months earlier.¹ Rudolf Schulze, its minister, remembered:

»We celebrated a very solemn service on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht during which the Nentershausen Synagogue had become a sacrificial victim. The service found a conflicting echo among the population. Nevertheless, about 100 people took part. After the sermon, the participants walked to where the former Synagogue had been located and ended the service with a moment of silence, prayer and song. This was not an easy service for all participants to attend. That impressed me very much at the time. At that time, the Nentershausen Community Board promised to erect a permanent memorial stone at the location of the Jewish house of worship.«

But no memorial stone was made. Finally, over 10 years later, a wooden sign was erected at the site of the Synagogue. It is the only physical evidence that at one time Jews had lived in Nentershausen.



Nentershausen Synagogue in 2016

AUGUST 10, 2010: Over time the inscription on the 1999 wooden sign outside the Synagogue site had become illegible. The Historical Society of Nentershausen erected a new and more substantial memorial plaque on the site of the former Synagogue.¹⁵

EPILOGUE

On Saturday, January 26, 1935, Erich Oppenheim was called to the Torah – his Bar Mitzvah.¹⁶ On May 4, 2015, he will repeat his reading. Erich Oppenheim has returned.¹⁷ The 93-year-old has come from Baltimore in the United States. He leans on a cane, walking the last few steps alone. It has been 80 years since he had last been to the Nentershausen Synagogue. The next day, his parents had sent the then 13-year-old together with his older brother Manfred to the United States, saving their lives. The Synagogue he had attended as a boy survived the Third Reich, but it is now 160 km away from Nentershausen in the Hessenpark Open Air Museum.



Erich Oppenheim at a morning prayer service in the Nentershausen Synagogue, reading from his 1935 Bar Mitzvah section of the Torah.

Oppenheim has come here to pray again in his Synagogue, to read again from his Haphtarah (a selection from the Books of the Prophets). Oppenheim is not alone. »There are four generations here,« says his son Lee. One, a great-grandson, will soon celebrate his own Bar Mitzvah, reading the same Torah text as his great-grandfather did 80 years ago. Hessenpark had been inviting Oppenheim to come see it for some time, but Oppenheim and his late wife, Thelma, were unwilling to travel at the time. With his wife having passed away, Oppenheim agreed to visit the Synagogue under one condition, »I'll come if you open the Synagogue and let us have a religious service with a Minyan.«¹⁸ The Hessenpark immediately agreed and began preparing the Synagogue for Oppenheim's arrival. They asked the nearest Jewish community to help provide enough worshippers to form a Minyan. The Jewish Community in the nearby town of Bad Nauheim did not hesitate and agreed. Monday morning they gather in the reconstructed Synagogue to pray with Oppenheim's family. Oppenheim stands with his tallit (prayer shawl) over his shoulders. Before he begins to read, he says »In memory of my mother, who was standing in the street, watching us go away.«

»I always sat next to my father, over there near the left front window.« On the day after his Bar Mitzvah, he saw his home and parents for the last time. Neither of them survived the Holocaust. »They sacrificed themselves for me.«¹⁹ His two younger brothers were also murdered. Their sister Bertha escaped through a *Kindertransport*²⁰ to Great Britain. Already in 1935, Erich's parents made the farsighted decision to send their eldest children out of Germany by ship to the United States. It is very quiet, Oppenheim reads slowly and fluently. His voice trembles. »Mazel Tov!« shouts prayer leader Benni Pollak from Bad Nauheim. Grandson Itzhak places his hand affectionately on Oppenheim's shoulder.²¹ Is it still the Synagogue of his childhood? »It is different – it has aged, as have we all.« The furnishing were different, he recalls – the Bimah was different.²² »But they did a nice job,« Oppenheim says about the reconstruction. He also remembers the benches. They were higher, he says. One did not have to lean over to read his Siddur (prayer book). »Perhaps it was because I was only 13. Who can remember exactly after 80 years?«

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Karl-Heinz Berndt, *Der Judenpfad*, published by the Historical Society of Nentershausen, June 2005.
- ² In 1661, Ernst Levin is mentioned as the first Jew in the *Chronicles of Nentershausen and Solz*. Sources: Paul Arnsberg, *Die Jüdischen Gemeinden in Hessen*, 1972, S. 116-118; and Otto Deisenroth, *Die Juden im Kreis Hersfeld und im Raum Rotenburg*, 1977.
- ³ Alan E. Steinweis, *Kristallnacht 1938*, Harvard University Press, 2009.
- ⁴ To get another view of the November Pogrom perpetrators, see Milton Meyer's book, *They Thought They Were Free*, University of Chicago Press, 1955. An account by a Jewish journalist living in Germany, making friends with ten former Nazis, and telling their stories about how they allowed themselves, or actively chose to, become a part of the Nazi machinery. In 1951, Milton Meyer spent a year in a small German town (that he called Kronnenberg) about the size of Nentershausen to get to know locals who had been Nazi party members. Kronnenberg had a Catholic Church, a Protestant Church and a Jewish Synagogue. Meyer described Kronnenberg »a quiet country town – small in size and population, old and conservative even for Hessen.« His book contains his extensive discussions with ten men regarding their experiences and thoughts. During the November Pogrom of 1938, the Kronnenberg Synagogue was burned to the ground. How did these ten Nazis feel about this event? Were they glad? A few were (including the one who actually led it). Were they disgusted? Many were. Could they do anything about it? None could, so nothing was done.
- ⁵ This information is from Willy Katz's 1948-1962 restitution claim documents and correspondence files.
- ⁶ The wooden front of the Synagogue's Torah Ark with its defaced Hebrew inscription has been exhibited at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC since its dedication on April 22, 1993.
- ⁷ Bert Katz's father and grandfather, both master shoemakers, repaired shoes, sold factory-made shoes, and made shoes-to-measure. They dealt directly with customers. The Katz men cut leather for the shoes that their apprentices would finish.
- ⁸ The material here was extracted from letters written after World War II between Bert's father, Willy Katz, and his cousin Norbert Bloch. In the years following the war, Bloch returned to Germany several times for extended periods to help Bert's father and others obtain their rightful restitution for the Nazi destruction and property theft. He had held government posts in Hesse prior to the war. He knew the people in charge and understood how the German legal system worked both before and after the war. Norbert Bloch and his wife Gretel emigrated to New York City on October 30, 1939.
- ⁹ Earlier, the Nazis had created new official police hierarchies and roles. Local police officers, even those in Nentershausen, were officially under national Nazi command. Police Sergeant Zimmerman himself would have been among them.
- ¹⁰ Thea Altara, *Synagogen und Jüdische Rituelle Tauchbäder in Hessen*, 2007.
- ¹¹ Excerpted from a July 5, 1981 article by Wilhelm Schwarz who visited Bert Katz's retired parents who then lived in Petah Tiqwa, Israel. It was published in *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, one of the newspapers of the Protestant church in Germany. The Hamburg weekly, published from 1967 to 2000, was the flagship of the Protestant press. Schwarz was born on December 25, 1929, in the village of Iba, less than 8 km southwest of Nentershausen. In 1955, he emigrated to Canada. In 1967, he became Professor of German Literature at the Université Laval in Quebec City. Bert Katz actually never met Schwarz in person, but they corresponded by mail for several years.
- ¹² Bettina Schümmer, *Mit Seiner Hülfe Von Oben*, Hessenpark, 1999, S. 57-72.
- ¹³ Hanging in front of the Torah Ark in every Jewish Synagogue, the Ner Tamid is meant to represent the menorah of the Temple in Jerusalem as well as the continuously burning fire on the altar of burnt offerings in front of the Temple. It also symbolizes God's eternal presence and is therefore never extinguished.
- ¹⁴ In Judaism, a Mikvah is a bathing pool used for the purpose of ritual immersion by men and women. The construction of a Mikvah is based on classical rabbinical writings. A Mikvah must contain enough water so that a person can submerge completely. The minimum necessary volume of water is 40 seah (approximately 500 liters). A Mikvah must be connected to a naturally occurring water source. Most Mikvahs are indoors. Collected rain water is often used for this purpose.
- ¹⁵ August 10, 2010 print edition of *HNA Rotenburg-Bebraer Allgemeine*, also online at <http://www.hna.de>.
- ¹⁶ A boy reaching the age of Bar Mitzvah becomes a full-fledged member of the Jewish community with all the responsibilities that come with it. Bar Mitzvah translates from the Hebrew as »son of the commandment.« To celebrate, he is usually called for the first time to read from the weekly Sabbath portion of the Torah. Bar Mitzvahs can also be celebrated on Monday or Thursday during morning prayers. An abbreviated portion of the Torah is read on these days. Erich Oppenheim read at the Hessenpark on a Monday morning.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/article/view/id/22278>
- ¹⁸ The quorum of ten men over the age of 13 required for traditional Jewish public worship.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹⁹ Together with hundreds of Jews from the surrounding villages, Oppenheim's parents and brothers were deported on May 30, 1942, from Kassel on a train heading east. Oppenheim believes that his brothers were killed in the Majdanek concentration camp and his mother in the Sobibór extermination camp. He does not know where his father was killed.
- ²⁰ Between 1938 and 1940, *Kindertransporte* were the series of rescue efforts which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children from Nazi Germany to Great Britain.
- ²¹ Mazel Tov (good luck) is the Hebrew phrase used to express congratulations for a happy and significant occasion or event.
- ²² The raised platform in a Synagogue holding the reading table used when leading prayer or reading portions of the Torah and from the Haphtarah (a selection from the Books of the Prophets).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Formerly a university professor, Stephen Denker has been researching family histories since 2000. In addition to this publication, he has published five history and genealogy books. He is presently editing the memoirs of his son-in-law's father who was born in Nentershausen, left Germany for Ecuador in 1940, and finally came to the United States.

NOTE

The workshop reports from the Hessenpark Open Air Museum contain contributions mirroring the great diversity of the scientific and conceptional work of the museum. These contributions allow for a wide range of formats, e.g. technical concepts, project outlines or documentations and reports on conferences or presentations, all on manifold subjects of everyday culture. We want to ensure that interested members of the public can access these pieces of information as well as that the information can be put to practical use. Parts of this series are published at irregular intervals and are available for free download on www.hessenpark.de.

IMPRESSUM

Werkstattbericht
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von Dr. Stephen Denker

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