



Our Family

by

Heinz and Thea Ruth Skyte, née Ephraim

Kitzingen



(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

Kitzingen is an old Franconian town, noted for its wine trade, situated amidst the most famous vineyards of the Main and Steigerwald.

Many of the early historical documents of the town were destroyed in a fire in 1484. During the 14th century Kitzingen had passed from the sovereignty of the House of Hohenlohe to that of the Prince-Bishops of Wuerzburg, who in 1443 pawned the town to the rulers of Brandenburg-Ansbach. Under their rule the reformation reached Kitzingen. In 1629 sovereignty was regained by the Prince Bishops of Wuerzburg. Citizens of the town were forced to reconvert to Catholicism and over 1,000 inhabitants, who refused to do so, were expelled. However, religious freedom was granted them in 1650.

Dr. August Schmitt in his 1873 Chronicle of Kitzingen describes the town in 1619 as follows:

"Kitzingen is a well known little town on both sides of the Main. It consists of three parts, the inner town, the outer town and Etwashausen on the left bank of the river. More than 3,000 surrounding acres are planted with vines and, on the left bank are many meadows, sufficient to graze 400 head of cattle comfortably. There are also numerous fruit and pleasure gardens on both sides. The actual town, built in the shape of a triangle, has a deep town moat going as far as the river, several walls, fences and 28 towers. Amongst these is the "Narrenturm", for the punishment of wicked women. On the "Falterthurm" lives a watchman, who looks after the time and gives fire warnings. In the outer town are also the Nunnery and the Infirmary. The little inner town used to have double walls and towers, many of which have however collapsed. The gates are closed at night and opened one hour before day break. The town has the privilege of holding markets. The market square, situated also in the inner town, is not very large. Eight annual fairs are held and the weekly market days are Wednesdays and Saturdays. Out-of-town people are allowed to bring and sell their wares, whilst a flag flies on the market in front of the Infirmary. The flag is taken down at 11 o'clock. Near the gate is also the old wooden Town Hall with its dance floor, which is used as a warehouse during the fair. Close by is the "Marktturm" (market tower). If fires occur, its watchman, during the day, hangs out a small red flag directed towards the site of the fire or a lantern at night. If fires burn in the country he blows a large horn and calls three times: "Trag aus, Alheit, s'ist nur dein Schad' und Leid." (Come

out everybody, it is only your loss and misfortune). The bridge, which is owned by the convent and collects the toll, starts at the Town Hall and goes as far as the outer gate by the bridge. From there it is built of wood which rests on three pillars of square stone. In the middle of the bridge, is the Custom House. The inner town has 180, the outer town 330 and Etwashausen 170 inhabitants. Etwashausen is surrounded by a large town moat and has four gates. Outside one of these stand the gallows and nearby is the "Koepfegrube", the place where people were beheaded. All citizens have the right to hunt hares, fowls and birds with hounds or snares within the boundaries and are also permitted to fish in the Main and, at night, to use lights for catching crabs. On Christmas Eve the poor of the town are allowed to cut wood on a specified site from early morning until the gates are closed. On St Urban's day the children are given little loafs of bread weighing 21 Loth (approx. 210 gr.) and a good drink of wine."

In 1803, during the occupation by Napoleon, Kitzingen came under the sovereignty of Bavaria. The town in 1806, however, passed into the Grand Duchy of Wuerzburg until it was finally returned to the Kingdom of Bavaria in 1814.

The Jewish Community of Kitzingen

As early as 1147 Kitzingen had a Jewish community, one of the largest congregations of the District Rabbinate of Wuerzburg. During the 13th century Jews were tortured and massacred. Throughout the following centuries the Jews suffered repeated persecutions, were given rights of protection against payments of special taxes, only to have these withdrawn again. According to a census of 1641, the Jewish congregation consisted then of 63 persons. A synagogue had been built in the 16th century. The building, which stood behind the town-moat was situated at No 6 Obere Bachgasse. It became a dwelling house, when Jews were expelled from the town, but until its destruction in an World War II air raid on the town in 1943, was still referred to as the "Judentempel".

There are records of an application in 1696 by the "Schutzjude" Lazarus for permission to distil spirits. Between 1705 - 1719 several accusations against Jews are brought by the Council as well as the townsfolk of Kitzingen, who complained that the increase in the number of Jews was detrimental to Christian traders, their profiteering, payment of negligible taxes and civic charges.

Persecution of the Jews of Kitzingen ever increased during the 18th century. They gradually moved out of the town and were accepted by surrounding villages, of which Mainstockheim was but one. In 1789 any remaining Jews were finally expelled from Kitzingen, although some documents suggest that the expulsion may have taken place in 1762/63 whilst others give the year as 1776. This expulsion had however long lasting consequences, as according the edict of 10 June 1813 "... the number of Jews, where they exist may not be increased ...". As no Jews lived in Kitzingen immediately prior to the 1813 edict, they were not now able to settle there again until after the "Emanzipationsedikt" of 10 November 1861, which finally lifted all restrictions, the "Matrikel" laws and allowed free settlement anywhere in Bavaria.

After the expulsion Jewish peddlers still visited Kitzingen for trade, but in 1807 local merchants again complained and Jews were no longer allowed to remain in town overnight. In March 1816 the County Court Kitzingen ruled that Jews, who wanted to trade in the town on days other than market days, had to have special permits. Shortly after this a few of the "most respected" traders of the outlying villages were able to obtain such a permit for a considerable fee. Amongst these were great-great-grandfathers Jonas Scheidt and Moses Kuhn of Mainstockheim. In the following decades a

few Jews were given permission to have warehouses in side streets, as long as no goods were visible from the street.

The Re-establishment of the Kitzingen Jewish Community

Some records state that after the 1861 edict Bernhard Scheidt, second son of Salomon Scheidt of Mainstockheim, was on 24 March 1862 the first Jew to receive permission to settle and trade as a draper in Kitzingen. In the "Geschichte der Juden von Kitzingen" (History of Kitzingen Jews) (1) Abraham Baer Stern of Mainstockheim, a grandson of Abraham Scheidt and great-grandson of Leser, is mentioned as the first person to have taken advantage of the new right.

The new Jewish arrivals were unable to form a congregation in Kitzingen, as there were not as yet the required ten adult males, but had to attend services in Mainstockheim, an hours walk away, or in Sickershausen. As more Jews moved to the town, they decided in 1864 to form their own congregation. Aron Gerst wrote a constitution and applied to the government of Lower Franconia. Royal permission was received for Kitzingen to form an independent Jewish congregation as from the 1st January 1865 under the chairmanship of Aron Gerst. A room in the private house of Emil Hellermann in Ritterstrasse was used as a prayer room. Louis and Bernhard Scheidt, sons of Salomon and Jeanette and Abraham Baer Stern were amongst people mentioned as making up the first Minyan, the required quorum of ten adult males. Soon however, as the congregation increased, this room became too small and the congregation leased a room in the Protestant School, which was fitted out as a synagogue and consecrated towards the end of 1867. 17 Jewish families lived in Kitzingen by that time. Louis Scheidt was elected President of the congregation and served from January 1868 to 1 January 1873, when the congregation had grown to 34 members. After Louis Scheidt moved to Frankfurt in 1873 an Executive Committee of three was formed, which took care of all necessary business and in 1875 a Board, to which Bernhard Scheidt was elected. Things did not always go smoothly and there were many disagreements. An application signed by ten members was made to the Magistrate in 1875, for permission to hold separate services, Bernhard Scheidt offering a room for this. They had complained that Aron Gerst, a member of the Executive, provoked certain people to talk back and would then fine them for doing so. They felt that whilst this member remained they would be unable to attend services. The Magistrate turned the application down, as the District Rabbi Adler had advised that there would be no qualified person to conduct services. Rabbi Adler however agreed that Gerst had a very bad temper and should be told to moderate his behaviour, otherwise he would be "dismissed" and a new member elected in his place. In December 1877 Bernhard Scheidt became Vice-president for the period 1878-1883.

A teacher, who also served as cantor and slaughterer was engaged in 1869 and a house in Obere Kirchgasse bought for his accommodation and also to house classes for religious instruction. Soon this became too small for the increasing community and in 1873 a further house to serve as a school house was bought by the community in Rosenstrasse.

When in 1871 the District Rabbi Immanuel Adler applied to have the Rabbinate moved from Mainbernheim, where only six families still lived, to Marktbreit, Mayor Schmiedel of Kitzingen intervened. He applied to have the Rabbinate located in Kitzingen, "the geographical centre of the area which, as well as having a new thriving community, was the seat of government offices and the police authority. It would also be of advantage to the town to have more Jewish citizens settle there".

The Kitzingen Synagogue

A building fund for a synagogue for the ever increasing community had been started by Hirsch Stern, a member of the newly appointed executive of the congregation in 1875. Payments of an entrance fee for new members, an annual membership contribution, a percentage of any dowry received by bridegrooms became compulsory. By 1876 the number of families were 50 and by 1877 had increased to 61.

In November 1881 two sites in Schrankenstrasse were bought for 11,000 and 9,000 Marks respectively. To finance this, shares at 50 Mk each were offered and, on a single day, 25 December 1881, 350 of these were sold, additional to 18,750 Mk raised in voluntary contributions. A Building Committee had also been elected on that day, of which grandfather Raphael Scheidt, Salomon and Jeanette's ninth and youngest child, who had by that time also settled in Kitzingen, was one of the members.



The entrance of the former synagogue in 1986

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

Laying of the Foundation Stone

Both Bernhard and Raphael Scheidt were amongst the people who on 31 July 1882 at 8.30 a.m. ceremoniously laid the foundation stone. This stone incorporated some coins, newspapers, a Hebrew document and its German translation commemorating the ceremony:

"For posterity it is herewith recorded that the foundation stone for this sacred building was laid in the month of Tammuz in the year 5642 after the creation of the world in the glorious reign of His Majesty King Ludwig II of Bavaria and at the time when the learned Mayor Ferdinand Sertorius was the head of the town, Immanuel Adler was District Rabbi and Hirsch Stern and Bernhard Scheidt were the Executives of this Congregation. We will give thanks to God for the blessings which he has bestowed upon us, that we Jews can also live in peace and harmony under the sceptre of the worthy and just Ruler of Bavaria and that we have the same rights as our non-Jewish brethren. Consequently 20 years ago, after an absence of 100 years, our co-believers again started to settle in this town and, at present, the number of tax-paying families is 65. May God put his blessings upon them. And these are the names of the men who, as well as the above mentioned Executives, were elected and who as a body are called the Building Committee: 1) Jacob Lehmann, 2) Maier Ullmann, 3) Aron Gerst, 4) Jacob Freirich, 5) Abraham Frank, 6) David Lauber, 7) Victor Mayer, 8) Nathan Gerst, 9) Raphael Scheidt. The construction was undertaken by Builder Korbach according to plans of the Town's Architect Schneider. May it be the will of Our Heavenly Father that this building shall soon be completed without any delays or difficulties and that we shall always live together in love, brotherliness, peace and friendship and that we shall all have the good fortune to participate in the consecration of this building and shall live to see still further Feast- and Holy-days in health and devotion. Amen. "

On 13 March 1883 three members (including Bernhard Scheidt) on behalf of the majority of the Building Committee made an application to have the Almemor of the new Synagogue located at the end, rather than in the centre. A minority supported by Rabbi Adler were opposed to this. Another request regarding the height of the balustrade of the women's section was made in May. As these matters were ritual ones the Magistrate decided that a decision for this would have to be left to the congregation.

The Consecration of the Synagogue

The new synagogue was consecrated with great festivities on the 7th, 8th and 9th September 1883. A special programme was printed for the occasion. After the last afternoon service (Mincha) in the old synagogue in the Protestant School, District Rabbi Emmanuel Adler made a short speech of farewell. After the scrolls had been taken out of the Holy Ark and handed to the appointed members of the congregation, a procession was formed. It was led by the youth followed by a female pupil, Emma Lauber, carrying the key of the new synagogue on a silk cushion, followed by the Rabbi with a Sepher Torah and all other Torah bearers, the band and choir. Then came the Honorary guests, which included Members of the Town Council and authorised Representatives of the Authority, who had previously been collected by a delegation, Government Officials and other Guests of Honour, the Building Committee with the builder, the building foreman, followed by all others. To the strains of the Schubert orchestra and accompanied by a large crowd, the procession moved to the new synagogue. At the doors a hymn was sung and Rabbi Adler recited some suitable psalm for the opening. Then Emma Lauber, presented the key on the cushion to Mayor Sertorius, and with a little poem invited him to open the building, which should be a credit to the town and thus proof, that in this country all people were brethren, irrespective of religious belief. The Mayor took the key and, after he had said a few words to the Executive, unlocked the doors and everybody flooded in. After the Holy scrolls had been carried three times round the synagogue, some hymns and readings, Rabbi Adler welcomed everybody and thanked all, irrespective of creed, who had contributed in any way towards the beautiful building. After his sermon and singing of Psalm 111, the eternal lamp was lit. Prayers were said for his Majesty the King and the Royal Family and the ceremony closed with the singing of Psalm 150.

Naphtali Bamberger described the synagogue as a magnificent monumental building. It was built in the Moorish style with two dome shaped towers, between which were the tablets with the first words of the 10 commandments. On the beautiful portal were the words "Jewish House of Prayer" in Hebrew lettering, and psalm 100, verse 4 was inscribed in golden letters above the three entrance doors. "On entering the synagogue through the vestibule, above which is the small prayer room, which also serves as committee room, one is hit by the beautifully decorated painted ceiling and walls. Above the Holy Ark of white marble is a crown shaped raised tablet around which is the Hebrew inscription "Remember before Whom you are standing". The synagogue is 24 m. long, 14 m. wide and 12 m. high. On three sides above the 290 men's seats, which are arranged in four rows, is the women's gallery with 146 seats. The balustrade is tastefully painted to resemble marble. Very beautiful is the chandelier with its gas lit candles, which is suspended from the centre of the ceiling, as well as a number of standard and wall-hung candelabras. The windows of frosted, painted glass throw subdued lighting over the whole interior adornment".

On "Kristallnacht", 10th November 1938, the synagogue was burnt down, a fate shared by most synagogues in Germany. The pogrom that night had been previously prepared by the Nazi party in Wuerzburg. During the war, after being horizontally divided by a concrete floor, it was used as a labour camp. Later the building was renovated and became, amongst other things, a factory.

On our first visit to Kitzingen in 1987 some of the windows of this once beautiful building were broken, part of the roof was leaking, and the whole building presented a picture of general neglect. An association of interested citizens of the town and surrounding districts, "Foerderverein ehemalige Synagoge Kitzingen a. M." worked hard for many years trying to have the synagogue restored to its former glory. Great efforts were made with the little material and funds available to put on an exhibition in the Synagogue: "The Jews of Kitzingen and Surrounding Communities" which was open to the public on Sunday afternoons.

In 1967 a plaque was affixed to the former synagogue.

**FORMER SYNAGOGUE OF THE JEWISH CONGREGATION KITZINGEN
BUILT 1883 - DESTROYED 10.11.1938
THE TOWN KITZINGEN PROVIDED THIS PLAQUE IN 1967 IN MEMORY OF ITS
FORMER
JEWISH FELLOW-CITIZENS.**

The former synagogue was classified as a Historical Monument owned by the town of Kitzingen. A City guide of Kitzingen describes the Synagogue of the Jewish Community as "the main architectural attraction of the Landwehrstrasse". "It still reminds us even to-day in its damaged condition, that the religious life of our town did not only include Catholics and Protestants, but that there was also an important Jewish Community. The foundation stone was laid on the 31st July 1882 and the consecration took place from 7th - 9th September 1883. In our photograph the domes on the two towers were added to the building, built in the Moorish style.



The former synagogue after reconstruction in 1997

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

During the "Reichskristallnacht" on the 10. November 1938, the synagogue suffered severe damage. During and after the war the building, which is now classed as a Historical Monument, ceased to serve as a place of worship." According to the guide Concerts of Chamber Music in the former Synagogue were one of the town's cultural attractions.

The Foerderverein had also started to establish an archive with material and books relating to the former Jewish community of Kitzingen and other places, which had been under the District Rabbinate of Kitzingen.

Gradually some repairs were done. In 1988 the building was re-roofed and some of the windows repaired. On 12 May 1989 the Main Post reported a decision to restore the former "Jewish Church" both in- and outside. The former synagogue has been a pitiful sight since "Reichskristallnacht", 51 years previously. "For the last 20 years there have been constant debates regarding the future of this once beautiful building. In consultation with the Jewish community of the area the purposes for which the building will in future be allowed to be used, will be agreed. A rehearsal room for a band was needed.

Alteration and reconstruction work started in 1990. The whole building was gutted and very extensive work had to be carried out to the basement, which was liable to flooding by the adjacent river Main. The Finance department of Kitzingen had set aside nearly one million Mark for contracts for interior sanitary, electrical, heating and ventilating installations. The cost of reconstruction and alteration of the former synagogue into an Art and Cultural Centre was expected to be a total of some 6,41 million Mark. (2)

However, further difficulties of opinion had to be overcome. Jewish interests did not want the building to be solely used for purposes other than the original ones. (3)

In order to find a solution to the problems a meeting took place between Oberbuergermeister Dr. Rumpel, Dr. Snopkowski, President of the Central Association of Jewish Congregations in Bavaria and David Schuster, President of the Jewish Community of Wuerzburg, which was responsible for Lower Franconia and therefore for Kitzingen. It was agreed that a "Synagogue within the Synagogue" should be included, a solution acceptable to all parties. This would accommodate 50 people and could be used as a Synagogue at all times. The Holy Ark should again be in its original position. The Synagogue to be visible from the foyer, to let visitors of the new Culture Centre see for themselves the historic significance of the building and that it will really encourage them to "remember". The inauguration of the Culture Centre with the "Synagogue within the Synagogue" to take place in 1993.

Arrangements for the inauguration of the new "Kulturhaus" (cultural centre) had been made for 19 May 1993 and invitations sent out. After some intervention by interested parties, including descendants of former Jewish residents of Kitzingen some changes took place. At the beginning of May new invitations arrived with an explanatory letter from the Oberbuergermeister. To avoid possible misunderstandings the name "Kulturhaus" had been revised and, in close co-operation with the Presidents of the Jewish Community of Wuerzburg and the Central Association of Jewish Communities in Bavaria, the name "Alte Synagoge" (Old Synagogue) had been agreed for the building, also pointing out that the "Synagogue within the Synagogue" recalled its original purpose.

Furthermore the archive and library established by the "Foerdereverein ehemalige Synagoge Kitzingen" in a small dilapidated room before the restoration were also given new accommodation in modern surroundings, where students can now carry out their research.

The Jewish Population of Kitzingen

No Jews lived in Kitzingen for some hundred years after their expulsion in the 1760/80s. After the re-establishment of a Jewish community in Kitzingen in 1863 the congregation grew through the influx of Jews from surrounding villages into the town. It however started to decline again after 1910, as more and more members left Kitzingen for larger towns e.g. Frankfurt, Nuremberg and Fuerth. Between 1933 and 1942 many Jews moved or managed to emigrate. In March and September 1942 the remaining 99 Jews were deported to Izbica near Lublin and to Theresienstadt. None of the members of the former Jewish Congregation returned to Kitzingen after the war.

Year	Jews	Total inhabitants
1641	63	
1731	120	

1867	57	5,931
1871	97	5,967
1880	337	6,966
1890	398	7,507
1900	463	8,489
1910	478	9,113
1925	421	10,272
1933	360	11,106
1938	210	
1939	165	
7.8.1942	103	
22.3.1942	27	
22.9.1942	2	
1943	1	



Kitzingen town archives

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

Footnotes

- (1) Naphtali Bamberger issued on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Kitzingen Synagogue.
- (2) Kitzinger Zeitung - Report 2 July 1991
- (3) Allgemeine Juedische Wochenzeitung, a German Jewish weekly paper, 12 March 1992.