



Our Family

by

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THE PRUSSIAN PROVINCE OF POZNAN (POSEN)

In the 16th and 17th century the province Poznan belonged to the Kingdom of Poland. The Civil Wars at the end of the 18th century led to the partitioning of Poland. In the first partition in 1772 King Frederick II. annexed West Prussia to Prussia. Further partitions followed in 1792 and 1794. Danzig, Thorun and the regions Posen, Gnesen and Kalisch were ceded to Prussia. King Friedrich Wilhelm III established the Grand Duchy of Poznan (Posen) in 1793.

In 1816 the total population of the province of Poznan amounted to 776,000. German culture and language had been introduced and the towns renamed and given German names. Due to competition with the industrial Prussian provinces, industry in the province declined and most of the population supported themselves through agriculture. The Prussian authorities abolished country markets and restricted those in towns. Prices of agricultural products began to rise in the 1830s. Natural disasters of floods and poor crops in 1845 led to more poverty and starvation. Epidemics of cholera and typhoid broke out, greatly increasing the death rate especially amongst the poor population.

Prussia was one of the States, which in 1870/71 combined with others, such as Baden, Hessen, Wuerttemberg etc. to form the second German Reich.

After the first World War in the 1919 treaty of Versailles the provinces of Poznan and West Prussia, apart from a very small western area - the Grenzmark Posen - Westpreussen, which remained German, were ceded to Poland. This area then formed the "Polish corridor", which divided East Prussia from the rest of Germany. Danzig became an independent territory.

At the end of World War II in 1945, all parts of Germany east of the river Oder became Polish territory.

JEWS IN THE PROVINCE POZNAN

Jews had been settled for many centuries in western parts of Germany and, due to religious persecutions and expulsions there, had emigrated increasingly further eastwards towards Poland and Russia. So Jewish Communities had become established in towns and villages of the province Poznan over some centuries. Here again they were to suffer, their rights and livelihoods were restricted and

they were subjected to payments of special taxes in money or kind to the various feudal lords, churches, councils or employees of these.

Jews had kept their German language, though this became intermingled with Hebrew, Polish or Russian words. After the province Poznan had become part of Prussia in 1793, Jews formed a large percentage of the German speaking population. The Prussian government ordered their Court Assessor Zimmermann to prepare a report, which showed "that the majority of Jews lived in towns and that most of these had "middle class" occupations. In some places, however, there were also some craftsmen. Particularly in the Ukraine there were many Jewish farmers. Jews were also used as day-labourers, manual workers and carters".

Prussia issued new laws concerning Jews, which however were no less restrictive than the previous ones. Regulations drawn up on 4th July 1793 concerning Jewish marriages laid down that a Jew, who lived on the "flat land", had to settle in those towns, where a Jewish community already existed. If he, however, lived in a town, he had to refrain from ever moving to "flat land". In 1794 the Prussian Minister von Voss reported that "on the whole the Jews of "Suedpreussen" (South Prussia) are more cultured than the citizens of the small towns and the peasants on the "flat land". Two categories of Jews were created, the "protected" and the "tolerated". Jews considered "civilised" and "protected" were given some special rights and privileges.

Jews started to struggle for equality. When the "Edict of 11th March 1812 concerning the conditions of Jews in the State of Prussia" gave Jewish inhabitants of other Prussian provinces certain rights, Jews of the province Poznan were specifically excluded. The regulations under which they had lived prior to 1793 remained. In 1827 a resolution of a session of the Parliament of the Duchy of Poznan to allow Jews some rights was rejected. In 1830 Prussia forbade Jews to move to other German provinces. Only on 1st July 1833 some temporary rules came into force. Jews were given the rights to have religious associations. Compulsory schooling of children between the ages of 7 and 14 years was introduced, after which they had to learn a craft or attend educational institutions to train for "better trades". Jews, who volunteered for the Prussian army and their fathers were exempt from paying special military taxes. Those who were "naturalised", i.e. spoke German and had adopted German names, could move. They could live either in towns or in the country and were allowed to buy farmland and choose occupations without restrictions. They were, however, forbidden to marry women from other provinces, unless these brought a dowry of at least 500 Rth with them. At first permission to move was readily given, but in 1836 restrictions were imposed, preventing skilled craftsmen from leaving the area.

"Tolerated" Jews, and 90% came into this category, had however inadequate incomes and suffered economic and political discrimination. They were unable to marry before the age of 24 and had to provide financial proof, that they were able to support a family. Unless they were employed by a landowner, they were not allowed to live in the country.

Until a further law was passed on 23rd July 1847 Jews had to fight for every right. In 1843 (or possibly 1848) the Jewish community of Birnbaum, for instance, protested strongly against the article by Dr W.B.Fraenkel "*Die Unmöglichkeit der Emanzipation der Juden im christlichen Staate*" (The impossibility of emancipation of Jews in a Christian state). When in 1856 the Representative of the Chamber of Deputies Wagener applied to have the words "*der Genuss der bürgerlichen und staatsbürgerlichen Rechte is unabhängig vom dem religiösen Bekenntnis*" (the enjoyment of civil and citizens' rights is independent of religious creed), contained in article 12 of the Charter of the Constitution of 31 January 1850, deleted, the various Jewish Communities of Poznan were amongst the 264 petitions strongly opposing this application.

Whenever there was a danger of a Polish uprising Jews were needed and were given jobs and some rights. During times of relative calm these were gradually withdrawn again and conditions deteriorated. During the wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870 Jews were again treated as equals, many fighting in the Prussian army.

The Prussian Constitution and the law of 3rd July 1869 were supposed to have finally given Jews full equality. In spite of this, conditions again deteriorated and attempts were made to remove Jews from positions, even though they were entitled to hold these by law. When there were further fears of Polish uprisings in the late 1870s it was declared that no difference had to be made between religions. All Germans, Jews were included in these, irrespective of their religion had to unite for the fight against the Poles. Germans of the Jewish faith had therefore to be considered to be of equal right.

The law of 1833 had allowed Jews to leave the province with the permission of the Minister of the Interior, which naturalized Jews mostly got. They very slowly started moving westwards, though their numbers were largely made up again by Jews, who moved in from areas of the Kingdom of Poland and from Galicia.

In the second half of the 19th century a very big wave of migration to the west, even as far as England, France and America, started. Many of these Jews settled in Berlin, where due to this influx the very beautiful "Neue Synagogue" situated in Oranienburgerstrasse was built in the 1860s.

A royal commission (*Königliche Ansiedlungskommission*), which was occupied with the repression of the Polish population, examined the move to the west. It came to the conclusion that Jews had to be included amongst the German elements and that the big migration of Germans, particularly also Jews, to the west was due to better employment conditions there. This migration in turn caused changes in the political and economic situations in Poznan. As many Jews were small traders, and the population on the whole was comparatively poor, conditions developed, which became clearer and sadder as time went on. In statistics of the district Inowiazlaw of 1870 it is reported "that the small Jewish traders prevalent in the small towns of the province Poznan were in a very sad situation in the 1870s. They became increasingly poorer, but they could not decide to try other work to make a living. If illness was added to the shortages and misery, then the tiny side streets, where they mostly lived, and where often several families shared a small room, presented a picture of the utmost depravity. There is then no other way out except the dire need to change to other branches of work or trade".

Bernard Breslauer, the first Secretary of the "*Verband der Deutschen Juden*" (Association of German Jews), in a pamphlet in 1909, "*Die Abwanderung der Juden aus der Provinz Posen*" (Emigration of Jews from the Province Poznan), however states that there had been many reasons for this migration. He believed that the main reason had been the long and constant struggle for equality, which caused them to find a new home elsewhere. He also blamed the lack of higher education in the province Poznan. As many Jews wanted to give their children a better education than they themselves had received, they sent them to towns, which had grammar schools. These children rarely returned to Poznan. Although there were some secondary schools in the province, their teachers constantly changed, as they themselves moved "to the west" and in large numbers to Berlin. There was no University in Poznan, so anybody wanting to study was forced to leave the province. There were no openings in the fields of technology or in the arts. For girls there were hardly any opportunities.

According to Eugen von Bergmann (*Zur Geschichte der Entwicklung deutscher, polnischer und jüdischer Bevölkerung der Provinz Posen seit 1824*) History of the development of the German,

Polish and Jewish population in Province Poznan since 1824) 46,640 Jews and 18,790 Poles left the Province Poznan between 1824 - 1871

After 1871 further migration took place, so that in most towns the Jewish population fell by 25 - 50% and more still in the second half of the 19th century and in some places even by as much as 75%.

Before 1834 registration of births, marriages and deaths was a matter of the Jewish communities, which on 28th December of that year were ordered to appoint registrars. The original records were kept by the mayors and later periodically sent to superior authorities.

A law of 23rd July 1847 introduced identical registration for the whole of Prussia. The registers were kept by a Judge-in-ordinary.

Registries of birth, marriages and deaths for all parts of Germany only opened in 1874.

Average number of Jews in the Duchy of Poznan.

Years	Average number of Jews
1824-1828	65,474
1829-1833	69,550
1834-1838	73,344
1839-1843	77,481
1844-1848	80,071
1849-1852	75,954
1854-1858	73,518

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