



# Our Family

by

**Heinz and Thea Ruth Skyte, née Ephraim**

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF BERLIN

Jews were first mentioned in Berlin in 1295, when merchants were forbidden to sell wool to Jews. Persecutions of Jews took place during the 14th century when, at the time of the plague, they were accused of poisoning the wells. They were expelled from the town in 1349, although they appear to have settled there again shortly afterwards. Further persecutions, sentences of death, burning at the stake and expulsions (some "forever") followed over the next three centuries. The Jewish populations of the whole province Brandenburg was expelled in 1573 after the Jewish Master of the Mint, Lippold, had been publicly tortured and drawn and quartered on 28th January 1573. He had been wrongly accused of the murder of the Elector Joachim II.

After years of wars and failure of crops etc, many foreigners were given permission or even invited to settle in the country, during the reign of Frederick William, Margrave of Brandenburg, "The Great Elector" (1640-1688). Their expertise and also their manpower was needed to improve the Prussian economy. Amongst these were Dutch and also the French Huguenots, experts in agriculture and trade. Thus Frederick William approved an application of Hirschel Lazarus, Benedict Veit and Abraham Ries, some Jews expelled from Vienna, who over the years had been forced to develop special financial skills. On 21st May 1671 the Elector issued an edict, allowing 50 Jews to settle under his protection ("*Schutz*") anywhere within the March of Brandenburg or in his Duchy of Krossen for 20 years. The first two Austrian families received their Letter of Protection, "*Schutzbrief*", on 10 September 1671. This date is now recognised as the foundation of the Jewish Community of Berlin, which existed there until 1943. Certain restrictions were, however, imposed on them, one being that they were explicitly forbidden to build a Synagogue.

Soon after this Edict objections to their presence were voiced again, and Jews were excluded from guilds and corporations. (Their exclusion from the Commercial Guild lasted until the beginning of the 19th century.) Trying to safeguard their settlement and so their livelihood, the "protected" - "*Schutzjuden*" - ("*Vergleitetete*"), issued some community regulations in 1674. This was also intended to prevent "tolerated" Jews, those without "*Schutz*" ("*unvergleitetete*"), to move into the area. They feared that their settlement, which, after all, had only been granted for 20 years, might be threatened by this illegal moving in of "*Unvergleitetete*", and that the burden of those taxes would also fall upon them.

In spite of this the Jewish population of Berlin grew and in 1700 amounted to 117 families, of whom only 70 families were under official "Protection". For this they had to pay, apart from the usual taxes, 8 Taler "*Schutzgeld*" as well as one golden Ducat on each marriage. The raising of the

"*Schutzgeld*" by the Jews of Berlin became a "pure impossibility", the community having become impoverished, their "most well-to-do" having died out or, having got into debt through fraud". The Elector of Brandenburg, Frederick III., who in 1701 had become King Frederick I. of Prussia, had however insisted on these payments and in 1702 the Jews elected representatives to appeal to him. Somehow the community appears to have got over this hurdle.

Over the next 100 years further rules and regulations, mostly of a restrictive nature and causing deterioration of conditions, concerning the community followed. The King had reserved the right to approve or even to appoint himself the elected Elders of the Jewish community, who were responsible for the assessment of assets and collection of taxes.

In May 1737 a conference took place of the War and Domain Cabinet and the "*Judenkommission*", a commission responsible for implementing a decision to limit the number of Jews in Berlin to 120 of the "best and richest" families plus 250 of their servants. The commission had to decide on how these had to be selected. It reported to have prepared a list, which showed the very careful selection of 120 heads of families. Amongst these were said to be "no more than 10 families with a capital of less than 1000 Rtlr, many having far above this amount". Documents, prepared by the Elders of the Jewish Community in 1733 for tax purposes, had been used for the selection. The commission further reported that they felt sure that some Jews, as well as Christians, could be found, who might have doubts or suspicions about the principles applied in assessing the capital of some of these Jews. These people might perhaps contest the findings of the commission or even find it not quite conclusive. The commission felt that, unless his Royal Majesty passed a resolution, asking the Elders of the Community and the cashiers to swear on oath as to the truth of the documents and the principles applied in assessing the capital of each individual, they might rightly or wrongly come under suspicion of having acted for personal reasons or even gain. These 120 families, including their wives and children consisted altogether of 794 people, which included 278 children under 10 years. A total of 1198 people, which included some old and sick dependent relatives, as well as some servants, were to be allowed to stay.

By June of that year it was reported, that 387 Jews had already left the city, before the given time limit of three weeks had expired, and that the remaining 200 would also be encouraged to leave as quickly as possible. King Frederick William I. personally added the following remarks to this report:

*"Gottlob, dass sie weg seyn, sollen die anderen auch wegschaffen, aber sollen sie sich nicht in meine andere Staedte und Provintzien niederlassen, sollen sie auch wegschaffen".*

(Thank God they have gone, the others shall also be made to leave, but they should not settle in my other towns or provinces, they shall also be made to leave).

The "*Revidirtes General-Previlgium und Reglement, vor die Judenschaft im Koenigreiche Preussen*", another law of 1750, laid down still more restrictive rules. Mirabeau, the French physiocrat, had called it "a law worthy of a cannibal". The regulations laid down, amongst other rules, that the number of protected Jews could not be increased. Only a first child could inherit the "*Schutzbrief*" and thereby be granted right of residence. Other children had to pay sums, which were practically impossible to be raised. It was further decreed that "whoever wants to give a son or daughter in marriage and to settle them, must choose a daughter-in-law or a son-in-law, who has a large personal fortune, and for whose settlements and dowries the parents do not have to use their own assets". Servants were altogether forbidden to marry, otherwise they could no longer be tolerated. 500 of the very poorest Jews had to leave Berlin.

Continually new taxes in addition to the "*Schutzgeld*" were imposed and special fees had to be paid for practically everything and on any occasion, e.g. to the fire fighting society, on marriage, births, deaths, for building and trade concessions etc.etc.

### **The "*Porzellansteuer*"**

In 1769 another most amazing tax, the "*Porzellansteuer*", was introduced by King Frederic II. The wool merchant Wilhelm Caspar Wegele had bought the secret of the manufacture of porcelain in 1751 and had opened a factory in Berlin, which had to close down during the Seven Year War. During the Prussian occupation of Saxony in this war, the secrets of Meissen porcelain had also been discovered. Ernst Gotzkowsky, a Berlin merchant, started another factory. When this got into financial difficulties, the firm was bought by the King and it became the "*Koenigliche Porzellanmanufaktur*" (Royal Porcelain Factory). In order to increase the turnover of his china, and "in order to publicize the products of the factory abroad more and more, the King decreed that Jews, before they could obtain any "privilege", e.g. permission of settlement, to buy a house, to marry or for any other matter, had to buy between 300-500 rtl. worth of china. This had to be sold outside the country and proof, that this had been done, had to be produced, before the particular document was handed over.

Jews were still excluded from all crafts covered by Guilds and were only allowed to trade in luxury articles, such as jewellery and precious stones, financial matters, real estate, manufactured goods, raw materials, horses and second hand articles, though some of these restrictions also affected the general population.

A privileged circle, the "*Hoffaktoren*" (Court Jews) must be mentioned, who had the task to supply the Court with financial means to carry out its personal, military and political pursuits. Amongst these were the families Ephraim and Itzig, who had been leased the right to mint coins by King Frederic II. During the Seven Years War (1756-1763), to ease the financial situation of the country, they were ordered by the King to produce poorer wartime coins by using inferior metals. This caused much hatred amongst the population, who called these coins, which bore the portrait of the King, "*Ephraimiten*", "*aussen schoen und innen schlimm - aussen Friedrich, innen Ephraim*" (on the outside beautiful, on the inside bad - on the outside Frederick, on the inside Ephraim). Through his connection with the mint, Veitel Heine Ephraim, the senior Elder of the Jewish Community from 1749 until his death in 1775, gathered much wealth. In 1766 Veitel Heine Ephraim built one of the most beautiful buildings in Berlin, the "*Ephraim'sche Palais*".

The *Ephraim'sche Palais* had stood in the centre of the old town, at the corner of Poststrasse and Muehlendamm. From 1843 it was owned by the city of Berlin. After being damaged during the 2nd World War (1939 - 1945), it was pulled down and the remains stored in, what was after the war and until 1990, the West Sector of Berlin. Its original situation was, what was during that period, East-Berlin. After years of discussions about rebuilding it on a new site in the West, the parts were eventually returned to the then East-Berlin in 1983 and rebuilt very close to its original position. It now stands on a site near the old St. Nicholas Church (*Nikolaikirche*), where many old and historical buildings have been rebuilt to re-create an area of Old Berlin, destroyed in the second World War.

Jews started to struggle against restrictions imposed on them and to fight for reform, emancipation and equality. Moses Mendelsohn was one of the best known advocates of this movement.

Between 1806 and 1815 under King Frederick William III. the Prussian Reform Movement, which strived for reform of social and political life based on individual liberty, was gaining momentum.

There were new legal rights for the rural population and serfdom was abolished. Schools of general education, "*Volksschulen*", and those of higher education, "*Gymnasien*", were introduced. People became "Burghers" instead of being "Subjects of the King" and they were free to trade or follow a craft in the city. Nobody who was settled and who was of good repute could be denied these rights. Jews, however, were specifically excluded.

Through the Municipal Statute of 19th November 1806 the Jews of Berlin eventually received some civic rights. The struggle for citizenship continued. Hardenberg, who had become Chancellor of State in 1810, stated a new law should only contain four words:- "Same rights, Same duties". Though the "Edict concerning the Citizens' Rights of the Jews of 11 March 1812" contained more than four words, it allowed 70,000 Jews to become Nationals and Prussian Citizens.

Though still living under great difficulties, including non-implementation or even reduction of civil rights granted them in 1812, the Jewish population of Berlin greatly increased, in particular through the vast migration of Jews from the east, especially the province of Poznan, over the next decades. Gradually educational and welfare organisations were founded.

When in 1871 the various German States combined to form the "Second German Reich" with Berlin as its capital, Germany had become an Imperial power and William I., King of Prussia, became Emperor of Germany. Jews became German citizens and all remaining restrictions were finally lifted.

During 1880/81 antisemitism again reared its ugly head. The beautiful "*Neue Synagoge*" (New Synagogue) was quoted as a sign of the power of the Jews. An antisemitic petition, pointing out the "Jewish danger", was circulated throughout Germany by the "*Berliner Bewegung*" and signed by some 250,000 people, demanding

1. that immigration of further Jews should be stopped or at least restricted.
2. that Jews should be removed from any position of authority and their work in the legal service, especially as judges, should be restricted.
3. that only Christian teachers be employed in elementary schools and only in very exceptional circumstances should Jewish teachers be used.
4. to order the reintroduction of official statistics of the Jewish population.

Many prominent Germans protested against this proposed segregation and the petition was also rejected by the *Reichstag*, the German Parliament.

To try to fight antisemitism on a political basis, liberal Jews formed the "*Centralverein deutscher Buerger juedischen Glaubens*" (Society of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith,) in 1893. Jewish Student organisations, sports and athletic clubs were founded. Zionist organisations came into being.

Having to flee from pogroms in eastern countries of Europe at the turn of the century and attracted by the prosperity of Berlin, many co-religionists made their way west and settled in the so-called "*Scheunenviertel*", a very poor area of just a few streets near the then central Alexanderplatz. A street there was described as "lonely and strange amongst the streets of Berlin, forming itself into a separate little town, with its own language, clothes, traditions and customs, which had no connection with the hustle and bustle of Berlin". A single street had ten orthodox Jewish hotels, food shops and bakeries and numerous second hand shops. It also housed many chassidic organisations and their numerous small prayer rooms - "*Shtibl*". Mishket Liebermann, an actress, was born there, called the area "a ghetto, a self-imposed ghetto" in her book "*Aus dem Ghetto in die Welt*" (From

Ghetto into the World). This area particularly attracted antisemitic feelings and many Jews felt that their precarious situation was threatened. In 1901 the "*Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*" (Aid Society of German Jews) was formed to try to help the immigrants during their stay in Berlin and to ease their emigration elsewhere.

## **Jews and the wars**

Jews had through the edict of 1812 become citizens, and when Prussia had declared war on 16th March 1813, the "War of Liberation", 400 Jews volunteered to join the army, 72 of them being bestowed with the "Iron Cross", an order then newly founded by King Frederick William. Berlin Jews manned the barricades alongside their neighbours during the March revolution of 1848, 21 of them died. Jews again took their place in the Prussian Army during the wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870/71. In the First World War approximately 100,000 Jews, of whom 19,835 came from Berlin, fought in the German army, navy and air corps. Many gained high distinctions, 12,000 gave their lives.

On 30 January 1933 the National Socialist Party of Germany (NSDAP) with Hitler, the "*Fuehrer*", at its head, came to power. From February 1933 onwards law after law was passed restricting and withdrawing rights of the Jewish population and other minorities. In 1933 (16. June) Berlin had 160,564 Jewish inhabitants, and, apart from over 30 Synagogues, several administrative buildings, many flourishing educational, welfare, cultural and sports organisations and institutions, many Jewish papers etc.

More and more regulations came into force restricting and withdrawing rights of Jews further and further and still further. Imprisonment, concentration camps, atrocities, deportation and finally murder followed.

## **The postwar era**

Some of the former buildings of Jewish institutions survived the Hitler period and the war years 1939-1945, some now bear memorial plaques. Only a few of the members of the Jewish Community of Berlin of some 160,000, however, survived this period.

After the war surviving Jews tried to pick up their threads. Some had survived, having been hidden and lived underground, some survived through "*Mischehen*" (mixed marriages), a few, very few, came back from Concentration Camps. Immediately some help was organised; the old Administration Building in Oranienburgerstrasse 28 re-opened its doors. This had been confiscated by the Nazis and was after 1943 occupied by them, housing the "*Reichssippenamt*", the Head Office dealing with the "Final Solution" - the extermination of Jews. It became once again the centre of what remained of Jewish life in Berlin and served as a first point of contact for help for the "Victims of Fascism", who had managed to survive or had been liberated from various Concentration Camps and returned to Berlin. The Jewish Hospital, parts of which had been turned into a prison by the Nazis and, towards the latter years of the war, served as an assembly camp for deportation, immediately became a hospital again. Religious services started to be held. Gradually some sort of life returned for the Jews of Berlin. Over the next few years many left Berlin, some to be re-united with family, who were now scattered all over the world. Many emigrated to Israel.

When a few years after the end of the war the municipal administration of Berlin divided into East and West, the Jewish Community was also divided and two separate administrations with their own institutions were formed in 1953. Only the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee was still used by both communities for a little while, West Berlin Jews soon establishing their own new cemetery in Berlin Grunewald.

In the late 1980s East Berlin had an ageing community of about 200 people. On 9th November 1989, a date particularly significant for Jews the world over, having been the date of "*Kristallnacht*" in 1938, the wall which had been built by the East Germans in 1961, was opened by them in several places.

West Berlin in the 1990s had a Jewish Community of about 6000, 50% of whom were recent immigrants from the Soviet Union.

After the official re-unification of the two Germanys, which took place on 3rd October 1990, the two Jewish communities of former East- and West-Berlin will also combine again. For the High Holydays in September 1990, members from former West-Berlin joined the worshippers of former East-Berlin for services at their Synagogue in Rykestrasse. The Synagogue, after having been confiscated by the Nazis and being used as a storage depot by the army during the war and also for stabling of horses, had been beautifully restored in 1953.

## **Jewish institutions**

### **JEWISH HOSPITAL**

A Jewish Hospital had existed in the 16th century, 100 years before the official establishment of the Community in 1671. Shortly after this the "*Chewra Bikur Cholim*", a society taking care of the sick, was founded and a small hospital built. In the 18th century another new hospital, also on the big communal complex Oranienburgerstrasse and Auguststrasse, had been erected and a report of 1796 states that:

"This house is 4 floors high and 20 windows wide", it had 12 rooms, 5 for female and 7 for male patients, a large hall for convalescent patients, storerooms, a small prayer room and living accommodation for the head in charge of the institution.

The first large Jewish Hospital in Auguststrasse was consecrated in 1862 and was used until the opening of the new hospital in Exerzierstrasse (now Iranische Strasse), which had been provided with all the latest medical and surgical equipment in 1914. During the Hitler period parts of this hospital were used as a prison and later still as an assembly camp for Jews, prior to their deportation. Parts of the Jewish Hospital have been rebuilt and refurbished since the end of the war

### **JEWISH ORPHANAGES AND CHILDREN HOMES**

Orphanages and Children's Homes had been opened, the first of these in 1789. By 1926 the total number had risen to twelve, ten of which were run by private charities and foundations.

## JEWISH SCHOOLS

The first Jewish school, the "*Juedische Freyschule*" had been founded in 1778 by David Friedlander and his brother-in-law Isaac Daniel Itzig. When in 1781 it became necessary to buy a permanent suitable building for the school, to prevent the institution having to move from house to house, members of the board appealed to be exempted from the usual purchase of 300 Rtlr worth of porcelain. The cabinet approved their petition two days later on 1st January 1782. The original building stood in Klosterstrasse, but had to close in 1825. Christian pupils had also attended the school for some years until the State prohibited their attendance in 1819. The school was taken over by the Jewish community and housed in one of their buildings in Rosenstrasse. The number of pupils increased constantly and a new building was opened at Grosse Hamburgerstrasse 27 in 1863. This building was replaced in 1906 by a new one, which also accommodated the Jewish Teacher Training College. This building still stands. In 1993 a Jewish School reopened in the old building, which once again is also attended by non-Jewish pupils.

A Middle School for boys opened in 1827, and one for girls in 1835, which later amalgamated. In 1930 the girls school moved into a new building in Auguststrasse 11/13, built on a large complex owned by the Community. The building still stands and now, however, houses the Berthold Brecht High School. A School for the Jewish Deaf was opened in 1873. Many other Jewish schools followed.

## JEWISH OLD AGE HOMES

The first Jewish Old Age Home had been founded in 1824. A new house was erected in 1844 and residents moved into the new building in Grosse Hamburgerstrasse 26. This was enlarged several times and further homes were built. By 1932 there were five homes for older people with over 600 places.



**Altersheim monument, 1994**

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

In 1942 the Home in Grosse Hamburgerstrasse, as well as the school next door, were used as prison-like assembly camps for Jews awaiting deportation. A memorial has been erected on the site:



(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

The inscription reads:

*An dieser Stelle befand sich das erste Altersheim der Juedischen Gemeinde Berlin. 1942 verwandelte die Gestapo es in ein Sammellager für juedische Buerger. 55,000 Berliner Juden vom Saeugling bis zum Greis wurden in die KZLager Auschwitz und Theresienstadt verschleppt und bestialisch ermordet.*

*VERGESST DAS NIE*

*WEHRET DEM KRIEG*

*HUETET DEN FRIEDEN*

On this site stood the first Jewish Old Age Home of the Jewish Community Berlin. In 1942 the Gestapo changed it into a collection camp for Jewish citizens. 55,000 Berlin Jews from babies to the very old were carried off to the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Theresienstadt and brutally murdered.

NEVER FORGET THIS

RESIST WAR

GUARD THE PEACE

## JUEDISCHES WOHLFAHRTSAMT

In 1922 all Jewish social and welfare institutions in the city were brought under one umbrella as the "*Juedisches Wohlfahrtsamt*", the Jewish Welfare Board of Berlin. By the 1920s Berlin also had a Jewish Institute for the Blind, a Home and an Old Age Home for the Deaf, and a permanent home for mentally retarded Jews. There was a workshop belonging to a non-Jew, who exclusively employed over 100 Jewish blind and deaf.

## JEWISH CEMETERIES

In 1672 the Jewish Community bought land in "Grosse Hamburgerstrase" for the first Jewish cemetery in Berlin. This was situated next to the Old Age Home. Moses Mendelsohn was buried here. By command of the Gestapo it was totally destroyed in 1943.



Land for a second cemetery was purchased in 1824 in Schoenhauser Allee, at that time still outside the town. It was consecrated in 1827 and used until the latter part of the 19th century. It has recently been restored and in 1994 was in very good condition.

Towards the end of the 1870s a further very large plot of land in Berlin-Weissensee was acquired by the community. Burials here started in September 1880. It is the largest Jewish cemetery in Germany with some 115 000 graves. After the end of the second World War and the division of Berlin the cemetery was situated in the then East Berlin between 1945 and 1990, but until 1960 served the whole Jewish Community of Berlin. After that, it was mainly used by the very small community of East Berlin. This very small community had not been in a position to maintain this large area properly, and it had become rather neglected. Over the last few years tremendous work has been done to tidy up and restore the Cemetery.

The Jewish Community of the then West Berlin opened its own cemetery in Berlin Grunewald in the 1960s.

The orthodox community "Adass Jisroel", which had left the Jewish Community of Berlin to form their own congregation in 1869, opened their own cemetery in Wittlicherstrasse in Weissensee in the 1880s.



**Jewish Cemetery Berlin Weissensee, "Alte Halle" (1990)**

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

The Jewish Community erected a Memorial to the memory of their brothers and sisters, murdered between 1933 and 1945 at the entrance of the cemetery.

## THE BERLIN SYNAGOGUES

Although the 1671 edict had specifically forbidden the building of a Synagogue, in 1712 a site in Heidereutergasse was purchased from the King for 3000 Taler and the first Synagogue in Berlin was built. This Synagogue was consecrated on Rosh Hashana 1714 in the presence of Queen Sophie Dorothea, her Court, as well as Ministers of the State. On the occasion of a visit for a Sabbath Service in 1718, King Frederick William I. presented the Synagogue with a valuable gobelin. After an addition of a Hebrew inscription in gold embroidery "*Es lebe unser Herr, der Koenig Friedrich*

*Wilhelm*" (Long live our sovereign, King Frederick William), this beautiful cover was used as a curtain for the Holy Ark. This curtain was later housed in the Jewish Museum, but has been missing since the looting of the Museum in November 1938. Though the Synagogue had been extended and altered over the next one and a half centuries, it became totally inadequate during the second half of the 19th century to serve the by now quite large Community of Berlin comprising by that time approximately 18,000 people.

The Synagogue had survived the November 1938 pogroms, but during the war, after having been taken over by the Post Office, was destroyed in an air raid. The site was cleared after the war.

Due to the vast movement of people from all parts of Germany to Berlin in the second half of the 19th century, the Jewish population also increased greatly. A new Synagogue, the "*Neue Synagoge*", designed by the Berlin architects Eduard Knoblauch and August Stueler between 1857 and 1859, was built on the communal complex at Oranienburgerstrasse 30. It was the largest Synagogue in Germany, seating 3000 people, with various rooms and halls for meetings and cultural activities.

The Synagogue was consecrated on 5th September 1866 in the presence of numerous dignitaries and government and community representatives by Rabbi Dr. Joseph Aub (1). A report of the occasion reads:

... Already an hour before 11.30 am., the time set for the start of the ceremony the Synagogue, lavishly festooned and decorated, opened its doors and was gradually filled by the large assembly. In the entrance stood five members of the Executive, several representatives of the community and members of the building committee to receive the invited guests. Of the latter we name: Count Boguslaus v. Radziwill, General Fieldmarshall Count von Wrangel, the governor of the Court, General of the Cavalry Count von Waldersee, General of the Infantry Dr. von Peuker, the Minister President Count von Bismarck, the Finance Minister Baron von der Heydt, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Dr. von Mühler, Minister of the Interior, Count von Eulenburg, the Mayor Lt.General von Alvensleben, Privy Councillor Dr. Johannes Schulze, the Undersecretaries of State Dr. Lehnert, Sulzer and Delbrück, the District President von Kamptz, The President of Police von Bernutz, the senior Government Councillor Lüdemann, the Chief of the Royal Household Chamberlain von Dachroeden, the Chief Burgomaster Seydel and deputising councillors, the present President of the Town Council Halske together with the deputy, the President of the House of Representatives von Forckenbeck and many members of the House, the Provost of Cologne. Around 12 o'clock an organ prelude played by Schwantzer started the ceremony. The Synagogue choir accompanied by organ and orchestra was conducted by Lewandowski, the royal music director (who also wrote the music for the choir) sang a song of welcome to those assembled (Psalm 118. verse 26: "Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord"). During this the decorated torah scrolls, preceded by two Synagogue officials carrying candles, were brought in up to the Holy Ark. The scrolls were carried by the rabbi and cantor followed by executive members and representatives, with other executive members at their side. During the procession "*Wie schön sind deine Zelte, Jacob, deine Wohnungen Israel*" was sung. This was followed by a benediction in Hebrew and German by Rabbi Dr Aub and the Hebrew song "Hear O Israel". The procession again brought the Torah scrolls to the Holy Ark. The doors were opened and the choir accompanied by organ and orchestra sang verses 7-10 of Psalm 24 (Lift up your heads, O gates! etc). On closing of the Holy Ark the Rabbi reciting the appropriate prayer in German and the choir finished with the last verse of lamentations (Jeremia 5, verse 21) in Hebrew. Now the choir sung a German song followed by the consecration sermon by Dr. Aub. In connection with the recently recited song of blessing from the Torah (Psalm 118, verse 26) he first re-

called the old Synagogue, wrongly mentioning that it opened in 1712, whereas this happened a year later again around the Jewish New Year 1714, he remembered the men who were concerned with this new house of God and have entered eternal peace, also Rabbi Dr Sachs, who in 1859 said the blessings at the laying of the foundation stone, the architects Knoblauch and Stühler and finally the President of the representatives Dr. Veit. He announced that apart from Hebrew, the German language will also be the language of services and then expanded the theme of his sermon (Haggai, chapter 2 verse 9 "The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts"). Again a German song followed, during which the rabbi read a prayer of consecration. After this the Mincha service according to the rites of this new Synagogue was held and the ceremony closed with Psalm 150 around 2 o'clock".

The "*National Zeitung*" reported the consecration of 5. September 1866 on the following day: "A fabulous building ... in the middle of a fairly plain part of our city, that introduces the phantastic miracle of a modern Alhambra with its graceful gentle columns, the tremendous arches, the colourful arabesques, the various articulated wood carvings, and with all the 1000 fold magic of the Moorish style".

Another report of the time states:- "The beauty of the architecture, the significance of the construction and the lavish splendour of the internal fittings proved the good financial position of the Jewish Community and their wish to build an imposing main Synagogue, which should become the centre of the Jewish Community of Berlin. At the same time the building was supposed to serve as a sign of the equality, which had been achieved, as now a building of worship had no longer to be hidden in a backyard and it was possible to compete with churches without having to worry about rousing any hostility".

In Juli 1867, during his journey to Russia, Lewis Caroll, the author of "Alice in Wonderland", spent some days in Berlin and visited the Synagogue. He describes the visit in his diary:

"19th July (Friday)

In the evening we strolled out and looked at the Jewish Synagogue, said to be well worth inspection - this we were told by a gentleman from New York, whom we met (with his wife) at the table d'hote & who seem very pleasant people ...

20th July (Saturday)

We began the day by visiting the Jewish Synagogue, where we found service going on, and remained until it was over: the whole scene was perfectly novel to me, & most interesting. The building is most gorgeous, almost the whole interior surface being gilded or otherwise decorated - the arches were nearly all semi-circular, tho' there were a few instances of the shape sketched here - the east end was roofed with a circular dome & contained a smaller dome on pillars, under which was a cupboard (concealed by a curtain) which contained the roll of the Law: in front of this was a reading desk, facing east & in front of that again a small desk facing west - the latter was only used once. The rest of the building was fitted up with open seats. We followed the example of the congregation in keeping our hats on. Many of the men, on reaching their places, produced white silken shawls out of embroidered bags & these they put on square fashion: the effect was most singular - the upper edge of the shawls had what looked like gold embroidery, but was probably phylactery. These men went up from time to time & read portions of the lessons. What was read was all in German, but there was a great deal chanted in Hebrew, to beautiful music: some of the chants have come down from very early times, perhaps as far back as David. The chief Rabbi chanted a great deal by him-

self, without music. The congregation alternatively stood & sat down: I did not notice anyone kneeling."

On the night of 9/10 November 1938, "*Kristallnacht*", when Nazi followers had started to set fire to a vestibule of the Synagogue, as in almost all Synagogues in Germany, Wilhelm Krützfeld, the Police Superintendent of the district was at hand. "As the Synagogue had been classed as a Protected Historical Monument since the reign of Emperor William I, he immediately marched to the Synagogue with a troop of police of his district, carrying the Official Order of Protection of the Monument in his hand. Referring to the document he prevented the S.A from lighting further fires and, at the same time, summoned fire engines, which immediately managed to extinguish the fire, which had already spread from the anterooms to the Wedding Suite"(2). Very little damage had been done.

On the day of Rosh Hashana, 14 September 1939 the golden dome of the Synagogue was painted black in order not to stand out. From the beginning of the war the Synagogue was used by the army as a storage depot (Military Clothing Depot III). On the night of 22 November 1943 during British air raids on Berlin the Synagogue was very badly damaged and described as "a total loss".

In many books a photograph of the burning Synagogue is shown stating this was on *Kristallnacht*. The picture could not have been taken on *Kristallnacht* as neither the tower nor a small dome on the east side are on it, which were not destroyed until the 1943 air raid. Neither was it taken on that night according to a report that the photograph shows the already destroyed Synagogue. The smoke and flames were added to a postwar picture (3).

The main part of the Synagogue was demolished in the 1950s, leaving only the front standing. This ruin was to have been preserved as a monument "for all times".

On 5th September 1966 a memorial plaque was affixed to one side of the main entrance of the Synagogue by the Jewish Community of Greater Berlin.

The inscription reads:

*5. September 1866 5. September 1966*

*Diese Synagoge ist 100 Jahre alt*

*und wurde am 9. November 1938*

*IN DER KRISTALLNACHT*

*von den Nazis in Brand gesteckt*

*Waehrend des II. Weltkrieges 1939 - 1945*

*wurde sie im Jahre 1943*

*durch Bombenangriff zerstört*

*Die Vorderfront dieses Gotteshauses*

*soll fuer alle Zeiten eine Staette*

*der Mahnung und Erinnerung bleiben*

*VERGESST ES NIE*

*Juedische Gemeinde von Gross - Berlin*

*Der Vorstand*

*September 1966*

This Synagogue is 100 years old and on 9. November 1938, Kristallnacht was set alight by Nazis. During World War II 1939 - 1945 it was destroyed in an air raid in 1943. The facade of this House of God shall remain a place of warning and remembrance for all times

NEVER FORGET IT

The Jewish Community of Greater Berlin

The Board of Executives

September 1966

Though these remaining parts of the Synagogue were to have been preserved as a ruin "for all time", restoration of the front part started in 1988 to form the Centrum Judaicum. Another matching plaque was affixed to the other side:

*50 Jahre nach der Schaendung*

*DIESER SYNAGOGE*

*und 45 Jahre nach der Zerstoerung*

*wird dieses Haus*

*nach unserem Willen*

*und Unterstuetzung vieler Freunde*

*in unserem Lande*

*und aller Welt neu erstehen*

*Juedische Gemeinde Berlin*

*9. November 1988*

50 years after the desecration of this Synagogue and 45 years after its destruction with our determination and the assistance of many friends in our country and all over the world, this house will arise again

The Jewish Congregation Berlin

9 November 1988

This part consisted of the beautiful outer entrance hall leading to an inner hall and cloakrooms. There were meeting and lecture rooms etc. on the upper floors. (The actual Synagogue was behind these parts).

On our visit in 1994 the inside of the front was very nearly completed. Wherever parts of the original decoration could be found amongst the ruins these have been used in their original places. No attempts has been made to try to match any parts of the original structure. Miraculously the eternal lamp was found amongst rubble in the ruin. The back of the building, the actual Synagogue, was demolished in the 1950s and will not be rebuilt.



**The back of the building. Nothing remained of the actual Synagogue, 1994**



**The golden dome shines once again over the Synagogue, 1994**

(photos: Heinz & Thea Skyte)



**Memorial plaque, 1990**



**The building is guarded by armed police and a police van is permanently outside the building, 1994**

(photos: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

It was intended that the Centrum Judaicum would house the Jewish Museum and Library. As, however, a new Jewish Museum is being built elsewhere in Berlin, what will be here in future apart from a small prayer room on an upper floor? The Synagogue was the only place in the former East Berlin visited by Bill Clinton, the American President, in June 1994.

During the 19th century problems had arisen within the various sections of the Jewish Community. The majority of the community had wanted to liberalise and to introduce reform to some degree. Rabbi Dr. Aub introduced a new liberal type of service for the New Synagogue. An organ and a mixed choir and the German language now featured in services. His appointment as Chief Rabbi and that of Abraham Geiger as deputy and their liberal attitude, led to a small orthodox faction leaving the main community, to form their own independent congregation "Adass Jisroel" in 1869. In 1872 the Jewish Community opened the "*Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*", an academy for Jewish research. "Adass Jisroel" opened the "*Rabbinerseminar für das orthodoxe Judentum*" (Rabbinical Seminary for orthodox Judaism) in 1873.

The "Reformgemeinde" had already been founded in 1845 as part of the main community. Their Synagogue in Johannisstrasse was consecrated in 1854. The services, except for some of the main prayers, were conducted in the German language. The Synagogue was extended at the beginning of this century, a beautiful organ was installed and a mixed choir accompanied the services. These were eventually held on Sundays, instead of Saturdays. In the 1930s Friday evening services were conducted in a small Synagogue in the Joseph Lehmann Schule, Joachimstalerstrasse 13.



**Former Joseph Lehmann Schule**

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

The Synagogue was burned down and completely destroyed. The whole complex was cleared after the war, leaving a wildernis.

In 1933 Berlin had 30 Synagogues. Less than a handful remain.

## THE JEWISH MUSEUM

This had been planned for many years and opened in January 1933 in the building next to the New Synagogue, Oranienburgerstrasse 31. Here were housed the many valuable collections of works of art, bequeathed to the Jewish Community. Many Jewish artists contributed works. Exhibitions, lectures and courses were held. The Museum was looted on 10 November 1938. After the war in 1945 many of the valuable paintings were rediscovered in various government buildings, some have been found in various locations in Berlin since then, others appear to have vanished for ever.

## JUEDISCHER KULTURBUND

In 1933 the "*Kulturbund deutscher Juden*", later to be renamed "*Juedischer Kulturbund*", was founded. Jewish musicians, singers, conductors, actors etc were no longer permitted to perform in the concert halls, opera houses and theatres of Germany. They now banded together to give high quality performances for Jewish audiences, although censorship soon started to bite here too. Works by Schiller, Goethe and other German authors were no longer allowed to be performed by Jewish artists. In 1937 Jewish orchestras were forbidden to play works by Beethoven followed by many other classical composers, apart from Haendel.



## Footnotes

- (1) Rabbi Dr. Joseph Aub is a descendant of Abraham Mayer Aub of Baiersdorf, an ancestor of the Skyte/Scheidt and Schloss families. He was born in Baiersdorf on 4 December 1804. At the age of 25 years he officiated in Baiersdorf before becoming Rabbi of Bayreuth. In 1850 he moved to Mainz and served the Mainz community for 15 years before being called to Berlin in 1865. He was one of the first rabbis in Germany to use the German language in services and published a number of Jewish philosophical and educational books. Rabbi Aub died in Berlin on 22 May 1880. He is buried in the "Ehrenreihe" on the old Jewish Cemetery Schoenhauser Allee next to his wife Ida née Osmund.
- (2) Hermann Simon in his preface to the 1987 reissue of Ludwig Geiger's *"Geschichte der Juden in Berlin"*.
- (3) Heinz Knoblauch in his book on Wilhelm Kruetzfeld: *Der beherzte Reviervorsteher* (The courageous District Chief of Police).