



Our Family

by

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Market place in Birnbaum

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF BIRNBAUM

Birnbaum, in Polish Miedzichod, is another town in the former Prussian later German Province of Posen, just like Neustadt bei Pinne, where the Ephraim family originated. After the end of World War 1914/1918 it became part of Poland, just on the Polish side of the border with Germany, whereas closeby Schwerin/Warthe, where the Alterthums, another branch of ancestors, had lived, remained German. Both towns became part of Poland after World War II.

It is believed that there was a Jewish population in Birnbaum at the beginning of the 16th century. Early documents of Birnbaum have been lost in two great fires in 1635 and 1712.

Between 1597 - 1790 the town had belonged to the Family von Unruh. When *Christopher von Unruh* began his reign in 1731 he immediately started a "*Privilegienbuch*", recording special rights or limitation of rights "for the renewal of the old laws of the Town Council and licences bestowed on particular citizens, Jews and Guilds" (1).

Little information could be found, though Jews of Birnbaum appear to have been relatively prosperous and officially accepted. After the passing of the Prussian Municipal Statutes of 17th March 1833, the Town Council of Birnbaum laid down that only a third of the Town Council could be Jews. Thereafter Jews did serve as members of the Municipal Council and of the Assembly of Town Councillors.



Alley in the old town of Birnbaum

(photo: Heinz & Thea Skyte)

Birnbaum had a synagogue. The Jewish community employed a teacher and cantor as well as a shochet (slaughterer), who also looked after the synagogue. Jewish children attended the non-denominational school, which employed a Jewish teacher. Apart from the *Chevra Kadisha* (Burial Society) there were a quite a number of Jewish societies, amongst these a Women's Society, a Welfare Society, a Bridal Fund, a Jewish Dining Society, a Reading Society and one for Jewish History and Literature.

STATISTICS OF BIRNBAUM

Year	Inhabitants	Jews
1793	482	
1816	1592	348
1827	2200	650
1837	2637	more than ¼ of the population
1840	-	790
1857	3000	700
1871	-	586
1885	-	294
1895	-	218
1905	-	142

Here again the movement away from the town can be seen.

Footnote

- (1) A. Heppner and J. Herzberg: "Aus der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Juden und der juedischen Gemeinden in den Posener Landen 1904-1913" (Excerpts of the Past and Present of Jewish Communities in the Territories Poznan 1904 -1913).