



# Our Family

by

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## THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF SCHWERIN AN DER WARTHE

Schwerin an der Warthe (in Polish Skwierzyna) is a town formerly in the Prussian province of Poznan, an important town on the trade route, which in olden times followed the river Warthe through the then "Grosspolen". It remained German after World War I (1914 - 1918), but became part of Poland after the second World War (1939 - 1945).

It was a "*unmittelbare*" town ruled by the "*Starosten*" of Meseritz. Starosten (Slavish for "Eldest") was formerly one of the feudal lords of Poland, owner of a fief given by the king.

Jews settled early in Schwerin and in 1456 each Jew had to pay 4 Groschen "*Kopfgeld*", a special tax, to the town. After the expulsion of Jews from the March Brandenburg in 1510, the Jewish population of Schwerin increased, Schwerin and Meseritz being the nearest towns to Brandenburg. In 1520 Sigismund I. ordered Jews to leave Schwerin as "they interfered in various ways with the livelihood and comfort of the citizens", though, it is believed, that this order was never carried out. Jews are mentioned to have lived in the town at different times after that (1).

Wladislaus IV. (1632-1648) confirmed an agreement of 6 January 1641 between the citizens of the town and the Jewish Congregation of Schwerin, which was represented by Wolf Loeser, Samuel Jotze, Markus Feibisch, Moyses Jockhans and Jakob Moyses. This laid down the following conditions: Jews had to:

1. pay, like other citizens, towards the two watchmen, "who take care of the watch of the town and call it out".
2. participate, at times of the plague or of war, in keeping watch. (The four Elders were, however, to be exempt from this, though they had to employ and pay two Jewish and two Christian watchmen in their lanes at night),
3. pay 12 Polish florins "*Schaarwercks-Gelder*" (2) to the Council for every Jewish occupant of a house.
4. pay 300 Rtl immediately for all privileges, particularly for the right to buy houses from citizens and then annually 53 Rtl. at Christmas for ever,
5. give the Mayor and the Parson each three lbs of pepper at Easter, and each house to pay quarterly one shilling to the town servants,

6. refrain from buying any more houses from Christians. (Although they were still allowed to buy a further four houses in the Reuthergasse, though they would have to pay annually a percentage of the cost of each house to the Council - 48 Polish Groschen for every three Polish Marks),
7. report quarrels between Jews and Christians concerning houses and pastures to the Council and the Courts of Schwerin.
8. refrain from buying food or corn outside the town or in the lanes,
9. refrain from buying corn for brewing before noon, particularly wheat and barley, (apart from Pesach, when as much wheat as was required for this festival could be obtained; but if a Christian should request it, the Jew had to give him the wheat at cost price),
10. refrain from bringing any cattle or horses to the town pastures; it was only allowed at "Georgi", when horses were usually brought from Gnesen,
11. refrain from bringing and keeping more than 60 "Schoepfe" on specified municipal land after "Johanni"; however, 10 oxen were allowed to be taken along by the town's cattleherds and to be looked after by them,
12. refrain from taking any unsold kosher meat to Christian butchers. To refrain from slaughtering together with Christian butchers on three days before Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide, as this offended the Christian faith (!) and, in case of meat going bad, to refrain from carrying this through the lanes,
13. to refrain from using or buying any barns or malting houses outside the town as living accommodation,
14. refrain from harming craftsmen, such as clothmakers, tailors, cobblers, furriers and smiths and therefore refrain from cutting local or foreign cloth or furs and to refrain from making axes or trading in these. (The only crafts they were allowed to carry out was tailoring, but they were not allowed to belong to a guild and were only allowed to sell wheat flour to each other),
15. refrain from malting grain, brewing beer or importing foreign beer and to buy their requirements of these only from brewers in Schwerin,
16. refrain from filling any positions vacated by citizens, without the permission of the Council,
17. refrain from bringing foreign Jews into the town,
18. had they bought corn outside the town on Thursdays, Jews were allowed to have this delivered on any other day; they were also allowed to collect acorns, as other citizens and under the same condition,
19. undertake not to build a house, barn or similar in the garden, which had belonged to Isaak Barroch and which bordered on the house of Maczeske,
20. all licences and agreements, which contravened this order or any part thereof were to be declared null and void.

In return the Council and the citizens promised to protect Jews, as far as possible, in times of war and to be of assistance during outbreaks of fire. If however a fire broke out in a Jewish house due to carelessness or deliberate action, that particular Jew should be punished but should, nevertheless, be allowed to rebuild the premises.

Whoever broke these regulations or only a part of them, would be fined 200 ducats or gold florins.

Many further regulations followed, restricting the livelihood of Jews. There was a "*Tuchmacher-Privileg*". This forbade the making of any cloth, cutting as well as peddling this in the town or in the countryside.

In the years 1636, 1682, 1685 and 1718 there were also regulations placing restrictions on Jewish butchers, tailors, bakers, and smiths. In 1728 a regulation concerning furriers forbade them to trade

with furs and pelts within or outside the "*Starostei*" of Meseritz, the land ruled by the Starosten of Meseritz. The "*Schuhmacherprivileg*" of 1765 forbade the buying of leather in the streets of the town. In 1756 bakers in the town had complained, that Jews were still trading in bread and flour and demanded that this be confiscated.

In 1785, after the synagogue had burnt down the previous year, the Jewish community was granted permission to build a new one. The foundation stone for this was however not laid until 15 April 1839 and the building was completed by 1841. A new "*Synagogen-Ordnung*" was drawn up in that year, laying down details for services. Amongst the 48 paragraphs of this, it ordered that on all holidays a "*Mi-she-berach*", a special prayer, to be said for Moses Montefiore of London and Adolf Cremieux of Paris for their services to Judaism as a whole, but in particular for their brave action for the unfortunate people in Damascus in 1840 (3).

A Jewish Elementary School existed in Schwerin which, according to an appreciative report of the Prussian Government (dated 21 November 1833), was housed in a "solid and roomy school building", and which then employed four teachers. Due to the migration of Jews from Schwerin, as from other places in the province of Poznan, the number of pupils diminished constantly. In 1905 the school was still attended by 25 pupils, which had been reduced to only 10 in 1924/25.

The Schwerin Jewish Community also had a *Chevra Kadisha*, a society caring for its sick, a men's welfare society for loans to deserving poor and a women's society taking care of poor brides.

Although the Jewish community had debts of 36,000 fl when Poznan became part of Prussia, in 1815 it had donated more than 100 Thaler for wounded Prussian soldiers, a considerable sum at that time. As in other parts of Poznan, Jews enlisted in the Prussian army and took part in the battles and wars of 1848/50, 1864, 1866 and 1870/71. (4)

Jewish councillors also served on the Town Council.

## JEWISH POPULATION OF SCHWERIN

YEAR	NUMBERS
1800	906
1838	1543
1849	1198
1857	1072 (including 5 adjoining villages)
1871	640
1880	473
1899	300
1901	188
1907	161
1913	115
1924/25	30 families

## Footnotes

- (1) A. Heppner & J. Herzberg: "Aus der Vergangenheit der Juden und der juedischen Gemeinden in den Posener Landen".
- (2) Schaarwerk = socage i.e. payment for rent for feudal tenure of land.
- (3) Father Tomaso, a Franciscan monk, was murdered in Damascus on 5 April 1840. Damascan Jews were accused of ritual murder, leading to antisemitic disturbances throughout Syria. Jews, amongst them children were imprisoned and tortured. The French and Turkish opposed the Austrian and British governments. Isaac Adolphe Cremieux, a French politician, and Moses Montefiore, British philanthropist and sheriff of the City of London, together with James Rothschild, Lord Palmerston (British Foreign Minister) and Count Metternich (Austrian chancellor) eventually managed to achieve the release of any surviving Jews. (Philo Lexikon, 1935).
- (4) A. Heppner & J. Herzberg: "Aus der Vergangenheit der Juden und der juedischen Gemeinden in den Posener Landen".