

The History of the Jews in Kaisersesch

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Jüdisches Leben im Landkreis Cochem-Zell
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1. Settlement of Jews in Kaisersesch

How and when Jews first settled in Kaisersesch is not documented. But we suppose, that after the award of freedom of the city and the right to hold markets in the year 1321 by king Ludwig the Bavarian the town became interesting for Jewish traders, who were not allowed to learn a handicraft by the severe guild prescriptions. This shows, that it is possible, that Jews have already lived in Kaisersesch in the Middle Ages, but they have probably been driven away from this region by the arbitrariness of the mostly catholic rulers.

In the life of Jews years of persecution changed with years of settledness. In 1418 the archbishop "Otto von Trier" drove the Jews away from his region, because of the rise of banks they were no longer needed. Against that in the 16. century a full resettlement of Jews took place. On the 02.05.1547 the elector gave 34 Jewish families the allow ness to settle down in the region of Trier. In 1618 an arrangement was released for the Jews, which said, that the Jews were not allowed to life here without the explicit grant of the elector. Because up to that time they were not allowed to do their retail trade in the large cities outside of closed living areas, many Jews moved to the country, where they were allowed to do it.

Since the year 1808 there was an enumeration of all Jews of today's district Cochem-Zell, in which 319 Jews lived, but there are no declarations, that Jews lived in Kaisersesch at that time. The first numbers descend from the year 1856, in which 13 Jews were supposed to have lived in Kaisersesch. That the Jews settled here at that time is a little bit remarkable, because the mood in the new gained Prussian Rhine provinces was rather hostile to Jews, because the emancipation edict from 1812 was not put into force. Possibly the in 1852 introduced retail- and cattle market had been initiated by one or more Jewish traders, because Sylvan Siegler, a Jew who has emigrated to the USA at the age of 12 with his father in 1937, thinks, that three generations of Jews had lived in Kaisersesch before his father. With that I am sure, that the beginnings of the Jewish community of the 19. and 20. century have to be found between the years 1808 to 1856.

2. Amount of Jews in comparison to the German Reich

In the following a table will reproduce the state of population of the Jews in Kaisersesch from 1858 - 1936 and compare them with the average of the German Reich.

Year	Inhabitants altogether	Catholics	Jews	Portion of the Jews	Federal average
1858	1003	983	13	1.3 %	No Information available
1890	1148	1099	44	3.8 %	1.04 %
1895	1223	1164	52	4.3 %	No Information available
1910	1486	1429	44	3.0 %	0.95 %
1925	1531	1471	39	2.6 %	0.93 %
1936	1532	1483	41	2.7 %	No Information available

These numbers show, that the number of the Jewish inhabitants in Kaisersesch, which was in the average about 3 %, was three times as high as the Federal average. This indicates, that Kaisersesch accommodated a relatively big Jewish community, whose size changed from time to time, but was 39 in the average. From 1895 on Kaisersesch was the second biggest Jewish community in the district Cochem-Zell, only the city of Cochem was bigger with 114 inhabitants in 1895 respectively 56 in 1925. In addition to the table is to say, that in Kaisersesch always lived more Jews than protestants, but that was a fact, which was the same in the whole district. In some villages there lived no protestants at all.

3. Jobs of the Jewish inhabitants

Supposedly most of the Jews had been cattle-dealers or butchers, because cattle-dealing was very important in the Eifel area. Only three of them are known to me by name:

1. Moritz Schmitz was a butcher. His shop had been closed by the Nazis in 1935 because of pretended uncleanliness.
2. Moritz Siegler was a farmer and cattle-dealer. His shop was closed in 1938.
3. Bernhard Siegler was a cattle-dealer in Kaisersesch and also after his emigration to the USA.

Some Jews have probably worked additionally or as their main occupation as farmers, as we saw at the example of Moritz Siegler, because that was one of the main occupations in the Eifel. Other Jews worked as traders, so did Max Schmitz, who owned a textile shop and "Auschels" Berta, that's what the family Siegler was called in the speech of the people, sold haberdashery and linen. There are also stories told about Moritz Lang, who walked through the village with a bell and sold fish.

4. Relation with the rest of the population

A good example to show the relation between the Jews and the rest of the inhabitants of Kaisersesch is the 25th anniversary of the ordination of dean Sauer, who worked in Kaisersesch from the 12th of September 1921 until the 28th of September 1945, the day he died. On that day the dean greets besides the members of the Catholic Church in the hotel Wagener in the Koblenzer Straße also a table with Jewish inhabitants, who congratulated him to his jubilee. Also the fact, that in 1926 at the 20th athletics and the 25th anniversary of the gymnastics and sports-club 1901 Kaisersesch, the name Siegler was mentioned as section leader for the 8 to 9 year old children, is a proof for that the Jews were engaged in the club life, that they were respected and that they were not handicapped. But Jews were members in other clubs too, like in the skittle club as the following picture from the year 1929 shows.



There are two jewess on this photo...

As a generous donor of a football the chronicle of the gymnastics and sports club shows the Jew Eberhard Siegler. He donated the ball in 1923 when the first football players met "Auf dem Wassem" (today the area of the REWE-supermarket) to start playing football. That catholic fellow-citizens helped their Jewish friends and neighbours despite the threat of punishment, is shown by examples from the time before and after World War II. As a male family member died in the house of the family Mayer, nobody dared to bury him. Then Franz Klinkner, someone who lived in the neighbourhood, took heart and drove the dead body joined by a funeral procession to the Jewish graveyard outside the town. The following pressure by the Nazis did not bother him. Even more courageous was Hannes Meyer, who dared to say good-bye to his friends in the terrible moments of their deportation. He stuck to his intentions even though the SA was joining them. Not all citizens were so courageous and ready to help, but faced them rather distrustful. There are anecdotes told about a teacher who taught in the school in Kaisersesch in the time before the First World War:

"Frooms Max, a Jewish pupil, had complained to his teacher in the time before the First World War, that one of the other pupils had called him a stinky Jew, whereupon he replied: "Well then you should have called him a stinky Christian" which is not the same and about

which the teacher with his arrogance and his superiority could mock very easily." "That teacher was generally always malicious and unjust after the Jewish pupils. And as he now old and trembling, but still with his insidious smile, wanted to welcome back his former Jewish pupil Moritz Siegler, who returned from the First World War, he left him standing alone."

On the whole we got a picture of the Jewish citizens with the catholic citizens handed down, which shows, that the Jews have been integrated in the community and accepted by the fellow-citizens. Until the beginning of Hitler's dominion they seemed to have lived a normal life, without political pursuit or hate on the part of the fellow-citizens.

5. Life of the Jews in the every days life

The religious and cultural centre of the Jewish community was the house of prayers in the Koblenzer Straße, which was called "Judenschule (Jew school) " in the speech of the citizens. You entered the little and insignificant house from the side of the Koblenzer Straße, went upstairs then and reached a choir from which you could look in the room lying underneath that. We can not say how that room was equipped, because there are no pictures existing of it. The only thing, which is handed down, is, that a big chandelier was hanging at the ceiling. Rabbi in the time of the Second World War was Moritz Schmitz.



House of prayers in the Koblenzer Straße

The children of the Jews went to the same school as the children of the Catholics. Often there are stories told about the "Matzen" (Jewish baker's ware), which the Jewish children gave to the other pupils at the pasha feast. The first Jews lived all in houses, which stood in the old town centre, today's Balduin- and Turnstraße. Later they lived also outside the old town centre , for example in the Hambucher Straße, "Im Höfchen" and in the direction to the railway-station, which is today called Bahnhofs Straße. In 1920 the Jewish community Kaisersesch made an application for the establishment of an own graveyard. Up to that time the Jews of Kaisersesch and the surrounding villages Dungenheim, Hambuch, Masburg and Müllenbach buried their deceased on the Jewish graveyard in Binningen, which was in the middle of the 19th century nearly the biggest Jewish community in the district Cochem-Zell.

With the writing from the 25th of June 1920 the nearly 150 souls embracing Jewish communities applied for the graveyard at the mayor's official residence in Kaisersesch. Therefore they bought a piece of land of a size of 9.74 ar for 2000 Marks from Paul Ollig on the " Zenterbach ". From them executing committee and the representative assembly this buy was sanctioned at the 14th and 15th of August 1920. Bernhard Siegler and Abraham Mayer signed the record of the conclusions.



Left row of graves on the Jewish graveyard

People, who had fields near the graveyard, report, that during the time of the Nazis gravestones often had been knocked over. In the time of the American occupation several people had been interrogated in that affair, but the offender was not found out¹. What the Jewish tradesmen in and around Kaisersesch had to go through, shows an article from the "Nationalblatt Mayen-Koblenz" from the 17.9.1935, where under the title "Again four Jewish filthy shops closed" had been reported about the closing of bakeries and butcheries. How the Nazis tried to take action against the friends of Jews, shows a letter written by two employees of the administration of the office.

The letter should mock them and make them insecure, at which the latter part succeeded. The letter was as following:

"30..April.1942

Dear friend !

You might have heard that we have moved with bag and baggage today. We march towards the sun to the land of promises - Poland - where Jehovah prepared a new home for us and where we will no longer be afflicted by the evil Nazis. I would have liked to take leave of you by myself, but I did not do that, because I did not want the Nazis to see that you had been my friend, they would persecute and insult you as Jew friends. I know that you are not a Nazi and that you do not want to become one of them. You stucked with us all the time without showing it to the public. Jehovah, the god of the Jews, will reward you one day. First of all I would like to thank you on behalf of all my fellow people for the loyalty you hold to us in those hard days. We are all full of hope firm as a rock, that also for us the trumpets of Jericho will play onetime. Then we will march to Kaisersesch with our heads high and we will chase the evil Nazis to the devil. Then the day will come, on which we will repay the shown benefits. We will bring you post and dignity and you should rule with us over the goims (?). Then the yellow star, which was affixed to us by the evil Nazis and with which they wanted to mock

us, will be the highest decoration in the state. From Zion's wise men I got the commission to award you this highest decoration today. It will take some time until it is awarded to you with a big celebration. Therefore take care of this letter and do not show it to the evil Nazis, so that they will not haunt you like they did us.

Sincerely Yours
Moritz Schmitz, Rabbi"

6. Emigration of jewish inhabitants

Many Jews from the jurisdiction of Kaisersesch succeeded in leaving Germany before the " Reichskristallnacht " in November 1938. So they saved themselves from being deported to the concentration camps and went to safe foreign countries, to start a new life there. They emigrated mainly to the USA, but some Jews also emigrated to Palestine. About ten Jewish inhabitants moved to cologne, but with which they did not save themselves from the reach of the Nazis. Julius Siegler emigrated 1936 to Luxemburg, where he probably soon had to live under the same conditions as in Germany. The following facts are from the answer of the mayor Simmig from the 8th of June 1946 to the inquiry of the district administration in Cochem about Jews in the district before and during the war. The names refer to the whole district and are not subdivided into the single villages. An assignment to the single villages was not possible for me, because I did not have lists of the population from the year 1934, the beginning of the emigration. And we can not be sure, that this list is complete, because some of the names of the deportated Jews are missing. In the following list only the emigrants and the Jews, who died during that time, are listed.

Name	died	emigrated to
Bender, Denny		1938 Cologne
Bender, Alies und 6 Kinder		1938 Cologne
Mayer, Ernst		1937 Palestine
Siegler, Bernhard	1974 USA	1937 USA
Siegler, Lilly		1937 USA
Siegler, Julius		1936 Luxemburg
Mayer, Abraham	1939 Kaisersesch	
Mayer, Henriette	1936 Kaisersesch	
Mayer, Elias	1939 Cologne	
Mayer, Frieda		1935 Cologne
Mayer, Johanna		1937 Palestine
Mayer, Karl		1937 USA

Mayer, Lilly		1937 USA
Mayer, Oskar		1935 USA
Hesse, Hermann		1935 USA
Hesse, Siegmund		1937 USA
Hesse, Ehefrau + Kind		1937 USA
Kaufmann, Richard		1934 USA
Kaufmann, Ehefrau		1934 USA
Kaufmann, Berth.		1936 USA

During the visit of Joshua Liberson in May 1992 to Kaisersesch (chapter 11) I heard, that his grandfather Bernhard Siegler had two sons, which are not listed above, which is an further prove of the incompleteness of the list. They were named Sylvan (born 1925) and Manfred (born 1930). He also told me, that a cousin of the family was the first, who emigrated to the USA. From there he tried to get the rest of the family to the USA. Therefore he needed much money, because he had to send a big amount of money to Germany, to save some members of his family. Especially tragically is, that this money was stolen three times and so it was prevented, that all family members, were saved. That is why Moritz Siegler and his family had to stay in Germany and watch helplessly, how they were led into death.

7. Occurences in the "Reichskristallnacht"

In the " Reichskristallnacht " SA-members from Cochem helped their party-companions in their devastating activity, because they had no connection to the Jews in Kaisersesch and so they could do their job more unscrupulous. After the same principle the synagogue in Mayen was burnt down by foreign SA-members, while the SA-members from Mayen were up to one's tricks in other towns. In that night pretendedly just the house of prayers should have been damaged, but that is not the total truth. Some families were harassed, insulted and beaten. Eye-witnesses confirm, that the SA entered the house of the family Schmitz, devastated the flat and beat the family members.

On the next morning all Jews were brought to the old gym for an examination of the happenings. Records of the examination, which could describe the happenings in that night, are no more present.

Who did not emigrate until that night had been a victim of the holocaust after many humiliations.

8. Deportation of the Jewish inhabitants of Kaisersesch

Already weeks before the deportation the 16 remaining Jews from Kaisersesch were accommodated with the four members of the family Hessel from Hambuch, two members of the family David from Düngeheim and about 15 Jews from Binningen in the house of Moritz Siegler in the Hambucher Straße. The 15 Jews from Binningen could have been the families Haas, Schmitz and Marx, who are named in the commemorative book of the federal government as Jews deported from Binningen.

That it was not pleasant to live in one house with about 35 persons can be imagined by everyone and this shows the disregard of the Nazis against the Jews. A guard was placed in front of the house, which was only allowed to be left for shopping with a grant from the SA. After their return they were principally examined for forbidden objects. In the night courageous neighbours brought additional food to the Jews through the garden behind the house. On the 29th of April 1942, one day before the deportation, they got the last chance to go shopping. On that day they also visited the saddlery of my grandfather Jakob Wagener, who had to add straps to their sacks, so it was easier to carry them. They told him, that they got a letter, which said, that they had to walk to the dairy at 10.00 p.m. for the purpose of eradication.

On the next day the SA had no problems to guide the perhaps 35 Jews to the dairy, where a cattle-van was waiting for them. Nobody protested, because everybody knew from the experience of the last months, that protest and revolt were purposeless, or could even be deadly. So they walked down the Cochemer Weg with dragging steps, escorted by the SA at the front and at the back. Because no big suitcases were allowed, but small luggage, they wore many articles of clothing under their bloated overcoats, on which the yellow star was shining. On a heap of straw, which was lying on the cattle-van, Frieda Wolf was laid down, who was disabled and bedridden for a long time.

This was told by eye-witnesses, who watched the scenery behind drawn curtains frightened and not having the courage to help the Jews. Nevertheless, as told earlier, the Jews experienced a humane gesture, when Hannes Mayer dismissed his friends personally with a handshake. Also the SA could not stop him from his intention. When all had taken place in the cattle-van, the flaps were turned over and so you could only see the hats and the hair of the people standing out over the flaps.

The van started moving and took the Jewish fellow-inhabitants of Kaisersesch into their ruin.

9. Out of the commemorative book of the federal government

Only some Jews succeeded in surviving the holocaust after the deportation by the Nazis. I do not suppose, that one of them was a Jew from Kaisersesch.

In the commemorative book of the federal government the following is registered about the destiny of the Jews of Kaisersesch. .

Name	birthday	day of death	place of death
Bender, Friedrich	20.08.1876	not heard of	unknown
Kaufmann, Flora geb. Hanau	28.12.1876	presumed dead	Minsk
Mayer, Lilli	07.07.1921	not heard of	Izbica
Mayer, Rosa geb Gottschalk	20.09.1892	not heard of	unknown
Mayer, Dora	unknown	not heard of	Poland
Schmitz, Moritz	08.07.1868	12.08.1942	Theresienstadt
Schmitz, Pauline geb. Herz	05.07.1872	not heard of	Minsk
Siegler, Bernhard 2	27.08.1873	not heard of	Minsk
Siegler, Frieda geb David	30.06.1885	presumed dead	unknown
Siegler, Frieda geb Kahn	22.06.1892	presumed dead	unknown
Siegler, Leo	26.09.1928	not heard of	unknown
Siegler, Moritz	10.03.1893	presumed dead	unknown
Siegler, Rosa I.	09.08.1927	not heard of	unknown
Siegler, Sally	15.12.1894	not heard of	unknown
Siegler, Selma geb. Wessel	21.03.1900	not heard of	unknown
Siegler, Wilhelm	03.09.1863	not heard of	Minsk

These facts are from the commemorative book of the federal government: victims of the jews under the nationalsocialism in Germany 1933-1945, 2 volumes, publication: Bundesarchiv Koblenz, 1986

10. Jews in Kaisersesch after 1945

It is understandable, that there lived no Jews in Kaisersesch directly after the war, but 1959 Arthur Kann founded another branch to his firm in Emmelshausen "Sweaters Kansa". He was born about 1930 and survived the holocaust, but his parents did not. But his firm, which produced textiles, became bankrupt in 1975.

1989 the school for mentally back warded children was supposed to get a new name. Mr. Pfalz, teacher at that school, had talked about the theme of the Jews in our district with his pupils. So he suggested not naming the school after a well-known person, but after the Jewess Edith David from Dungenheim, who was deportated at the age of 14 on the 30th of April 1942, together with the jews from Kaisersesch. For this reason Mr.Pfalz wrote a letter to the sister of Edith David, who had emigrated to the USA in time. In this letter the last years of Edith's life and the situation in the years of the jew-baiting is described a little bit.

I do not want to enter into this, because it applies to the village of Dungenheim. But I want to mention, that the Jews in Dungenheim were integrated, accepted and had a lot of friends too, as the letter shows². But now back to the original theme. The school was not named after

Edith David, but I do not know why. It is a pity, because it would have been a first step of reparation.

Kaisersesch still shows the presence of the former Jewish fellow-inhabitants. There are 18 gravestones on this graveyard, which are only partly readable. On the 30th of April 1992, the 50th anniversary of the deportation, the scouts of Kaisersesch under the guidance of Werner Lutz inaugurated a commemorative table at the former diary, the place of the deportation. The scouts walked the same way the Jews had to walk on that sad day 50 years ago. A second commemorative table was attached to the old school. That shows that even today in the time of new appearing of national socialistic groups, humans think of their former fellow-inhabitants, the Jews.



Commemorative table at the old school

Two weeks after the anniversary an unexpected visitor arrived in Kaisersesch. Joshua Liberson, grandchild of Bernhard Siegler, visited Kaisersesch, the town of his ancestors, on his trip through Europe. Here he applied to an old friend of his uncle Sylvan Siegler, Peter Klein, who went to school with him. Joshua Liberson wanted to know something about his ancestors on the one hand and on the other hand he could tell us things we did not know in Kaisersesch before. Then we visited the houses of the Jews, the graveyard and the commemorative table. On the graveyard Joshua thought that his great-grandparents, who died about 1920, could have been buried here. But, because this graveyard had not been build before 1921, his great-grandparents had to be buried on the Jewish graveyard in Binningen, where the Jews of Kaisersesch buried their deceased until that year. So we drove to Binningen and we really found three gravestones with the name Siegler, but we could not read the first name clearly. In good faith having found the right graves we drove back to Kaisersesch, where Joshua called his uncle Sylvan to get answers to some questions, I asked him. Sylvan Siegler himself had been to Kaisersesch in 1987 already, but only for some hours for a meeting of the classmates. So he had had only little time to see the changes in the course of time.

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