

## The Daily Life of the Village and Country Jews in Hessen from Hitler's Ascent to Power to November 1938

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### Introduction

This article deals with Jewish life in the state of Hessen (Volksstaat Hessen) in the district of Hessen-Nassau (part of Prussia at that time) and in the district of Kurhessen and Waldeck during the Weimar period. We may surmise that patterns of Jewish life in southern and western parts of Germany during the period in question did not differ strikingly from those in Hessen.

A small number of Jewish families lived in some of the villages in the region; they were either too few in number to constitute a community, or managed to establish small though organized communities within their own synagogue. In small towns with several dozen Jewish families, local communities sponsored a number of communal institutions, which functioned quite well before 1933, and made efforts to maintain their patterns of communal life even during the period around which this article revolves.

The present study draws upon a number of sources: first, the original documentary material preserved in the archives of the villages and small towns<sup>1</sup>; secondly, publications that discuss the Jews in various localities and districts of Hessen; and, thirdly, letters and oral testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors and of several non-Jews. Some of these testimonies were published in Germany, mostly in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>2</sup>, and, despite efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the documentation can be found in the collection compiled by the author, dealing with the life of the Jews in small communities. The documents were catalogued by Yad Vashem and are now in the Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (henceforth: Kaufman Collection). The documents were collected with the active assistance of Dr.

Ernst Jacobi, the director of the Advisory Office for the Preservation of Communal Archives in the State of Hessen, Federal Republic of Germany (Beratungsstelle fuer Gemeindearchivpflege des Hessischen Landkreistages).

<sup>2</sup> On the difficulties involved in interviewing non-Jews on the events during the period in question, see Angelika Schleindl, *Verschwundene Nachbarn*.

emphasize the local residents' pro-Jewish behavior, in fact, this was more the exception than the rule. One important category of documentary evidence is the so-called situation reports (*Lageberichte*) composed by the Gestapo in 1933-1936, which reveal an abundance of details about the life of the Jews<sup>3</sup>. Some material is based on the recollections of this author who, until 1934, lived in a small village in Hessen, and, from 1934 until 1937, in a town of 15,000 inhabitants.

The Jews of Hessen lived in the countryside for hundreds of years; many of them had been "protected Jews" (*Schutzjuden*) of local rulers. Some families had preserved protection documents going back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the second half of the nineteenth and in the twentieth century, most Hessen Jews in the countryside were engaged in commerce and middlemen occupations. Usually the businesses were small, providing the owners with a modest income<sup>4</sup>. Those who dealt in cattle also usually operated butcher shops and grew fodder and fresh produce for household consumption. In Hessen a relatively large number of Jews earned their livelihood from farming alone. Many others owned retail shops, selling tools, foodstuffs, clothes, household utensils, or agricultural products. A number of large stores, or even small plants, operated in larger towns. The few Jewish professionals lived mainly in the large villages and small towns<sup>5</sup>.

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*Juedische Gemeinden und Synagogen im Kreis Gross-Geray, Gross-Gerau,*  
1990 (henceforth: Schleindl), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Die Lageberichte der Geheimen Staatspolizei ueber die Provinz Hessen-Nassau 1933-1936*, Koeln-Wien, 1986 (henceforth: Gestapo Reports for Hessen-Nassau).

<sup>4</sup> One of the non-Jewish interviewees reported: "Our Jews lived modestly, dealt in cattle and kept small stores." See Kaufman Collection, 072/62. Josef Menz, "Zur Judengeschichte, in Wuestensachsen mitgeteilt von einem Zeitzeugen," Kaufman Collection, 072/62. See also interview with Hanan Aynor, May 1991, Oral Documentation Section, Institute for Contemporary Jewry (henceforth: Interview with Aynor). Information about the occupations of Jewish residents can be found in most of the relevant documents discussed in this article, Kaufman Collection.

<sup>5</sup> On industrial enterprises established in small towns, see testimony of Ernst Kahn on the shoe factory in the town of Bad-Homburg. See also A. J. Peck and U. D. Herschler, *Queen City Refuge*, West Orange, New Jersey, 1989

## Relations Between Jews and Their German Neighbors Before the Nazi Ascent to Power

Jews appear to have been fairly well integrated into life in various Hessian localities, even though antisemitism was not unknown<sup>6</sup>. Jewish sociologist,

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(henceforth: Peck-Herschler). See also H. G. Vorndran und Juergen Ziegler, "Juden in Gross-Gerau, oder: Wie die Heimat zur Fremde wurde," in: *Juden in Gross-Gerau, Eine lokale Spurensuche*, 1989 (henceforth: Ziegler); Menahem Kaufman, "Die Juedische Gemeinde in Gross-Gerau" (henceforth: Kaufman, Gross-Gerau). On small industrial plants owned by Jews in Kurhessen, see Gestapo reports for October 1933 and April 1934, Gestapo Reports for Hessen-Nassau, pp. 71, 89.

<sup>6</sup> On the integration of the Jews into the town and village society, see a letter of Maria Fischer, from November 10, 1988, Babenhausen documents, Kaufman Collection 072/48; testimony of Ernst Katz of Hungen, *ibid.*, 072/11. See also K. H. Doernbecker, "Die Juden in Ziegenhain in den dreissiger Jahren unseres Jahrhunderts" (henceforth: Ziegenhain), *ibid.*, 072/20; Brunhilde Hoffen, *Es geschah unter uns*, Obererlenbach, 1988 (henceforth: Hoffen/Obererlenbach), *ibid.*, 076/76; Fritz Engel, *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Ortenburg*, 1981 (henceforth: Engel/Ortenburg), *ibid.*, 072/71; Lich, 1933-1945, Eine Dokumentation (henceforth: Lich). According to this document, the Jews maintained good relations with their neighbours until 1925, when Hindenburg was elected president of the Reich for the first time. Later the situation deteriorated, *ibid.*, 072/80. According to Zwingenberg documents (henceforth: Zwingenberg), p. 379, the Jewish residents of this town were well integrated into local society. Most were poor, though self-respecting people, *ibid.*, 072/83. See also testimony of Spiegel of Hildres, *ibid.*, 072/88. On antisemitism in the 1920s, see testimony of Ernst Katz of Hungen, *ibid.*, 072/11. See also Naftali H. Sonn und Otto Berger, "Schicksalswege der Juden in Fulda und Umgebung" (henceforth: Sonn-Berger, Fulda), p. 158, Fulda documents, *ibid.*, 072/68. In Gedern in the 1920s the Jews were accused of taking over peasant houses and running their businesses in a "typically Jewish" fashion, see Erwin Diel, "Zusammenleben in Gedern" (henceforth: Diel/Gedern), *ibid.*, 072/75. Liselotte Stube Wieland recounted her grandfather's fierce antisemitism in the town of Homburg throughout the Weimar period, Liselotte Stube Wieland, "Die Lektion gelernt," Homburger Hefte, 28/1986 (henceforth: Stube Wieland), p. 15, *ibid.*, 072/58.

Werner Cahnman, attempted to examine the extent of Jewish integration into German society with the help of a model developed by Ferdinand Tönnies positing two polar modes of collective bonds: "community" (*Gemeinschaft*) vs. "association" (*Gesellschaft*). Briefly, *Gemeinschaft* designates a social group whose members relate to one another in nearly all spheres of life and is characterized both by internal primary ties and by secondary-formal ones. In contrast, formal, impersonal ties predominate in the *Gesellschaft* mode of association. Although the Jews of Hessen could not be described as full-fledged members of the peasant and working class society, they did maintain personal relations with their neighbors and formed an integral part of the local society<sup>7</sup>.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Christian religion ceased to be a condition for joining voluntary associations, and from that time many Jews in the countryside and in small towns had joined sport and glee clubs, as well as other social organizations. For the most part, Jews opted for membership in general, national German organizations rather than political bodies, such as left-wing organizations<sup>8</sup>. After World War I, Jews also sought to join war veterans' associations, but with little success<sup>9</sup>. Notwithstanding their exclusion from nationalist organizations, the local Jews had maintained good relations

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<sup>7</sup> Werner J. Cahnman, "Village and Small-Town Jews in Germany," in: *German Jewry, Its History and Sociology*, New Brunswick (USA) and Oxford (UK), 1989 (henceforth: Cahnman), pp. 51-65. In addition to this theoretical analysis, see Cornelia Rühl and Inge Auer, *Die schlimmste Sache war die Angst, die andauernde Angst. Alltagsgeschichte der juedischen Familien in Moerfelden Walldorf 1918-1942*, Moerfelden/Walldorf, 1986 (henceforth: Rühl-Auer), pp. 34-36, 42-46, 188; Schleindl, p. 92; see also *Das Schicksal der Hadamarer Juden* (mimeograph), Kaufman Collection 072/21 (henceforth: Hadamarer Juden), pp. 4-5. On the extent of the integration of Jewish peasants into village society in Woelfersheim, see a survey on the Rossmann family (henceforth: Rossmann), a mimeograph in the possession of the author. Also based on personal recollections of the author.

<sup>8</sup> Rühl-Auer, p. 42; *Erinnerungen an juedische Mitbuerger*, von Michael, Erster Beigeordneter 23 Feb. 1988, Wehrheim, Kaufman Collection 072/82; Cahnman, pp. 52-56; testimony of E. Katz, Hungen documents, Kaufman Collection 072/11; Oberbrechen documents, *ibid.*, 072/63, Diel/Gedern, *ibid.*, 072/75; Zwingenberg, *ibid.*, 072/83.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas V. Lummitsch, *Uebersicht ueber christlich-juedisches Zusammenleben in Gedern* (henceforth: Lummitsch/Gedern), p. 11, *ibid.*, 072/75.

with their neighbors from the beginning of the century. Thanks to their participation in the war, these relations actually improved during World War I. The shared concern of families in the rear for their sons fighting on the front bonded these relationships even further.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the restrictions inherent in their religious precepts, the Jews regularly participated in public events held in the countryside, such as the annual carnival parades, weekend dance balls, summer festivities (*Kerb*), and family celebrations and gatherings. On Sundays they came to the taverns to play cards; young people met their peers; Jews were invited and accepted invitations to the religious ceremonies of confirmation and communion of Protestant and Catholic girls. They gave advice to their neighbors, provided comfort in time of distress,<sup>11</sup> visited the sick, attended funerals, trained Christian maids to run a household,<sup>12</sup> exchanged holiday gifts, and so on. Often the Jews were harbingers of progress in the countryside and introduced the estate owners and the peasants to new inventions and methods. The first telephone in the village was likely to be installed in the house of a Jewish storekeeper; Jewish traders were the first to bring radio sets from the city. Contrary to prevailing custom, many rural Jews enrolled their children in the secondary school in town or the nearest city.<sup>13</sup> Usually Jews shunned political involvement so as not to endanger their source of livelihood; trade relations in small localities were often based on personal acquaintance, and open

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<sup>10</sup> Thus, for example, in the village of Ziegenhain, seven Jews, i.e., 10 percent of the total Jewish population of the village fell on the battlefield during World War I, Ziegenhain, Kaufman Collection 072/20. In his testimony on March 3, 1989, Paul Hess, a non-Jew, reported on the close relations resulting from the shared fate during the war. See Griesheim documents, *ibid.*, 072/71.

<sup>11</sup> Testimony of E. Katz, Hungen documents, *ibid.*, 972/11; in Ortenberg Jewish soloists sang with the Protestant Church choir, especially during Christmas, see Ortenberg, *ibid.*, 72/71; also recollections of author.

<sup>12</sup> Menahem Kaufman, "Juedische Kindheit und Jugend in Deutschland," in: *Juden in Gross-Gerau* (henceforth: Kaufman-Jugend), p. 42; see also Interview with Aynor, and Cahnman, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61; Babenhausen, Kaufman Collection 072/48; Ernst Katz was enrolled at the secondary school (*Oberrealschule*) in the nearby town, Hungen documents, *ibid.*, 072/11; see interview with Aynor, also based on the author's recollections.

adoption of a political stance was liable to jeopardize business. Needless to say, there were some exceptions.<sup>14</sup>

As in all relationships based on trade, the one between the Jews and their neighbors also contained an element of ambivalence.<sup>15</sup> For example, even though Jewish traders went to great lengths to establish relations of trust with the peasants, there is an inherent conflict of interests between peasants and cattle dealers. Nevertheless, the commercial ties with the Jews continued through the first years of Nazi rule.

At the same time antisemitic circles were quick to exploit the peasant's difficulty in meeting his debts to the Jewish trader, or his dependence on the Jew, or even repossession of his property following legal suit in order to incite hatred. Peasants harboring prejudices maintained that Jewish business practices were shady.<sup>16</sup> Many transactions involved installments or credit ("pay me after the harvest," "pay me when you find work"). In times of crisis, such as the economic depression of 1929-1932, many peasants accumulated

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<sup>14</sup> Engel related, *inter alia*, that the Jews had avoided political involvement; Engel/Ortenberg, *ibid.*, 072/71. Regarding the request of the district chief (*Landrat*) from February 15, 1934, the *Buergermeister* of Fritzlar reported on February 23, 1934: "The Jews have adjusted to the new situation in the town. They had not engaged in political activity in the past either." *ibid.*, 072/51. Similarly, the Jewish residents of the village of Geinsheim and the town of Gross-Gerau were not involved in political activities. Also based on the author's recollections. On the reluctance of Jewish villagers to become involved in politics, see Rossmann mimeograph in the possession of the author. As for exceptions to this rule: in Gedern Jews played an important role in the Social-Democratic party. Fifteen percent of the party members were Jews, whereas the percentage for the general was 6.6%. See Diel/Gedern, Kaufman Collection 072/75. In the small town of Oppenheim, attorney Artur Bockmann served on the municipal council on behalf of the SPD and was sent to the Osthofen concentration camp in May 1933. See *Dokumentation der Oppenheimer und Niersteiner Juden*, Kemp, 1990 (henceforth: Oppenheim und Nierstein), p. 6, Kaufman Collection.

<sup>15</sup> Cahnman, p. 58; the registrar of Oberbrechen maintains that the tension between the Jewish residents and their neighbours was not racial in nature, but stemmed from the ordinary tensions of everyday life in the village. See Eugen Caspari, *Juedische Buerger in Oberbrechen waehrend der Weimarer Republik und in der Nationalsozialistischen Diktatur Giessen, Brechen-Oberbrechen*, 1975 (henceforth: Caspari/Oberbrechen), p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Stube Wieland, p. 15, *ibid.*, 072/58.

debts, and in many cases relations between Jews and their neighbors suffered serious setbacks as a result.

However, despite close ties between the Jews and the peasants, the former were not as deeply rooted in the life of the countryside as were their neighbors. The Jews' ancestors had been expelled from the cities and had moved to villages against their will, since the guilds were not as powerful there as in the towns. And despite everything, the peasants continued to regard the Jews as a people bearing the yoke of punishment for having rejected the gospel of Christ. Mixed marriages between Jews and Christians were a very rare occurrence in the villages and towns of Hessen.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, most peasants regarded their Jewish neighbors as German nationals – albeit professing a different and foreign religion – who discharged their duties to the fatherland.<sup>18</sup>

### Jewish Society in the Countryside and Small Towns Before 1933

Prior to the Nazis' ascent to power, the Jewish identity of the Jews of Hessen was defined primarily in religious terms. They observed the commandments, or at least most of them, according to the strictness that each individual prescribed for himself. Jewish faith and philosophy, the study of the *Halakhah* and the sources were not much in evidence (one exception was Martin Buber, resident of the town of Heppenheim). Patterns of Jewish religious behaviour had been fixed by habit and custom. In the countryside the synagogue was located in one of the village houses; more ornate synagogues, built specifically for that purpose, could be found only in the towns.

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<sup>17</sup> Regarding the fears of a Jewish young man who intended to marry a Gentile woman in one of the villages of the region, see Interview with Aynor. In Oppenheim there was one mixed couple, and in Nierstein on the Rhein two couples; on their fate under the Nazi regime, see Oppenheim and Nierstein, pp. 60-66, Kaufman Collection.

<sup>18</sup> Cahnman, p. 62. One of the residents of Babenhausen said of the Jews living in the village that they were "people like us, though with strange characteristics"; see *Aus den Erinnerungen eines Babenhausner Buergersohnes*, Babenhausen, Kaufman Collection 072/75.

The social standing of an individual in the village community was designated through "honors" such as being called up to the Reading of the Law or the location of his seat in the synagogue. The well-to-do received a greater share of honors of this kind, but they also contributed more to the communal needs and philanthropic causes. Due to the involvement of Jews in village life, rural communities lacked strong cohesiveness, and Jewish life was confined mainly to meetings in the synagogue, ties with members of one's extended family, co-operation in obtaining kosher food, and religious festivals. Jews also maintained a social life themselves.<sup>19</sup> Matchmaking also played an important part in internal Jewish ties: more often than not relatives facilitated meetings between young people so that in a number of areas most Jewish residents were linked by extensive family ties. As most Jews earned their living by trade, rivalry was not unheard of; there were even cases of protracted feuds.<sup>20</sup> After the exclusion of the Jews from German society in 1933, relations within Jewish society also underwent substantial changes.

### National Identity of Jews in the Countryside and Small Towns Before 1933

Prior to the Nazi ascent to power, Jewish residents of the villages and small towns of Hessen did not have any doubt as to their belonging to the German nation.<sup>21</sup> Only a handful maintained contacts with the Zionist movement, and many tried to join German patriotic organizations. When they were unsuccessful, they established their own organization of Jewish war veterans

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<sup>19</sup> Cahnman, pp. 55-58; Interview with Aynor; testimony of Yochanan Hans Oppenheimer of Nahariya, Israel: Zahlen und Fakten ueber die letzten Jahre der Juden in Langsdorf , Langsdorf documents, Kaufman Collection 072/75.

<sup>20</sup> On a failed match of this kind and the outcome, see Interview with Aynor; on troubled relations between Jewish families in Langsdorf, and on the Oppenheimer family, see Langsdorf documents, as well as the author's recollections.

<sup>21</sup> Ruehlig-Auer, p. 43, 185; testimony of the Neu brothers, p. 198; see also Stephan Kolb, *Die Geschichte der Bad Nauheimer Juden* , Bad Nauheim, 1987 (henceforth: Kolb), p. 133; testimony of E. Katz in: *Die Geschichte der Juden aus Hungen* , 1988 (henceforth: Hungen A), p. 13; see also Kaufmann-Jugend, pp. 42-43, and Interview with Aynor.



(RJF), with a strong German national orientation. Even observant Jews were eager to express their German patriotism.

Most Hessen Jews believed that the wave of antisemitism that was sweeping Germany would spend itself. They were convinced that as they spoke German – and the local dialect; as they were strongly attached to the soil of the homeland (Heimaterde) ;<sup>22</sup> as they sang German folk songs; and as they adored national heroes, their Germanhood could not be doubted. Although village Jews could read prayers in Hebrew, they did not know the meaning of the words, whereas every Jewish child could recite from memory the poems of Schiller, Goethe, and Heine (who until 1933 had been regarded as the German national poet). Jews were also proud of the part they had played in World War I and the war of 1870-1871. The names of their fallen had been engraved on commemorative monuments, and the local rabbis had delivered eulogies at the unveiling ceremonies along with Catholic priests and Protestant pastors. Jewish confidence in the German national identity prevented many of them from grasping the meaning of the events that took place in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, even after the advent of Hitler.

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<sup>22</sup> Ulrich Dunker, *Der Reichsbund juedischer Frontsoldaten 1919-1938 , Geschichte eines juedischen Abwehrvereins* , Duesseldorf, 1977. On the establishment of the RJF branch in Gedern, see Lummitsch/Gedern, Kaufman Collection 72/75; Chaim Weizmann, who stayed in the town of Pfungstadt in the years 1892-1893, reported on the German patriotism of the Orthodox Jews there; see Yehuda Reinharz, *Chaim Weizmann – the Making of a Zionist Leader* , New York, 1985, p. 28; on the connection with the place called Heimatbewusstsein, see Caspari/Oberbrechen, Kaufman Collection 072/63.

## The Collapse of Weimar and the Mounting Jewish Fears

Despite the description above, the disruption in Jewish existence in German society did not come as a total surprise to the Jewish residents of the villages and towns of Hessen.<sup>23</sup> The violent Nazi antisemitism had been acutely felt in everyday life for some time, even though it remained relatively tolerable in the localities where the Social-Democrats and the Communists still exerted a great deal of influence. The uniformed Nazis marched through the alleys of the villages and small towns, sang antisemitic songs in front of Jewish houses and vociferously incited to hatred. During the economic depression residents of many villages succumbed to slogans such as "the Jew is to blame for our misery," or "the Jew of Mammon," and even tried to act on these catch phrases. The Jews knew their enemy well (among themselves they called them *die Reschom* , "the evil ones"), looking back almost with nostalgia to "the good, old antisemitism"; but only very few came to grips with the difference between the old antisemitism and the Nazi rendition. Only a few young people left their home before 1933, in order to emigrate to other countries; most Jews in the countryside hopelessly clung to the belief of having to "bend their necks" and let the ugly forces play themselves out. Despite contempt for Hitler and hopes for his end, Jewish anxieties kept mounting.

Even before 1933, in some villages the peasants responded to court decisions directing the repossession of their cows in order to cover their debts to Jewish cattle dealers by hoisting black flags and sounding the church bells as if a calamity had struck, until the crowd forced the court officer to return the repossessed property to its owners. Protestant pastors did not confine themselves to the role of bystanders: in 1930, for example, the antisemitic

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<sup>23</sup> Ruehlig-Auer, p. 49; Kolb, p. 133; Schleindl, p. 41, 151; Cahnman, p. 60; Ziegler, pp. 25-26; see also Jisk Steeskamp, *Die Evangelische Kirchengemeinde Gross-Gerau und die Juden 1910 bis 1938* , p. 49, in: *Juden in Gross-Gerau* (see note 5) (henceforth: Steeskamp); Kaufmann-Jugend, p. 43.

pastor Scriba incited members of his congregation against the Jews in the town of Gross-Gerau, and, on one occasion, he told visitors from Frankfurt: "We've got 150 Jews here, and you can take them back home with you, we'll be glad to give them to you." When the Jews complained about this to Scriba's superiors, they were in no way inclined to denounce him.<sup>24</sup> In 1932, the movement of "German Christians" was founded that openly advocated hatred of Jews, Communists and pacifists. The new movement was particularly influential in the villages and small towns where the Church had traditionally functioned as the centre of cultural life.

Even in the most remote localities, everyone grasped the importance of the Reichstag elections of 1930-1932. When 107 Nazis were elected to the parliament in 1930, all the Jews were seized by fear. That, however, was just the beginning. The results of the following elections were even worse, and the situation of the German Jews deteriorated even further: German friends broke off their ties with the Jews or joined the Nazi party; debtors refrained from repaying their debts; verbal and physical violence mounted.

As explained above, most Jews in the countryside did not take an active part in political life. Before 1930 most of them voted for a small Democratic Party, Deutsche Staatspartei.<sup>25</sup> But after that year most of them shifted their allegiance to the Social Democrats (SPD) whom they regarded as the only force capable of containing the Nazis. In the early 1930s only a few Jews took an active part in this party's activities: for example, in the village of Gedern and in the town of Oppenheim. Many Jews supported the elderly Field

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<sup>24</sup> Scriba's detailed report on the incident can be found in *Chronicles of the Church*, pp. 423-424, see Steeskamp, p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> According to Engel, the Ortenburg Jews sympathized with the "*Freisinn*" movement and later voted for the Demokratische Staatspartei, known also as Deutsche Staatspartei; see Kaufman Collection 072/71. In the Reichstag elections the Jewish vote went to different parties, including the German nationalist right; therefore, one may only point to overall trends, without solid statistical proof. According to Aynor, some Jews even voted for the Catholic political party *Zentrum*; Interview with Aynor.

Marshal Hindenburg in the presidential elections and regarded him as the protector of Jews loyal to the fatherland against Hitler.

Thus, the situation in the early 1930s can be summed up as follows. Antisemitism in everyday life continued to mount,<sup>26</sup> and practically everyone sensed that something ominous was about to take place, but most Jews did nothing.

### Differences in Persecution of Jews in Hessen Localities After January 1933

The Jews in Hessen were not persecuted with equal ferocity in all locations after the Nazis came to power. In the villages and small towns that had been Nazi strongholds before 1933, local leaders made efforts to prove their loyalty to the new regime by immediately attacking Jews and ousting them from social and economic life. In the localities where Nazi control had been far from absolute in the first period of Nazi rule, village heads, usually the *Buergermeister*, attempted to mitigate Nazi anti-Jewish excesses, or even halt them completely. Thus, for example, a *Buergermeister* in one village, who was also head of local Nazi party branch, did not allow anyone to attack the Jews, and even protected them during the *Kristallnacht*.<sup>27</sup>

The results of the elections in the countryside in 1930 and in March 1933 also affected the severity of Jewish persecution. In the village of Moerfelden, for example, before 1933 the *Buergermeister* was a Communist, SPD was the dominant political force, and Nazi supporters could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In fact, no attacks against local Jews took place in the first period

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<sup>26</sup> On the harassment of Jews in the Catholic village of Gersfeld in the Fulda district before 1933, see Hans Wilde, "Die Juden in Gersfeld" (henceforth: Gersfeld). Wilde maintains that, as in other villages, Gersfeld was controlled by the Nazis even before 1933; Kaufman Collection 072/58.

<sup>27</sup> The registrar of the town of Obererlenbach, B. Hoffen, related the following: "The situation was different. In some places the Jews could carry on somehow up to 1938 amidst the local population, but in some settlements the terror was unleashed at a very early stage." Hoffen/Obererlenbach, *ibid.*, 072/76. The Nazi *Buergermeister* who protected the Jews of his village was Hugo Trost. He had been influenced by his mother, a close friend of the local Jews. See Caspari/Oberbrechen, *ibid.*, 072/63.

after 1933, and the anti-Jewish boycott declared by the Nazis on April 1, 1933, did not affect to any great extent the Jews' relations with their German neighbors. Even in the years 1935-1936, conditions in the village remained relatively tolerable for the Jews. In 1934 Jews still participated in local soccer matches and, together with other fans, traveled to see out-of-town games. Jewish children joined their friends from the village to see the opening ceremony of the local section of the Autobahn, which was attended by Hitler himself. In the village of Sprendlingen, local Jews continued to play on the soccer team and retained membership in the local sports association whose announcements were prominently displayed in the shop windows of Jewish merchants.<sup>28</sup> Jews resided in some villages up to 1942, when they were deported directly to the East.

In most villages, however, the Jews were "persuaded" to leave by 1935; in small towns the Jews were forced to leave about one year after the riots of November 1938. But in the traditional Nazi strongholds they were compelled to leave as early as 1934.

**Source: M. Kaufman, *Yad Vashem Studies* XXII, (Jerusalem 1992), pp.147-159.**

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<sup>28</sup> Ruehlig-Auer, pp. 66, 113, 206. For information about Sprendlingen, see *Die Sprendlinger Juden*, Dreieich, 1983 (henceforth: Sprendlingen), Kaufman Collection 072/65.

