

The Jews of Paderborn - Introduction

Sixty years ago this summer, in 1958, when I was 16 years old, I spent the first of three successive summers in West Germany, living with families. This first trip was a project of my Lab School German teacher, Gregor Heggen, a young German who had emigrated to Chicago after the war. (He was a marvelous teacher.) Many of my classmates on the trip (the majority, as I recall) were Jewish, and both the Federal Government of West Germany and liberal organizations in a number of West German cities were eager to host us. Remember, this was only 13 years after the end of the war, and we were apparently the first predominantly Jewish high school group to visit the country since 1945. We spent a month living with families in Bielefeld, in Westphalia; two weeks with families in Esslingen, near Stuttgart; and a month traveling around the country with our German brothers and sisters. It was an incredible experience.

One of the high points of the summer was a brief visit to Paderborn, a small city near Bielefeld and Herr Heggen's home town. During our city tour, I asked Herr Niedieck, who led our tour, if Paderborn had had a Jewish population. He said yes, and asked if I would be interested in learning more about that. I said that I would. He sent Herr Heggen a short document for me—it may have been prepared expressly for me—dated July 16, 1958, which I translated into English. I've never done anything with it, but it's always been in my mind—and, fortunately, in my file.

Before turning to the document, let me remind us all that Jews had lived in Germany for hundreds of years, mostly quite peacefully, before the rise of the Nazis. I assume that this story of what happened in Paderborn beginning in 1933 is more or less the same story as one would find in hundreds, perhaps thousands, of German communities.

This document is hard to read aloud, and I imagine you will find it hard to listen to. And 60 years ago, this 16-year-old Jewish girl found it immensely painful to translate. I'll do my best to read it to you this evening with a steady voice.

July 16, 1958

Before 1933 the Jewish community in Paderborn had about 360 members. In addition, Paderborn had a Jewish orphan asylum called "Jewish Orphan Asylum for the Rhineland and Westphalia." An average of 50 to 60 children were housed there. We had a main synagogue and a second synagogue in the Jewish Orphan Asylum. A rabbi directed both synagogues. Before 1933 Paderborn had an open cemetery on Warburger Street and a closed cemetery on Pipin Street.

On April 1, 1933, the general Jewish boycott was instituted. All Jewish citizens were forced to place defaming posters in their store windows and in their homes. These posters, applied by means of decals, were indelible. The boycott lasted a few days, and afterwards Jews were permitted to remove the posters at their own expense.

In May of 1935 the general Jewish laws were issued; that is, no Jew was permitted to employ domestic servants under the age of 35 anymore; in front of almost all stores were posted permanent sentries of the SA, who discouraged the population from shopping in Jewish stores. Whoever entered a Jewish store despite this had to reckon with the fact that he would be photographed and branded as politically "unreliable." Then there was a period of quiet until the

9th of November, 1938, the so-called “ Kristallnacht” (Crystal Night). During this night all Jews were delivered to the police prison by the SS and its followers, after they had broken up and plundered the Jewish stores. The women and children were released the next morning. On the 10th or 11th of November all the men were taken from Paderborn by way of Bielefeld to the concentration camp Buchenwald. There they experienced the greatest atrocities. After a few weeks those who were still alive were released from Buchenwald and ordered to immediately sell their landed property and stores and leave Germany. Since, however, most of them had no connections and no opportunities to emigrate, those who still resided here had to report to the Arrangements Office of the city of Paderborn every Monday to show how far their plans for emigration had progressed; that is, what steps they had taken to emigrate. Emigration was a possibility for only a very small number.

In September, 1939, on the highest Jewish holy day (the Day of Atonement), the radio sets belonging to all Jews were taken away without payment. On the 10th of December, 1941, some of the Jews still living here were registered and deported to Riga. Of the Paderborn Jews who went to Riga, only one woman came back after 1945.

On the 15th of July, 1942, a deportation went to the annihilation camp of Auschwitz. None came back. On July 29, the rest (except for partners in mixed marriages) were deported to Theresienstadt. Only two women and one man survived this camp. The mixed-marriage couples still here were evicted from their homes and had to move into the Jewish House on Bach Street, number 6. All the men of these mixed couples had to submit to being organized into labor details.

In 1939, a Jewish Retraining Center was housed in barracks at Green Way, number 86. These Jews, predominantly young people, were supposed to be educated in agriculture for the purpose of emigration to Palestine. The Center housed about 110 people. The inmates of this Center were put to work cleaning the streets, at the gas works, and other large enterprises. The money earned had to be turned over entirely to the administration of the Center for maintenance and support. On March 1, 1943, the entire Jewish Retraining Center was deported to Auschwitz. There were men, women, and children. Of these, seven survived Auschwitz.

On the 15th of September, 1944, the remaining Jews (partners in mixed marriages) were brought to the camp at Zeitz. Only good things are reported about this camp, because the camp director, Vogel, was a most decent man. A number of the Jews who were brought there remained until February of 1945. Some were sent back home as incapable of working. The whole group, with only a few exceptions, was deported on the 13th of February to Theresienstadt. There were no casualties from this last transport.

On April 1, 1945, Paderborn was occupied by American and British units. In the city of Paderborn there was only one Jew; another had fled to Neuhaus, near Paderborn, in the so-called “night of bombs” (March 27, 1945). After April 1, 1945, the first three Jews came back to Paderborn; they had been in the Jewish Retraining Center but had not previously been residents of the city. One of them emigrated as soon as possible to America, with the help of relatives. The Jews who emigrated at that time to foreign countries (Holland, England, North and South America) led for the most part miserable lives, as far as we know here. Most of those who emigrated have died in the meantime.

Toward the end of 1945 the Jewish community was formed again. Paderborn had at that time a membership (mostly of foreigners or non-residents) of nine people of both sexes, so that it was still impossible according to Jewish law to hold religious services because ten men over 13 years of age are necessary.

In 1952 the Jewish communities joined together; that is, in the future the Jewish circles in Büren, Lippstadt, Soest, Werburg, and Höxter would belong to the Paderborn community. This present Jewish community consists of a total of six circles with 49 members, both female and male, including children.

Of these community members, most are too old and infirm to work. The remaining members are active as merchants and craftsmen.

After much reflection, the members of the community (which is so scattered) have repeatedly come to the conclusion that it would be inexcusable to burden their few members with the immense financial obligation of maintaining their own synagogue, despite the willingness of the city of Paderborn to help.

So that is the end of this report on the Jews of Paderborn.

(Report translated from the German by Marianna Tax Choldin)