

# Traces of Jewish Life in Thuringia

The following text is an extremely shortened version of a German documentation from 2007 which deals very detailed with Jewish life in Thuringia. It purports to give a historical overview of the topic. The most important towns, villages and places where we can find traces of Jewish life are listed. The German version also contains a lot of pictures, which will not appear here. Of course there is still the possibility to download the German version as well, in order to look at the photographs.

**[www.thueringen.de/imperia/md/content/lzt/juedische\\_vergangenheit\\_buch.pdf](http://www.thueringen.de/imperia/md/content/lzt/juedische_vergangenheit_buch.pdf)**

## **Introduction: History of Jews in Thuringia**

In the area of the present German Federal State Thuringia Jews settled first in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The protection of the Jews had initially been the responsibility of the kings and emperors, but with the strengthening of territorial lords in the late Middle Ages the responsibility switched to them. The settlement and toleration, as well as in times of crisis the displacement and persecution, of Jews depended on the mercy of the lords which often acted in line with the “public” – in the majority of cases anti-Jewish - opinion.

Because Jews often worked as (long distance) merchants, an early evidence of their settlement in towns is an indicator of the economic importance of the place in former times. Erfurt was the first Thuringian city where Jews could be found. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century towns as Eisenach, Meiningen, Gotha, Arnstadt, Mühlhausen and Nordhausen followed.

At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century an initial expulsion of Jews from England and France brought more Jews to the Holy Roman Empire (i.e. Germany, Bohemia, Moravia and Austria). Therefore new Jewish communities arose in other Thuringian towns, for example in Saalfeld, Hildburghausen und Vacha.

With the plague at 1348/49 the relationship between Jews and Christians deteriorated. Since the Jews were held responsible for the expansion of the disease, there were pogroms and most of the Jewish communities were wiped out. The survivors fled primarily to Eastern Europe.

After that a few Jews settled in Thuringia again, but Reformation and Counter-Reformation brought new, especially economically related harassment and led to expulsion again, which lead to another large-scale emigration to Eastern Europe.

An organisation of the free nobles of the Holy Roman Empire, who called themselves Free Imperial Knights and were directly under the emperor, became important for the Jewish inhabitants. They Free Imperial Knights enjoyed sovereign rights within their territories and soon discovered that the assurance of protection for Jews, a so called “Schutzbrief” (protection letter), could be a source of finance. Many of the knights therefore accommodated Jews on their land, mostly in small villages. The former ur-

ban Jewry subsequently became more rural, and the merchants had to work as cattle dealers and door-to-door salesman.

Only at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century did more Jews settle near or in the towns again.

The territorial changes at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which led to the creation of states instead of lordships also affected the Jews. The legal position of the Jews was arranged, for example they were obliged to get a fixed family name. There was still no legal equality between Jews and Christians: Jews were not allowed to decide where to live, only one son of a family was allowed to marry (the others often emigrated).

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a lot of new synagogues and Jewish schools were built in small towns and villages. After the last financial restrictions were eliminated the Jews moved back to the cities, where schools, synagogues and graveyards developed. Full civil equality was reached at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Jews had access to all academic professions.

But this much wanted and hardly contested emancipation of the Jews was only of short duration. In World War I over 12 000 Jewish soldiers died on behalf of Germany. Only 15 years after its end the fate of the German Jews took another severe turn.

Already in 1924 Adolf Hitler referred to the Jews as the enemies of the German People. After the Nazi seizure of power the Jews were systematically expelled from society: first economically, then legally and politically, until the villainous plan was made to murder all European Jews. Most of the Jews in Thuringia were deported on 10th May and 20th September 1942 to the concentration camps Belzyce and Theresienstadt.

After the end of World War II many thousands of Jews – victims of the concentration camps Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora – were in Thuringia, most of them waiting for the opportunity to leave for Canada, Australia, the USA, Israel or other places.

Many Jews left the Soviet occupied zone for West Germany, when new persecutions initiated by Stalin occurred.

Some survivors though rebuilt the Jewish community in Thuringia, which nowadays is located in Erfurt. In the 1990's the number of members has grown.

## **Traces of Jewish life**

### *Synagogues*

Synagogues are places where people meet and learn: The Synagogues were used as schools for the children and adults had the opportunity to receive religious education and to read the Torah. The poor and the foreigners found support and hospitality here.

In Thuringia today only the Synagogue in Erfurt, built after 1945, is regularly used for worship services.

All the other synagogues and houses of praying are no longer Jewish property and therefore not used for their initial purpose. Sooner or later they were sold to other people and confiscated during the Third Reich. Nowadays the remaining buildings are used diversely as memorials, cultural meeting points and residential houses or businesses. Unfortunately most of the former Synagogue buildings vanished. Many towns and villages built memorials for them.

### *Cemeteries*

In Thuringia there are 59 Jewish cemeteries and we know of 16 that no longer exist. Most of them were located outside the towns for various reasons: Non-Jewish inhabitants usually did not tolerate Jewish cemeteries close to them. The Jews hoped to avoid the greatly feared desecration of graves if the cemeteries were protected by nature and the way there was made with some effort, through a long or burdensome access road. There was also a financial aspect: because grounds in the woodlands or mountainsides were less fertile they were much cheaper.

Because a Jewish grave is not allowed to be re-used under any circumstances, there are a lot of very old tombstones which are culturally and historically very revealing and valuable.

### *Schools*

Most of the Thuringian Jewish communities had their own schools and even school buildings. In these schools Jewish children were either educated fully in terms of Jewish life or they only had a religious instruction by a Jewish teacher.

### *Mikves*

Because almost all of the Thuringian Jewish communities were orthodox or conservative each of them was in the possession of a Mikveh. This is a Jewish bathing facility that remains in ritual contact with water. People as well as household items could achieve ritual purity by dipping into the water. In the majority of cases the Mikves were destroyed, but one can still find some in Thuringia, for example in Berkach.

### *Names of locations or streets*

In many villages and towns there are still traces of the existence of a Jewish community found within street or plot names. Some still carry the word "Jew" in them, which could lead to the conclusion that Jews used to live or owned fields there.

### *Houses*

One can still find houses, where Jews used to live or which they even built. Indications are Hebrew inscriptions or relics of the fixing of a Mezuzah, a symbol that is affixed to the door frame in order to fulfil a Biblical commandment.

## List of towns and villages

### Altenburg

Already in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Jews used to live in Altenburg. In 1925 165 Jews lived there. An Israelite Association was established which had a house of prayer in the Pauritzer Gasse 54. The building was torn down in the 80s and in 1998 a commemorative plaque was installed.

### Apolda

In Apolda Jewish families started settling only after 1850. In 1895 47 Jews lived here. An Israelite Religious Association was founded, but already in 1925 the house of prayer was used in a different context. Even though there was no more organised community life, 80 Jews lived in Apolda in 1933. The "Bernhard Prager" lane was named after a former Jewish citizen who was running a company. He was deported by the Nazis and killed in the concentration camp Theresienstadt.

### Arnstadt

On the occasion of a persecution, Jews in Arnstadt are mentioned first in August 1264, when five Jews were killed. Almost all Jews of the community were killed during the pogrom in 1349. But in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Jews began to settle again in Arnstadt, where they built a Synagogue and a cemetery. There is evidence that Jews traded goods in Arnstadt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but they did not live in the city. They were moving in again around 1875. In 1884 a community was established. First they met in a house of prayer in the house of a merchant, when the room got too small they built a synagogue which was inaugurated in 1913. This building was burned down in the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis and their followers. In 1988 a memorial stone was installed in order to remember this crime.

The community was wiped by deportations between 1942 and 1944. One can find another memorial stone at the old cemetery to commemorate the mass murder of the Jewish citizens.

### Aschenhausen

Aschenhausen was the property of an imperial knight who was authorized to take Jews under his protection. This claim was first taken in 1695 when the family of Speßhardt built little houses outside their court. The constantly growing community possessed a cemetery, a school, a house of praying and later also a synagogue. There was also a kosher butcher. In 1876 the Jewish and Christian schools were put together. In 1895 there were 97 Jews and 197 Christians living in Aschenhausen. But like everywhere the number of Jews decreased. In 1936 the building of the synagogue was sold and became the barn of a merchant. In 1942 the last five Jewish inhabitants were deported to concentration camps. In 1991 the former synagogue was restored and became a site for meetings and commemoration.

### Bad Frankenhausen

The first evidence of Jews in Frankenhäusen is found in 1346. But their settlement only lasted till 1349, when they became victims of a persecution. After that there is only a scattered appearance of Jews in the town. Only after 1813 did Jews live in Frankenhäusen continuously again. There were even some cases where Jewish inhabitants acquired citizenship. An outstanding personality was Professor Siegmund Hubert (1871-1945) who was the director of a technical department and very innovative. He and some other Jewish inhabitants managed to emigrate. The rest were deported up to 1943 and killed in concentration camps.

Nowadays one can still visit the Jewish cemetery where a memorial stone was installed in the 1950s. Unfortunately only one tombstone is well preserved.

### **Bad Langensalza**

Jews settled in Langensalza at the latest from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The city was destroyed in 1346. The majority of people held the Jews responsible for that, therefore many of them were burnt at the stake.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were smaller or bigger groups of Jews living in Langensalza. One can still find street names that contain the word "Jew".

### **Bad Liebenstein**

In 1871 22 Jews lived in Liebenstein. The family Liebenstein, who ran a textile shop, was allowed to set up a private cemetery. The Jewish inhabitants were deported in 1942. After World War II some Jews lived here again until 1962.

### **Bad Salzungen**

In 1298 Jews in Salzungen are recorded to have been persecuted and after a resettlement in 1323 the community was dispelled again and many of them killed in 1349. Not before the 19<sup>th</sup> century did some Jews settle here again. In 1895 there were 59 Jewish inhabitants, in 1933 there were only 41 left. The remaining ones were deported in 1942.

### **Barchfeld**

Jews lived here since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A religious community developed and remained until 1938. The community had a synagogue, a Mikveh, a cemetery and a school. People from the villages nearby also used the synagogue in Barchfeld. The building was torn down in the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938. All pieces of wood, the Torah scroll and all other ritual objects were set on fire by the Nazis.

### **Bauerbach**

A little Jewish community already existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, later a synagogue and a school with Mikveh was built. Because the number of pupils was too small the school was unified with the school of the village. The last Jews of Bauerbach were deported in 1942. The synagogue became private property in 1930 and today is a residential house.

## **Berkach**

The first Jew moved to Berkach in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and many followed his example. But during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the number of Jewish inhabitants first stagnated and then decreased. The reason for this is likely the fact that from 1869 on the Jews were allowed to move in the towns again.

The Jewish Community had a cemetery, a synagogue, a school and a Mikveh. Because the number of pupils declined, the school building was sold. The synagogue building remained safe during the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 and was sold to the municipality. After that the building was used as a storehouse, a workshop, a smithy and as a stable for horses, it was restored in 1990. The former school is now in private property and used as a residential house.

The last Jews of Berkach were deported in October 1943.

## **Bibra**

The baron of Bibra was a member of the Imperial knighthood and therefore allowed to settle Jews in his area, which he first did in 1658. In 1885 the community had 132 members, but then many of them moved into the towns when they were allowed to do so. The community possessed a synagogue, a school with an apartment for the teacher, a Mikveh and there was also a kosher butcher. In 1938 the synagogue was besmeared with anti-Jewish slogans, but not destroyed. In 1940 the building became property of the municipality. Through the deportation of its members in 1942 the Jewish community was destroyed. Nowadays a square is named after Oskar Meyer, the last Jew who was deported in 1943 from Bibra to a concentration camp.

## **Bleicherode**

The first Jews settled here in the 14<sup>th</sup> century from whereon they experienced different expulsions and resettlements. In 1728 155 Jews lived in Bleicherode, in 1937 there were 29 families, all in all up to 77 people. In 1942 the last Jewish inhabitants were brought to concentration camps.

The Jewish community met in a house of prayer until they built a synagogue in 1882. The synagogue was burned down on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis. Until the 1950s the ruins of the building were visible, today one can find a memorial stone on the former location of the building. A memorial plaque installed at the Christian church is saying: "Many were killed and we remained silent. Lord, help that we won't be silent again if people near us are being slurred or avoided."

## **Buchenwald**

The concentration camp Buchenwald near Weimar is one of the places that show the agony and pain of the Jews under the Nazi regime.

The first Jewish prisoners came here in September 1938 from the concentration camp Dachau, many thousand more followed. In April 1945 the majority of the prisoners were "evacuated" to other concentration camps. Many of them died on this

“march of death”; today memorial stones along the way remember the victims of this terrible trail through many villages in Thuringia. The area today is a memorial place.

### **Crawinkel-Jonastal**

The memorial place Jonastal remembers a satellite camp of the concentration camp Buchenwald where thousands of prisoners died at the end of World War II due to hard slave labour. The aim was to build a bunker, where Hitler could escape to.

### **Dreißigacker**

Jews were living here from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The village is close to Meiningen. That is why many Jews who were not allowed to live in the town lived in Dreißigacker. When it was no longer prohibited, many of them moved to the town. An important Jew born 1851 in Dreißigacker was Gustav Strupp, who was significant for the industry and banking of the Duchy Saxony-Meiningen and Vice-President of the Parliament.

### **Eisenach**

As early as the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Jews were settled in Eisenach. The community was wiped out with the pogroms of 1349, then some Jews settled again and were again expelled. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Jews were allowed to trade but not to settle in Eisenach. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were Jews under special protection, after 1850 many Jews moved from the villages nearby to Eisenach. A Jewish community was established with a school for religious education and a cemetery. A synagogue was built in 1885 and restored in 1928, when a memorial for the killed Jewish soldiers who fought for Germany in World War I was built. On the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the synagogue was burnt down by the Nazis, all Jewish inhabitants were deported until 1943.

In 1947 a memorial was installed on the former location of the synagogue. Furthermore there is a street named after Paul Oppenheim, a Jewish doctor. Another street and the medical college are named after Dr. Siegfried Wolff. He worked as a paediatrician in Eisenach from 1920 to 1939. He was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944.

At the train station, where the deportation for the majority of the Jewish inhabitants started, one can find a memorial plaque.

### **Eisfeld**

Between 1394 and 1441 Jews lived in Eisfeld, but then became victims of an expulsion. A small Jewish community arose at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century again. Meetings and worship services were held in the house of Hermann Gerson. This house still exists today and is now used as a fashion shop.

The former hospital of the municipality was built in 1902 with the help of donations by the Jewish merchant Max Michaelis.

## **Ellrich**

The early Jews of Ellrich became victims of the plague pogrom in 1349. Already in 1418 Jews are mentioned here again. In 1593 all Jews were expelled, but resettled in 1620. A Jewish community established with a synagogue, a Mikveh and a cemetery. On the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the synagogue, just restored in 1927, was devastated and torn down. After that the community was wiped out by the deportation of the Jewish inhabitants.

## **Erfurt**

Jews were living in Erfurt already at the turn from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest part of the “old synagogue” dates back to these early times, the building was expanded in the following centuries. From this we can deduce that the community must have grown constantly at this time.

From the reign of archbishop Konrad of Mainz at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century a Jewish oath, the first of its kind in German language, is conveyed. A Mikveh is first mentioned in 1248, the community was also in the possession of a cemetery where the oldest still remaining tomb stone dates back to 1247. As everywhere in Thuringia, rumours that the Jews had poisoned wells led to a pogrom in March 1349. Most of the 100 Jewish inhabitants were killed by former councilmen and sons of the most important families as well as some masters of guild. The remaining Jewish families set their houses on fire and committed suicide. Probably among the victims was a money changer who managed to hide his valuables. These belongings were not detected until the late 1990s and are now known as the “Erfurt treasure”.

After the pogrom of 1349 the synagogue was treated with profanity and used as an attic, for commercial uses and as a hall for a restaurant. Today this “old synagogue” is restored and hosts a museum about the Jewish life in Erfurt including the Jewish silver treasure.

In 1357 a new Jewish community was founded. A synagogue for it was built by the municipality very close to the town hall. Furthermore the community had a dancing hall, butcher’s stalls and a bakery. Moreover there was a Yeshiva, a Jewish theological school where famous rabbis like Rabbi Samuel Ben Menachem Halevi, Rabbi Simcha Ben Gerschin, Rabbi Alexander Süsskind as well as Rabbi Jacob Weil used to work.

Many Jews left Erfurt when in 1453 the council announced that the Jews were meant to be deprived of the guaranteed protection.

Finally in 1768 a single Jew obtained special permission to live in the city.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century more Jews moved to Erfurt again. In 1810 the first Jew to have received citizenship after the Middle Ages was David Salomon Unger. He and his family were the founders of the new community, which started with a room of prayer and a cemetery. Because the community grew rapidly Unger bought building ground right opposite the second synagogue which had since burnt down; the new synagogue was inducted in 1840. It had a Mikveh, and flats for the Rabbi, the teacher and the servants of the synagogue. Soon even this building got too small



and a new property was purchased. The old building was sold and used later as a storage facility for barrels and as a manufacturing facility for spirits and essences. Today this building called “small synagogue” is restored and became a place of encounter, history and art.

The new synagogue was finished in 1884; it was torn down in the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938, when the new cemetery was also destroyed by the Nazis. A catholic priest managed to save two torah scrolls from the fire and hid them throughout World War II. Only 200 out of the 1000 members of the Jewish community attempted to emigrate. The rest were deported to concentration camps, where most of them were murdered – only 15 came back to Erfurt after World War II. These returnees founded a new community that still exists today. A new synagogue, inaugurated in 1952, was the first synagogue built in the former German Democratic Republic.

### **Gehaus**

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the baron of Boineburg hosted Jews in this area. A Jewish community arose and existed until 1938. In the year 1826 almost one third of the population belonged to the Jewish denomination. In May 1942 the last Jewish inhabitants were deported into concentration camps.

First the worship services were held in a private house, after 1840 a synagogue was built. It was devastated by Nazis from a village nearby on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938. The building became private property and was used as a workshop; a fire destroyed the house in 1975.

The community also had a kosher butcher until 1925, a cemetery and a school building which is used today as a residential house.

### **Geisa**

The presence of Jews in Geisa is first attested to between 1571 and 1600, but it is likely that Jews had been living there before. In 1808 all Jews living in Geisa were obliged to get a family name. In 1879 the first Jew was elected into the municipal council.

The Jewish community was in the possession of a cemetery, a school and a synagogue, which was destroyed by a big fire in 1858. Soon a new building was constructed. The number of the community members decreased throughout the years. On 1933 only 67 Jewish inhabitants remained in Geisa. The new synagogue was destroyed by the Nazis on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 as well as Jewish shops demolished and the cemetery devastated. The Jewish people were deported in stages between 1941 and 1942. At the location of the former synagogue one can find a memorial plaque.

A famous Jew who lived and worked in Geisa was the teacher Moritz Goldschmidt (1863-1916) who explored the flora of the Rhön Mountains. In order to honour his achievements a memorial plaque was installed in 1922, but destroyed by the Nazis. A new plaque was installed in 1990.

## **Gera**

The pogroms of 1349 also claimed victims of Jews living in Gera. After that every now and then Jews appear in the books. Around 1500 there is another expulsion said to have taken place. Since then there is no evidence of Jewish life until the 19th century. A community established and a synagogue was built, but it is not clear for how long it was used. However, after World War I the worship services were held in another building in the back of a hotel. Also there were rooms of prayer for the different orthodox confessions. On the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the Nazis cleared out the praying hall and destroyed the furnishings, the same happened to the Jewish school. The members of the community were deported to concentration camps until 1942.

In 1989 a memorial for the former synagogue was installed.

## **Gleicherwiesen**

Jews are likely to have lived in Gleicherwiesen before 1680. In 1786 the Jews from Gleicherwiesen and the nearby Simmershausen founded a common community. They built a synagogue, a Mikveh, a school building, a bakery, a kosher butcher's and a cemetery. In 1853 there lived 244 Christians and 188 Jews in Gleicherwiesen. But then the number of the Jewish inhabitants decreased until the remaining ones were deported in May and September 1942.

The synagogue and the Jewish school were destroyed on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis and all the furnishing burnt.

## **Gotha**

At least since the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Jews were settled in Gotha. They lived at the market, where a former Mikveh is proven. There were persecutions in 1303 and 1349, after that the first Jew is mentioned again in 1379.

In Gotha was the Jewish Court, which was responsible for all areas of the landgraviate Thuringia.

In 1465 all Jewish inhabitants of Gotha were expelled again. In 1768 the resettlement of Jews was allowed, they also got the permission to create a cemetery and to do worship services in their private houses.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a school for Jewish religious education was established. In 1879 the government of the duchy of Gotha made the Israelite community a corporation under public law. A synagogue was built and inaugurated in 1904. The building was burnt down on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis. Today one can find a memorial stone at the site.

## **Heilbad Heiligenstadt**

Jews in Heiligenstadt are proven in 1335, but maybe there were some Jews settling here already from 1212 on. Most of them were murdered during the pogrom in 1349, some survivors moved to Erfurt and Frankfurt/Main.

The next hint of Jewish life is a Jewish Oath from around 1400. 1796 the archbishop of Mainz gave the permission to settle in the region Eichsfeld to four or five Jewish families, even though the municipal authorities of Heiligenstadt were against it. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the number of Jewish inhabitants started to increase until 100 Jews were living in Heiligenstadt in 1882. A Jewish cemetery and a synagogue were established. After 1900 many moved away into the more industrial areas. In the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 seven Jews were taken prisoners, only 14 were left. These ones were deported in 1942. The synagogue was set on fire on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis, but not burnt down in order to keep the surrounding houses safe. Finally the community was forced to sell the building, which was converted into a residence. A memorial plaque was installed at the house in 1988.

### **Heinrichs**

A Jewish community developed in Heinrichs at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Many documents regarding Jewish life from the 18<sup>th</sup> century have survived.

The community had a building which was used as school and residence of the teacher as well as a synagogue; it is likely that there was also a Mikveh. The cemetery is still there today. Because the community was unified with the community of Suhl, the synagogue was sold in 1872 and torn down in the 1960s.

### **Hildburghausen**

The first episode of Jewish life in Hildburghausen ended with the pogrom in 1349, a survivor moved to Erfurt in 1367. Between 1388 and 1412 a Jew named Gutkind lived in his own house in Hildburghausen and carried an own seal; he was able to give great loans.

In 1420 a bathing day once a week for the Jewish inhabitants was established in the local bath house. It is likely that the Jews living at this time became victims of the persecutions starting in 1430.

In 1740 a Jew from Hildburghausen was set in charge of the finances of the Duke.

From 1795 on there was a teacher seminary where both Christian and Jewish teachers were trained, even in special Jewish subjects. Important Jewish persons like Salomon Steinhardt and Julius Rosenthal taught here.

Even though there were persecutions every now and then, a Jewish community developed. First they met for worship services in the back of the private house of a member of the community. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards the number of members increased until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1811 the community was in possession of a synagogue, and later also a Mikveh, a school and a cemetery.

The synagogue that lay in the back of the private property was closed and torn down after an expropriation in 1933. After that a new synagogue was established in the garden house of a Jewish factory owner. It was defiled and the furnishing was burnt on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis.

Nowadays one can still find the Duke-Georg-fountain which was endowed by the Jew Max Michaelis who was born in Eisfeld but later became honorary citizen of Hildburghausen. There is also a street named after him.

## **Ilmenau**

Jews are first documented in Ilmenau in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Their presence is indicated by a so called "Jew gate" and the so called "Jew lane". These Jews are likely to have been affected by the fact that the protection for Jews was not longer extended in 1555 in the County of Henneberg.

Not before 1870 Jews settled in Ilmenau again. From 1880 a Jewish community developed. The community had no synagogue, for worship services they used rooms in the back of a private residential house. The room of prayer was demolished and all the furnishing burnt on the market square by the Nazis on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938.

The community of Ilmenau did not have its own cemetery; they buried their dead at a Jewish cemetery in Plaue.

Today one can find a memorial plaque at the former business premises of the Jewish family Gronner.

## **Immenrode**

Jews are known to have been present here since the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Because there is another Immenrode near Nordhausen, it was often called Jew-Immenrode in order to distinguish between the villages. That was because at some times the Jews provided a considerable proportion of the population: up to 18%.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish inhabitants lived in their own, fenced in area. A rented barn was used as the synagogue until they got the permission to build one in 1750. The new building was sold in 1926 and torn down between 1933 and 1935. Furthermore the community owned a Mikveh and a school. The former cemetery lies outside the village. It was defiled on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis and later there were tombstones said to have been removed and revamped into Christian tombstones.

## **Jena**

In a document from 1379 a Jew living in Jena is mentioned. There was a community which owned a synagogue. Maybe already in 1431 but latest in 1452 all Jews were expelled from Jena

In 1785 the Dukes of Saxony who ran the university allowed Jews to become students there. The permanent settlement for Jews in Jena though was allowed again in 1825. The new community that developed did not build a synagogue. Worship services were held in various private houses.

## **Marisfeld**

From 1679 it was possible for Jews to settle in Marisfeld, after the owner of the castle was allowed to give protection letters. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century one third of the inhabitants were Jewish, working as livestock dealers, wagoners or in farming. After a big fire in 1866 many Jewish families moved to Themar or Meiningen. Therefore the synagogue was torn down the next year. The building had served as a residential house for Jews in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was situated remarkably close to the Christian church. A new synagogue was built in 1832; it was used until the 1930s and saved from being destroyed by the Nazis because it had become private property. The building still exists and is used as a residence.

The community also had a school building and a Mikveh. The affiliation of the Jewish citizens with the municipality becomes evident at the facade of a building in the Dillstädter Straße, where the Star of David is embedded in slate. The cemetery owned by the Jewish community was defiled during the Third Reich; nowadays one can still find 158 tombs.

The last three Jewish citizens of Marisfeld were deported in 1942.

## **Meiningen**

Already in 1243 and 1298 the Jewish citizens of Meiningen became victims of persecution. Also in the following century they were not safe: In 1349 numerous Jews were beaten to death or burnt in April and July. The henceforth empty synagogue was transformed into a Lady Chapel in 1384. But there are indications that already in 1373 Jews were living in Meiningen again. In 1422 it was announced that it was neither allowed to sell nor to let lodgings to Jews. In 1525 the citizens of Meiningen unsuccessfully demanded the expulsion of all Jews. But in 1555 all Jews had to leave the county, after that there is only little evidence of their presence until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before they were allowed to settle again in Meiningen some Jews already had permission to open a shop in the city, but lived in Dreißigacker. Still in 1819 the inhabitants of Meiningen tried to prevent the Jews from moving to their city and working there. It was only in 1856 that all Jews of the county became legally equal citizens.

The Israelite community of Meiningen was founded in 1866. A cemetery was purchased in 1870, a new synagogue was inaugurated in 1883 and a school for religion was established. The synagogue was destroyed by the Nazis on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938. At the place where the building stood a memorial stone was installed in 1988.

The Jews of Meiningen who had not emigrated by 1941 were cooped up at a so called "Judenhaus" and from here deported into concentration camps in 1942. This building called "Brockenburg" where the Jews had to live in inhuman conditions still exists today and one can find a memorial plaque there.

Fritz (Peretz) Bernstein, who was one of the founders of the state of Israel, was born in Meiningen on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 1890.

## **Mühlhausen**

Already before the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Jews have been living in Mühlhausen. Some Jews who engaged in trade are mentioned in the law code. The council allowed Jews to buy property in the city in 1302. But already in 1320 the municipality was requested by a papal commissioner to banish certain Jews listed by name from the city as a reaction of too high rates of interest.

In 1349 the majority of the Jewish inhabitants, amongst them Rabbi Elieser, was killed. A bitterly fought quarrel over the belongings of the dead arose afterwards.

In 1374 the settlement of Jews was allowed again in Mühlhausen. The new community had a synagogue, a school and a cemetery and its members lived without strict separation from their Christian neighbours. The council of the municipality claimed the exclusive right to admit Jews to live in the town in order to control their number, but on the other hand also to protect its members from having to settle claims from the Reich.

A new pogrom occurred in 1452 when the Jewish inhabitants were arrested and released soon afterwards. The majority of the Jewish community decided to move away after this incident.

There is evidence of a Jewish community in 1471 which disintegrated in 1511 for no definite reason. The synagogue was sold and in 1561 the council announced that Jews should be banned from Mühlhausen for all times. But already in 1635 the municipality tried to resettle Jews and succeeded at least with a small number of new Jewish inhabitants.

A Jewish community was established in 1806, which asked for the permission to hold worship services in 1808. A new synagogue was built and inaugurated between 1840 and 1842.

The centre of social Jewish life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the house of the family Oppé, where a memorial plaque for the killed Jewish citizens of Mühlhausen was installed in 1985.

The synagogue was devastated on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1938, especially the furnishings. The building itself remained and was used later on as storage space. The cemetery which remained undamaged during this occasion was defiled several times after 1945.

Under the Nazi regime the Jews were cooped up in so called "Jew houses" and lived there like in a ghetto until they were deported into concentration camps in 1942. With some single arrests in 1943 and 1945 the Jewish life in Mühlhausen was extinguished.

After World War II a new Jewish community was established already in 1947. It was never formally disbanded, even though it stopped its activities in the 1950s because most of the members moved away.

Since 1998 the ensemble of the old community centre and the synagogue is restored and used as a place for remembrance, documentation and gatherings.

## **Nordhausen**

The earliest evidence of Jews in Nordhausen dates back to 1290, when king Rudolf of Habsburg fixed tax regulations for them. The admission of Jews into the town was regulated by the municipality which gave the permission to solve disputes between Jews at a rabbinical Court in 1333. Around 1300 the Jewish community owned an estate, a well and a Mikveh. The synagogue was plundered and demolished in 1324, but a new building was soon erected. In May 1349 the landgrave of Thuringia demanded to kill all Jewish inhabitants for “well poisoning” and the municipality obeyed. Already in 1350 a Jew became citizen of Nordhausen again, some more followed. Most of them lived in the “Jüdenstraße” (i.e. Jew street), where also the synagogue stood, but also in other parts of town. The cemetery that was used before 1349 was reactivated. In 1447 the Jews were expelled again from Nordhausen but came back latest in 1454. Around 100 years later there was the next attempt to expel the Jews of Nordhausen. In 1630 some Jews lived here again, but the next settlement of longer duration took place only after 1808.

The locations of the old synagogue and the Mikveh could not be reconstructed; the medieval cemetery was also cleared.

In 1808 a private Jewish community was established under Meyer Abraham Ilberg, which met in hall of prayer in a house that still exists today. In 1820 a new cemetery was set up (and still exists today), a Tahara hall followed in 1867. Because the room for worship services got too small, a synagogue was built in the town centre until 1845. Two years later the community was officially announced a synagogue community. The synagogue building was restored in 1888 and in 1919 a memorial plaque for the killed German Jewish soldiers in World War I was installed. Until 1910 the number of community members increased constantly up to 452 people, after that a slow decrease began. But still in 1939 there were 180 Jews in Nordhausen, despite the fact that the synagogue was burnt down on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis and 90 Jewish inhabitants were deported into the concentration camp Buchenwald the same year. More deportations were made during World War II.

A memorial plaque was installed close to the former Jewish community centre in 1988. Furthermore there are streets named after famous Jewish persons: the banker Jacob Plaut and Oskar Cohn, a left wing Member of Parliament during the Weimar Republic.

## **Nordhausen-Krimderode/ concentration camp Mittelbau Dora**

Next to the traces of Jewish life one sadly finds also traces of Jewish suffering and dying in Nordhausen: The memorial of the victims of the Nazi concentration camp “Mittelbau Dora”. About 7000 Jews had to carry out slave labour in a tunnel system or in about 30 so called satellite camps. It is not known how many of them died as a result of the compulsory labour or the following “evacuation march”. This “march of death” which caused the death of so many prisoners was initiated by the persons responsible for the camp: They wanted to hush up their terrible crimes and prevent the prisoners from being possibly called as witnesses for the Allies. The march pro-

ceeded through the following towns: Buchholz, Ellrich, Harzungen, Ilfeld, Netzkater, Neustadt, Niedersachswerfen, Nordhausen, Stempeda, and Woffleben. Along the way one can find many memorials for the victims.

In 1995 the entrance to the tunnel and part of the tunnel system were opened to the public.

### **Oberhof**

With the growing importance of Oberhof as a holiday resort, also the requirement of lodging and kosher catering for Jewish visitors arose. A hotel taken over by Benjamin Blum in 1924 tried to meet expectations and also installed a room of prayer. But in 1938 all Jewish business was exposed to compulsory expropriation, and the owners driven out. The former "Hotel Blum" burnt down in 1941.

### **Ohrdruf**

In Ohrdruf one can find a memorial for the victims of the Nazi regime, i.e. also Jewish victims, in the town centre. Near Ohrdruf was the concentration camp "S III", a satellite camp of the concentration camp Buchenwald. From September 1944 to April 1945 prisoners who had to do compulsory labour at Jonastal lived here in inhuman conditions, about 5000 died here. The area is used as a military training area today and therefore is not open to the public.

### **Plaue**

Jews are recorded in 1434 in Plaue, but further information is missing.

After 1820 some Jews settled here, until 1840 six Jews were citizens of the municipality. A Jewish community developed and used the private house of Eduard Bamberg for worship services. There was also a bathhouse in a private garden. Between 1845 and 1866 some of the members emigrated to the USA, after 1875 many moved to Arnstadt. The only hint of former Jewish life in Plaue one can find nowadays is the cemetery below the castle ruin. It was set up in 1826 and until 1926 the Jews of Arnstadt were also buried here.

### **Pößneck**

Already at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Jews were living in Pößneck. Between 1423 and 1425 a Jew from Pößneck is mentioned as the creditor of the Earl of Orlamünde. Further information is not available until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The highest number of Jewish inhabitants was reached in 1895 with 51 people. A small Jewish association established and existed until 1938, a religious community did obviously not exist. The religious activities are very likely to have been held in the private house of the merchant David Binder; the building still exists.

### **Römhild**

The Jews of Römhild became the victims of a pogrom already in 1298. After that only a small number of Jews settled here again. When the territory was bought by the house of Wettin in 1555 Jews were no longer tolerated in Römhild. Only in the 19<sup>th</sup>



century Jews were moving again to Römhild. They then belonged to the Jewish community of Bibra, but used an own room of prayer at the back part of the house of the merchant Adolf Kahn. This house was used by the Nazis as a “Judenhaus” where all Jews of the town were cooped together until they were deported into concentration camps in 1942. Nowadays this building is used as a normal residential house. In 1988 a memorial plaque was installed at the front of it.

Another memorial is situated on the cemetery of Römhild: The names of 169 victims of a so called “camp for working education” which was initiated by the former mayor. The inmates had to carry out compulsory labour for the Gestapo.

About four kilometres away from Römhild one can find a “path of remembrance” for the cruel fate of many concentration camp inmates. Along the way one passes a former tunnel where the then mayor Alfred Schmitt gave the order to bury 70 weak and sick prisoners alive in 1945.

Certainly Jews were among the victims of these atrocities.

### **Rudolstadt**

Jews are likely to have lived in Rudolstadt before 1349, but the first direct evidence dates back to 1434. Later indications are rare; in 1496 all Jews in the county were expelled, in 1554 a single Jewish woman lived in Rudolstadt.

A small Jewish community existed from 1784 until 1874, after the Prince from the house of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt allowed their settlement and the exercise of their professions. In 1796 the community became officially recognized and then used a room in the house of the merchant David Hirsch Schwabe in the town centre as a synagogue. Some of the furniture and equipment can be seen today in the museum at the Heidecksburg castle. The death of the last head of the community, Gustav Callmann, in 1874 marked the end of the Jewish community. From 1800 there had been a Jewish cemetery; the last burial was in 1911. In 1935 the area was levelled and became part of a porcelain factory. Also all traces of a Mikveh which existed between 1796 and 1816 were wiped away.

### **Rüdigershagen**

In Napoleonic times the landowner Erich Carl von Hagen discovered the settlement of Jews as a source of income. At the highpoint in 1840 a number of 75 Jews lived in Rüdigershagen. The community owned a synagogue at the sheep farm of the estate and a cemetery outside the village. Already in 1850 the state of the building was described as poor, after 1860 it was used as a workshop for many years and finally torn down in 1994. The only remaining Jewish building is a residential house, where Jewish inhabitants lived until the 1920s.

The last burial on the cemetery took place in 1908, some remaining tombstones are said to have been found in 1989.

## **Saalfeld**

At the latest by the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Jews started to live in Saalfeld. The Jewish inhabitants became victims of the pogroms in 1349. After that the synagogue was sold in 1364 to some citizens. In 1389 the municipality became property of the house of Wettin; a Jewish inhabitant is mentioned in the same year. Some more Jews settled here again, until all Jewish inhabitants of all the territories belonging to the house of Wettin were expelled. Even though there are no special remarks on Saalfeld, certainly it was affected, too.

Only by the 19<sup>th</sup> century did Jews settle again in Saalfeld. They formed a Jewish religious association, but no community. Up to 33 Jewish inhabitants lived here until the 1930s. Worship services were held together with Jews from Rudolstadt in a room of prayer in a private house. The building was torn down around 1970.

## **Schleusingen**

Jews from Schleusingen were persecuted and killed by pogroms in 1298 as well as in 1349. After that Jews were not settling in Schleusingen for several centuries. It is proven that there were Jewish inhabitants present after 1534. But already in 1556 the Count refused to provide further protection and as a result the Jews left again. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Duke allowed the resettlement of Jews. In 1712 the Jew David Hertz received citizenship and bought a house at the market square. In 1725 the statutes of a Jewish community were confirmed, in the following years the number of members grew. A fire destroyed the synagogue in 1876; a new one was inaugurated in 1881. This building was used until 1938: on the 9<sup>th</sup> November it was devastated by the Nazis. After rebuilding activities the house became and still is a residential building. A memorial plaque was installed at the front of the house. A Jewish cemetery was used between 1743 and 1937; it seems that it was defiled several times.

## **Schmalkalden**

The first mentioning of Jews in Schmalkalden is related to a pogrom in 1298 and the second persecution following in 1349, when 18 Jews were killed because they were accused of well poisoning. In 1357 a single Jew is recorded in Schmalkalden again. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century there are only some scattered reports of Jews in the municipality, some more during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. After 1570 no Jews are mentioned in the records until 1611, when the landgrave of Hessen-Kassel allowed four Jewish families to settle in Schmalkalden. Among them was Isaak Schmuel who built a little synagogue at a yard in 1622. In 1639 21 Jewish families were living in the town, who owned besides the synagogue a Mikveh, a school and a cemetery. In 1717 the synagogue burnt down as well as four other Jewish houses, but was rebuilt immediately. In the years 1823 and 1833 the Jewish community of Schmalkalden was under government supervision.

The synagogue was renovated between 1929 and 1930, but burnt down by the Nazis on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938. The remaining walls were broken down by the SS. In 1933 the community had still 95 members. In 1942 the remaining Jewish inhabitants were deported and most of them killed in concentration camps.

In 1989 a memorial plaque was installed at the house which now stands on the location of the former synagogue.

The Jewish cemetery of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was cleared in 1962 and the tombstones brought to the “new” Jewish cemetery which was installed in 1898 next to the Christian cemetery. Here the last burial took place in 1942; the youngest tombstone dates back to 1939, the oldest one is from 1652. One can also find a memorial stone for the “old” Jewish cemetery.

## **Schwarzza**

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century some Jews lived in Schwarzza under protection of the Count of Henneberg-Schwarzza. The next time Jews are mentioned is in 1652, when Joseph Aaron and his family moved here after the Thirty Years' War. Some more families followed his example and a community developed. A synagogue was built in 1686. The number of Jewish inhabitants increased during the 18<sup>th</sup> century until in 1847, 287 Jews lived in Schwarzza. After that the number decreased again and in 1942 only four Jewish inhabitants were living in the municipality.

The community owned a synagogue, a Mikveh, a Jewish school, a shelter for poor Jews and also had a kosher butcher's shop and a bakery.

The synagogue building was not destroyed on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938, but some Nazi followers broke in and took out the prayer books which they burnt outside. The building itself was later used as a garage for buses and torn down around 1980 because of danger of collapse. Today one can still see some foundation walls in a private garden.

The building of the school, which was only used as a school until 1804, is today used as a residential house, as well as the butcher's and the bakery. The Mikveh was torn down in 1830 and in the meantime a new house was built over it, but the spring which probably was responsible for the water supply, is still there.

A Street is named after Irma Stern, the last Jewish woman that lived in Schwarzza. She was deported into the concentration camp Lodz with her little children and her mother in May 1942.

On the former Jewish cemetery one can still find 78 tomb stones, most of them inscribed in Hebrew at the front and in German at the back. The oldest one is from 1680 the last one from 1936.

## **Simmershausen**

In 1711 a first Jew was admitted to the protection of the Duke of Saxony-Hildburghausen in Simmershausen. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century more and more Jewish families came and established a community. They had a synagogue, a school and a Mikveh. At the highpoint in 1853 the community had 60 members, but already in 1930 the last Jewish inhabitants left Simmershausen. Their dead were buried at the cemeteries in Weitersroda and Gleicherwiesen. Despite intense research it was not possible to find out the locations of the former Jewish buildings, hence documents are the only traces of Jewish life in Simmershausen.

## **Sondershausen**

The archaeological result of a medieval Mikveh, which existed already before a town wall was built, proves that Jews lived in Sondershausen already in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. These early Jewish inhabitants became victims of the pogroms in 1349. In the following centuries there are no traces of Jewish settlement in Sondershausen.

A Jewish community existed again at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: In 1698 a Jewish school and a room of prayer in a private house are recorded, one year later also the purchase of an area for a cemetery. In 1825/26 a synagogue was built at the back of a building and used until 1938 when it was defiled by the Nazis. Today there are no remains of the building after it burnt down during a bomb strike in 1945 and the clearing of the area around 1960. Today there is a new building but a memorial plaque indicates the Jewish history of the site.

From 1842 there was a private Jewish boarding school for boys, run by Rabbi Philipp Heidenheim. In the beginning the school was in the building in front of the synagogue but later it used the rooms of the municipal schools.

The Mikveh is located in the town centre, under a new building hosting a shopping mall.

At the old Jewish cemetery one can still find 180 burial plots, some of them from early 18<sup>th</sup> century. There is also a memorial for the victims of the Nazi regime. Sadly some tombstones show clear traces of defilement and destruction.

## **Sonneberg**

First evidence of the presence and business activity of Jews in Sonneberg is found in 18<sup>th</sup> century. More Jewish families moved here during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a community was established. There was no synagogue, worship services were held in a private house. It was not possible to locate this former room of prayer.

The dead were buried at the cemetery of nearby Coburg.

It is not known when the community dissolved, but it is likely that it was in the second half of the 1930's.

In the heyday of Sonneberg (before 1914) the most important stores were run by Rosenthal and Speyer, both Jewish. The Jewish lawyer Eduard Lasker was the elected Member of Parliament for the constituency and Hugo Karl Liman was mayor between 1893 and 1909. But in the middle of the 1920's the liberal atmosphere changed: Until 1938 most of the Jewish enterprises were expropriated in terms of "Aryanization".

## **Stadtilm**

In 1349 the Jewish inhabitants of Stadtilm became victims of the plague pogroms, after that Jews settled here again in 1398. In 1452 the Count of Schwarzburg gave the permission to turn the synagogue into a Christian chapel. After that there are no

traces of Jewish life in Stadtilm. The chapel does not exist anymore; it was not possible to find its former location.

## **Stadtlengsfeld**

Since 1494 Lengsfeld was property of the house of Boineburg which belonged to the Free Imperial Knighthood. Therefore they were allowed to take Jews under their protection which first happened in late 16<sup>th</sup> century. By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Jewish community had its own cemetery, a new one was set up in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1800 there were 800 Jews living in Lengsfeld, the number declined until 1935 when there were 30 Jewish inhabitants left.

The community had a synagogue, a Mikveh, a school and a kosher butcher's shop. In 1850 the Christian and Jewish schools were unified by request of both communities.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 the synagogue was destroyed by the Nazis, by the end of the year all Jewish inhabitants had left the town. Nevertheless more than thirty of them were killed in concentration camps.

The synagogue building was renovated and is today used as a residential house. Also the school building and the residence of Rabbi Joseph Wiesen can still be found, as well as the former Jewish cemetery with over 600 tombstones.

Some famous Jewish persons are connected to Stadtlengsfeld: Dankmar Adler who later became one of the best known architects in the USA was born here. Julius Löwenheim who has written some very important papers on educational theory was teacher at the school in Lengsfeld and also a popular politician of the region. Also one can mention Dr. Kroner, who was Rabbi in Lengsfeld until 1883. He played an outstanding role in the exploration of the Jewish history of Erfurt.

## **Suhl**

Jews are recorded in Suhl several times during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then they had to leave, because their protection was no longer provided.

The Jews that moved to Suhl in the 19<sup>th</sup> century initially belonged to the community of Heinrichs, but the main emphasis soon moved to Suhl. The community existed until 1942. First they used the cemetery in Heinrichs, later they owned one in Suhl. There were several active Jewish organizations.

Between 1871 and 1906 there was a room of prayer available at the house of the family Harras; the building was torn down later. The synagogue was inaugurated in 1906. It was burnt down in the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938 by the Nazis and soon the community was wiped out: The Jewish inhabitants were all deported into concentration camps by 1942.

A memorial plaque at the location of the former synagogue commemorates the fate of the Jewish citizens.

## **Themar**

Already by the 13<sup>th</sup> century a Jewish community existed in Themar, but was wiped out by the pogrom of 1298. Around 1500 a single Jew was living here, but only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did a new community develop. In 1870 the Jewish inhabitants used a room of prayer and a room for schooling. In 1877 a synagogue was inaugurated and a Jewish community constituted. In 1898 the community had 97 members, in 1938 there were 48. Only 15 of them managed to emigrate, the rest were deported to the concentration camps Belzyce and Theresienstadt.

It is likely that the community was in possession of a Mikveh, for burials they used the cemetery of Marisfeld. After 1938 the synagogue building that was not damaged on the 9<sup>th</sup> November was sold. The building where the community had the room of prayer, the school and an accommodation for the teacher is today used as a residential house.

## **Vacha**

Already by 1323 a Jewish community was documented in Vacha. The members of it became victims of the pogroms in 1349 and the community which is likely to have been in possession of a synagogue and a Mikveh was wiped out. In 1414 a Jew settled in Vacha again. From the tax list we can extract that there were always one or two Jewish families until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then there is evidence missing, but latest in 1590 Jews seem to have lived in Vacha again. The Jewish inhabitants were allowed to carry out worship in private houses.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century more Jews moved to Vacha and in 1777 a Jewish community was established. They owned a synagogue, a Mikveh and a cemetery. The synagogue was renovated and expanded in 1829, because the community had grown (in 1924/25 it had still 90 members). The building itself was not destroyed on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938, but the furnishing had been burnt on 10<sup>th</sup> October already. The synagogue was compulsorily "sold" to the municipality and torn down in 1955. Opposite of the former synagogue a cellar Mikveh was discovered in 1998, which had probably belonged to private property. Today there is a school building; the former Jewish sites are indicated by a memorial plaque.

There is also a memorial stone at the former Jewish cemetery, which shows some marks of defilement. The oldest tomb stone dates back to 1718.

## **Völkershausen**

Latest in 1548 the lords of Völkershausen had settled Jews, offering them protection. A Jewish community developed and in 1816 a synagogue was built. Also there was a Mikveh and a Jewish school. After 1840 most of the Jewish inhabitants did move away, hence the community dissolved in 1903. After 1914 no Jews lived in Völkershausen anymore.

The synagogue was partly torn down later; some parts remained and are now part of a garage.

## **Walldorf**

Walldorf was the property of three noble families who offered their protection to Jews. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century a large community developed; it is the only one of which we still have the archive. Because each family allowed "its" Jew to found a community there were three Jewish communities with a room of prayer and a school each. There was a common cemetery though. In 1789 the three communities became one and a new school and a synagogue were built. The school burnt down in 1836 together with a bathhouse and a bakery.

In 1851 Walldorf had 562 Jewish inhabitants, but around 1870 a growing number moved to the towns, especially to nearby Meiningen.

In 1939 only 19 Jews were still living in Walldorf, only some of them managed to emigrate, all the others were deported to concentration camps. One survivor came back to Walldorf after 1945.

The synagogue was devastated on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1938; the building became property of the municipality and was torn down in 1949.

At the location of the former synagogue there was a memorial built which had nothing to do with the Jewish community, it was removed in the 1990's.

One can still find the former Jewish cemetery.

## **Wasungen**

During the pogroms of 1298 Jews from Wasungen were also killed. During 16<sup>th</sup> century there is only scarce mention of Jews in Wasungen. From 1555 onward, the Count of Henneberg no longer provided protection for Jews. Traces of Jewish life are found in the names of streets and areas: Jew lane, Jew tower and also earlier Jew garden or Jew hill.

## **Weimar**

The early Jews of Weimar became victims of the persecutions in 1349. After that Jews are first mentioned again in 1379 and 1390.

After 1529 the respected doctor Moses Staffelsteiner, who worked for the Elector of Saxony, lived here.

A new Jewish community established after Duchess Anna Amalia had appointed Jacob Elkan as Court Jew. In 1789 three important Jewish families lived in Weimar: Elkan, Löser and Ulmann. They formed a kind of private community and Elkan built a synagogue (rather a room of prayer in his house) and a Mikveh in 1805.

In 1880 80 Jews lived in Weimar, a part of them founded an Israelite Association in 1903.

There was a cemetery set up in 1774, which was last used in 1898. It was sold and used as an orchard for long years. In 1983 a part of the cemetery was restored as a memorial.

Also at the municipal cemetery one can find traces of Jews: The tombstone of the Jewish Court conductor Eduard Lassen and the tombstone of Josef Cygler (born 1900 in Poland), an inmate of the concentration camp Buchenwald, who died in hospital in 1945. Furthermore, there is a memorial for the victims of fascism.

### **Weißensee**

A Jewish community existed already in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. In spring 1303, 126 Jews listed by name were killed because they were accused of ritual murder. The survivors of this massacre and newcomers died as victims of the plague pogrom in 1349. After that, Jews are recorded again in Weißensee in 1390.

Today there is still a lane called Jew Lane. Also there is a fountain with the Star of David on it, but it is not clear whether there is a connection to the existence of a Jewish community or not.

### **Weitersroda**

There has never been a Jewish community in Weitersroda. But with the permission of the Duke in 1680 the cemetery for the Jews of Hildburghausen was set up here. Later Jews from Simmershausen were also buried here. The cemetery is still in a good condition. One can find 233 tombstones.