

Ottensoos Community

The village of Ottensoos had been under the rule of an inheritance of 44 noble families (sic) since 1478, but was surrounded on all sides by the territory of the imperial city of Nuremberg. Only in 1519 is a local Jew named Amschel mentioned in a tax list. Only his end is unusual, because on December 17, 1537 he was publicly hanged in Nuremberg as an alleged fence. In 1630 eleven Jewish families lived in Ottensoos. After severe devastation in the Thirty Years' War, their number quickly increased again, and as early as the 1650s they were able to form a religious community for the first time. This joined the Rabbinate Schnaittach and used the cemetery there.

At the end of the 17th century, fourteen Jewish families with around 60 people lived in the village, who were legally equal to their Christian neighbors. In 1686, the community built its own, centrally located synagogue opposite the parish church of St. Veit (today Dorfplatz 5). After the Electorate of Bavaria had taken over Rothenberg Castle and all associated manors in 1698, the Jews of Ottensoos, Schnaittach and Hüttenbach received new letters of protection, which were usually valid for 15 years, for a total payment of 8,000 guilders.

An electoral decree from 1717 that Jews were not allowed to acquire any further land without official permission proved to be a heavy burden for the Jews of Ottensoo: In 1722, for example, 18 families lived in just seven houses. The further history of the Jewish community in the 18th century has so far been little researched, only the overwhelming poverty of its members is certain from the tax files. If at all, only one community servant took on all the basic functions (Chasan, Melamed, Schochet) in personal union. A local peculiarity were Jewish families who lived in an extraterritorial Freihof and were under the protection of the Frankish Imperial Knights of Crailsheim. Accordingly, they rarely appear in Bavarian archives, but were considered committed members of the community, who often provided the board.

In 1806 the formerly independent Imperial Knights' Circles were mediated, and the Franconian Knights' Circle and its inhabitants fell to the Kingdom of Bavaria. A new list from 1811 mentions that there was a (probably honorary) circumciser in Ottensoos, while in Hüttenbach and Schnaittach the rabbi himself took on this task.

The coexistence of Christians and Jews was quite uncomplicated throughout the 19th century: when the religious community built a poorhouse around 1829, a needy Jewish family lived in the school building during the construction period, and the lessons for thirty Jewish children were held in a room belonging to the Christian Schneidermeisters Deuerlein relocated. In 1829, the new state hygiene regulations caused some headaches: As in almost every other Franconian rural community, the old mikveh in the Ottensoos synagogue also proved to be inadequate. By 1834 a free-standing bathhouse was built north of the synagogue, which was expanded in

1853 with a pumping system for the water supply and renovated at great expense in 1904.

From the middle of the century, the great wave of emigration overseas began, with the free choice of occupation and place of residence granted in 1861, this situation became even worse. At the turn of the year 1865/66, the religious community refused the evangelical parish office the New Year's fee, which they had to pay to the local pastor as compensation for the lost stolen money. On March 9, however, the board members Hayum Simonsfeld and Wolf Hessdörfer had to officially acknowledge that their religious community "every year on New Year's Day on the k. record Parish office [have] to administer the 3rd Nuremberg pound of sugar there". From 1867, so-called "Auszugsgeld" was intended to compensate for the ever-increasing loss of income, which aroused understandable resentment among the emigrating community members.

In 1869, 108 Jewish women, children and men lived in the village. While the children went to the local elementary school, they received separate religious instruction in the community school. The building of unknown construction date and location also served as a slaughterhouse. As before, the state-certified religion teacher held the posts of Chasan in the synagogue and Schochet in personal union. Because the young community teacher Salomon Friedheim married and needed a larger apartment, the IKG Ottensoos decided in 1869 to build a new building that was directly connected to the synagogue and cost a proud 1,300 guilders. Ironically, on the Sabbath night of September 2, 1871, a fire broke out in the butcher Rebitzer's barn and destroyed nine buildings, including the school and synagogue complex. With a Bavaria-wide collection, however, the religious community raised enough funds to be able to build a new synagogue with integrated school and living quarters in the summer of 1872.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the economic situation in Ottensoos improved noticeably, above all due to the upswing in the Jewish hop trade, which had a globally important center in Nuremberg.

In the then wealth-linked census suffrage, the Jewish population of the place had a majority. From the end of the 19th century until 1933, there was always a Jewish representative among the municipal representatives. In 1901, the IKG suggested the construction of a water and power supply line in Ottensoos. Community festivals such as the fire brigade ball were organized on an interdenominational basis, and Jewish life took place openly in everyday life. In view of the shrinking rural communities, the IKG Ottensoos had to significantly expand its catchment area. A government decision of June 25, 1932 allocated one Jewish family each in the villages of Röthenbach and Offenhausen to the religious community.

After the National Socialists took power in 1933, Jews were increasingly pushed out of public life. Many moved to the supposedly safe big cities or left the country if possible. By 1938 only 15 Jewish families lived in the village. Since a minyan was no

longer established, Ottensoos, Schnaittach and Hüttenbach joined forces for joint services.

In the November pogrom of 1938, the synagogue was devastated and all Jewish residents were held in the elementary school until they could return to their looted houses in the morning. After that, under pressure, they sold their properties and left their homes by June 17. A total of 24 Jewish men, women and children who were born in Ottensoos or had lived there for a long time died in the Shoah.

In the former synagogue, which from 2010 has been managed by the "Former Synagogue in Ottensoos e.V." renovated, cultural events take place today. A commemorative plaque has been attached to the south wall of the building since 1988, commemorating the history of the congregation and its place of worship. The lintel of a Jewish house from 1723 is in the Jewish Museum of Franconia in Schnaittach, along with two Torah curtains from the synagogue. One of them, the foundation of the married couple Heinrich and Helene Prager from 1884, became the showpiece of a special exhibition in 2021/22 as a "rediscovered gem from Ottensoos". == Patrick Charell