

*Ottensoos – A Village in the district of Lauf (Pegnitz)*

### History of (Jewish) Community

**Beginnings:** The Jewish community in Ottensoos seems to have originated in the 15th century. One explanation of the beginnings is that Jews first came there when they were expelled from Nürnberg. They brought with them their traditions to this new community. The first document attesting to this community is from 1537. In it it is told that a Jew from Ottensoos was hanged in Nürnberg that same year. (A similar event occurred in 1590.) On the tax list of the Counts of Rothenberg, Jews of Ottensoos are mentioned from 1577 to 1585.

**Rabbinate:** Starting from the end of the 16th century, the Jews of O. were subject to the authority of the "state rabbinate" which was seated in Schnaittach. From 1560, at the latest, Jews of O. were buried in the Jewish cemetery at Schnaittach. This, together with the question of burial payment and burial proprietorship, were bones of contention between the two communities until 1710, when a rabbinical decree and the intervention of the government, ended the conflict. The rabbis of Schnaittach and the state, Model Levi Oettingen (1655–1661), and Asher Zecharia Enslein (1674–1693), promulgated various rules, the aims of which were to regulate the relationship between the two communities. These rules were the basis for community life for a long period. These rules also applied to the communities of Hüttenbach and Forth, and were therefore called "the customs of O.S.F.H."

**From Crisis to Prosperity:** The 30 years war (1618–1648) caused much suffering to the community of O. The heavy taxes, the robbery and pillage of the armies, all undermined the economic well-being of the Jewish community. Some families were forced to leave and find employment elsewhere. In 1644 the leaders of the state permitted the Jews of O. to appoint for themselves a teacher and shamesh, and to add 5 more families to the community. In 1671 there were 10 tax-paying Jewish families in O. (compared to the 11 of 1630), and by 1698, this number had risen to 14. In this same year, O. (and the three other communities in O.S.F.H.) came under the rule of Bavaria. The protection writs of Bavaria now applied to these communities.

At the urging of the local pastor, the village council complained to the government on the large number of Jews in O. Nonetheless the community continued to grow. In 1703 there were 118 Jews in 8 houses. In 1722 there were 18 tax-paying families. In 1747 the number had increased to 23. In internal legal matters, the Jews of O., in 1770, were under the jurisdiction of one "head administrator", the court agent Reb Anshel Halevi of Schnaittach. When he died, at the beginning of the 19th century, this post was abolished.

**19th Century:** In 1808 the "state rabbinate" was cancelled and the Jewish community of O. became independent. However, they were subject to the district rabbinate in Schnaittach, and continued to use the cemetery there. In 1872 a new synagogue was built in O., replacing the old one which had burnt down. The Jewish community in O. was attached to the district rabbinate of Schwabach in 1883, and to that of Ansbach in 1932.

### Under Nazi Rule (1933–1938)

In 1933 the Jewish community of O. was attached to the district rabbinate of Ansbach. The community had a synagogue, a religious school (the teacher was the Jewish teacher of Schnaittach), and a mikvah. Attached to the community were also individual Jews from villages in the area (Offenhausen, Hersbruck, Lauf, Neunkirchen a. Sand, and Röthenbach a.d. Pegnitz). Immediately after the rise of the nazis to power, notices appeared on the roads to O. saying "Juden unerwünscht" (Jews not wanted). Anti-semitic riots broke out in early April 1934. On the night of April 19, the windows of most of the Jewish houses in O. were smashed.

As a result of the economic boycott against the Jews, many Jews in O. were impoverished. From December 1935, most of the Jews of O. were supported by the winter relief fund of the Nürnberg community. In March

1936, a window-pane of the synagogue was smashed. By this time there were not enough Jews in O. to form a minyan.

In February 1938, the archives of the Jewish community were removed to the protection of the Jewish community of München. By November 1938, 12 Jews had left O. 3 emigrated (Israel, Holland, France), and 9 went to other places in Germany (of which 5 went to Würzburg). 3 Jews died in O. In September 1938, a Jew, Arnold Sommerich was arrested in O., and accused of criticizing the internal German situation. In 23.2.39 he died in Buchenwald.

### **Holocaust**

In the disturbances of November 10, 1938, rioters partially ruined the synagogue in O., and totally destroyed the furnishings. The religious objects were removed and their fate is unknown. The 13 Jews of O. all left O. between January and May of 1939. 9 went to Nürnberg, and 4 to Frankfurt a. Main.

After the war not one Jew returned to O. The synagogue, school, and mikvah which were partially ruined, survived the war.

There are no Jews in Ottensoos today.