

Foreword: ***Siezzon*—Not Always a Good Grazing Land**

The History of the Jews of Süssen

During the persecution of the Jews in the Nazi period, dark spots also formed on the clean vest of Süssen, a small village in the center of southern Germany. At the bottom of a list of names of the sixteen deported Jews, to whom an additional name has to be added, we read in perfect Sütterlin handwriting the cynical sentence, “Süssen is now free of Jews!” In contrast to other places where violence or even physical attacks on Jewish fellow citizens occurred, this did not happen in Süssen. Rather, when the need of the local Jews was greatest, they were secretly supported by a number of Süssen citizens, through groceries that were secretly left on their doorstep, for example. Most of the repressive measures against the Jews were brought into the village from outside. Non-Jewish citizens, too, understood the meaning of deportation. After a Jewish neighbor said goodbye, the son of a couple overheard his father saying to the mother, “They will not return.”

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the village had no Jewish history whatsoever. To be sure, the names *Judengasse* and *Judenzoller* are mentioned in old accounts and maps. These hints refer merely to a street for Jewish travelers, for whose use they had to pay a fee.

The history of Jews in former Gross-Süssen began in 1902 and ended with their deportation on November 28, 1941, with a brief continuation when three of the sixteen who had been deported, and who survived the hell of the labor and concentration camps, returned in 1945. As was the case in many other villages and towns, the memory of the former Jewish fellow citizens was repressed. Nevertheless, a few Süssen citizens maintained contact with former Jewish residents, especially with Hugo Lang, who was the last to succeed in emigrating to the United States.

The passage of time allowed for a more open conversation of the events from the Nazi period. Hence, in 1989, then Mayor Martin Bauch extended an invitation from the city council to the surviving members of the Jewish

families to visit Süssen. This invitation had a ripple effect that continues to this day.

A second impetus arose from the visit of an American professor. Mrs. Gilya Gerda Schmidt teaches Judaic Studies at the University of Tennessee, with a focus on the Holocaust. She was born Gerda Dauner in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt and grew up in Süssen. She remembered from her mother's stories that Jews also lived in Süssen. In the summer of 1998, she received an invitation to give a lecture at the Evangelische Akademie in Bad Boll near Süssen; she took this opportunity to establish first contacts with the town. Since that time the Jews of Süssen have had their historian.

In the intervening years, Professor Schmidt has been in Süssen again and again, for many weeks, and tirelessly researched the fate of the Süssen Jews. She likewise explored the fate of the members of the Ottenheimer family. Although the Ottenheimers lived in the nearby district capital of Göppingen, they owned a factory in Süssen that was Aryanized in 1938. For this research she traveled all the way to Cuba, which was not easy for an American citizen.

Professor Schmidt's kindness and human warmth, along with a consistent single-mindedness and diligence, earned her respect, appreciation, and affection from those who came in contact with her.

I hope that the book will help to send racism and nationalism where they belong—to the rubbish heap of history.

Werner Runschke
Süssen Stadtarchivar