Remembering the Jewish Community of

Karlsruhe, Germany

Remembered by Howard Novick

For the first 8 years of her life, my mother lived in Karlsruhe, Germany with her older sister and her parents. My grandfather, Dr. Fritz Weile, was a physician there, with an office in their home at 50 Kaiser Allee. Most of his patients were non-Jews; he had a general practice, and also was the physician for the local soccer team. Karlsruhe is in the province of Baden, and was Baden's capital until 1945. It is located in the southwest of Germany, not far from the Black Forest. In the 1930s it had a population of approximately 150,000 and a Jewish population of approximately 3200. At that time Jews had been present in Karlsruhe for about 200 years. There were 282 members of the Jewish community in 1733. In the 1800s the population grew steadily from 893 in 1825 to 2577 in 1900 out of a total population of 107,765.

In addition to being the seat of Jewish institutions serving all of Baden, the community maintained a broad range of social and cultural activities. The focus of the community's cultural life was the Bialik Lehrhaus for adult education, where lectures, courses, concerts, and exhibitions were held.

In the Weimar period, the Jews maintained their leading economic position in Karlsruhe society. Jews owned four banks; 26 % of the city's doctors and 40 % of its lawyers were Jews. Prominent Jews during this time included Baden's minister of Justice Baden's minister of finance and the president of the Mannheim District Court (the first Jew in Germany to hold such a position). In 1933, there were 3,199 Jews in the city. The community maintained two old age homes and a hospital and operated numerous welfare services (societies for the distribution of food and fuel, for the support of the widows, for assistance to the sick, etc.). With the onset of Nazi rule, judges, teachers,
doctors, and officials were fired from the public service and Jewish businessmen were forced to liquidate. The last Jewish bank was sold in 1939. The community continued its social and educational services and rendered assistance towards emigration.

In all, at least 2,000 of Karlsruhe's Jews emigrated in 1933-39. My mother and her family were among the last to leave, in 1939, after Kristallnacht. On Kristallnacht (9-10 November 1938), the Adas Jeshurun synagogue was burned to the ground, the main synagogue was damaged, and Jewish men were taken to the Dachau concentration camp after being beaten and tormented. Deportations commenced on 22 October 1940, when 893 Jews were loaded onto trains for the three-day journey to the Gurs concentration camp in France. Another 387 were deported in 1942-45 to Izbica in the Lublin district (Poland), Theresienstadt, and Auschwitz. Of the 1,280 Jews deported directly from Karlsruhe, 1,175 perished. Another 138 perished after deportation from other German cities of occupied Europe. In all 1,421 of Karlsruhe's Jews died during the Holocaust. A new community was formed after the war by surviving former residents, with a new synagogue erected in 1971. Its membership numbered 359 in 1980.

My mother and her family fled first to Nice, France and then to Ashford-Kent, England, where my grandfather worked as a gardener at a girl's boarding school while they awaited permission to enter the United States. On January 3, 1940 they arrived in New York, and settled there. After a while my grandfather passed his medical boards, and he established a general practice in Woodside, Queens, where he practiced until his retirement in the mid 1970s.

Here is a memorial book in German. You will be brought to a picture of a Holocaust memorial. Click on the picture, and you will see a list of the names on the memorial. Each name is a link to a biography of the victim, many including a picture.