

Journey Of No Return

The Tragic Story Of The Dottheim Family



Translated by Elisabeth Stiegler and Joanna Brooks

For Joanna and Kara

Erinnerung
ist das Geheimnis
der Versöhnung

Preface

Leaving a place forever
for different reasons
like a conflict, distress
or circumstances that offend the dignity of man.

If you try to pick up the trail of a man,
a family or a group
that was part of a journey of no return,
you must know that damage will show up.

Tracking down people
and documenting their lives
will always be a thin track
unless these people and their personal life stories
are included.

This type of research only makes sense
if you are willing to listen
to what these people have to say.

Often they are deceased.

But the family members they leave behind
often have heard of the past
and have somehow taken over the feeling of injury.

It is never too late
to try a reconciliation
even if generations have passed.
This can benefit and heal both sides
– the victims and the culprits.

The descendants of the Dottheim Family
have met us on this way.

We wish them good luck for the future.
God bless them.

{...May the Lord protect you, bless you with his love, and
give you happiness and health...} Sigmund Dottenheimer

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National Socialism in Gunzenhausen

- 1927 Dr. Heinrich Münch becomes mayor
- Since 1929 First attacks on Jews
- 13.10.1933 50th anniversary of the synagogue
- 25.3.1934 Pogrom on Palm Sunday :
An SA-squad breaks in several Jewish homes and arrests the men. With kicks and punishment almost all of the Jewish men are led away. Two Jewish men lose their lives.
- 15.7.1934 A Jewish innkeeper is murdered
- 1935 Johann Appler becomes mayor
Jewish inhabitants suffer more and more discrimination because of the ‚Nürnberg Laws‘.
- 8.11.1938 The town buys the Synagogue and the school building from the Jewish community
- 9.-10.11.38 „Reichskristallnacht“ with attacks against Jewish private houses.
- 17.11.1938 The domes of the Synagogue are destroyed
- 28.11.1938 Jewish men are deported to Dachau
- Jan. 1939 The last Jewish residents leave Gunzenhausen

The History of the House on Burgstallstraße 1 in Gunzenhausen



Year built	1900
Builder	Heinrich Dottenheimer, businessman and wine salesman
Change of owner	1912 Business handed over to son Sigmund Dottenheimer
	1938 Compulsory levy to the city of Gunzenhausen for 910 RM
	5.2.1944 Bought by the 'Großdeutsche Reich' for NSDAP quarters for 16,600 RM
	1946 After WW II the Bavarian Free-state becomes the owner of the house
	1955 the business house is bought by Karl Marschall, a hairstylist
	1956 Reinhard Carben, a dentist, buys the wine cellar
	Today the houses are still in possession of the two families

The Business

Heinrich Dottenheimer opens a spirits store on Nürnberger Straße 10 in 1883.



**Nürnberger Straße at the turn of the century
The second house on the right is number 10**

This house is in possession of Leonard Asyl, a relative of his wife, Ida. Business seems to be going along well, because the family decides to build a house for home and store, on the lot of Burgstallstraße 1, around the turn of the century.



Wine store Dottenheimer, first house on the right

This sign was on the door of the house. Today it is still in possession of the owner. Surely this was a reference to the lower Franconia wine production region, Würzburg.



As it appears, the young family becomes wealthy in the next few years. The house on Burgstallstraße, in the shade of the city tower, becomes a popular address in Gunzenhausen. In 1906 an addition is made. The barn is elongated and a wine cellar is built.



In 1912 senior boss Heinrich hands the business down to his son Sigmund. He runs the store successfully with his sister, Frieda and her husband, Max Strauß.

This family is one of the first in Gunzenhausen to own an automobile with a chauffeur.



Frieda Dottenheimer with sons Fredi, Werner and Kurt (from the right)

The Economy Crisis

Apparently the fragile economy of the twenties doesn't leave the Dottenheimer business untouched. In 1926 rooms on ground level are rented by the Bavarian Animal Breeding Inspection and the Breeding Control for yellow cows.

In April of 1930 dentist Karl Liebl moves his office from Schillerstraße 10 to this house.

On January 6th 1933 the family deregisters their wine and spirits store, only a few weeks before Adolf Hitler takes power. It is unknown to us what Sigmund Dottenheimer is doing now in terms of work. He is now 46 years old, much too young for retirement.

The family stays in their home and experiences the first measures that are taken and discrimination acts that are made against Jews. These began very soon in Gunzenhausen. On March 25th 1934 the town experiences the first pogrom. Two Jewish residents lose their lives and many are arrested, imprisoned and tortured. The Dottenheimers have the same fate.

On 1.9.1937 dentist Reinhardt Carben from Berolzheim takes over the dentists office.

The family feels they couldn't leave their home, therefore they also experience the Reichskristallnacht in November of 1938. Most of the Jewish men, including Sigmund and his son Kurt, are deported to the concentration camp at Dachau in the days following. Wife Frieda is now alone with daughter Irene and youngest son Werner. The country uses this situation to take the house into possession. It is most likely that mayor Appler pressures the woman into signing the house over to the county for 910 RM. He has also done this with Kirchenstraße 13/15 for example.

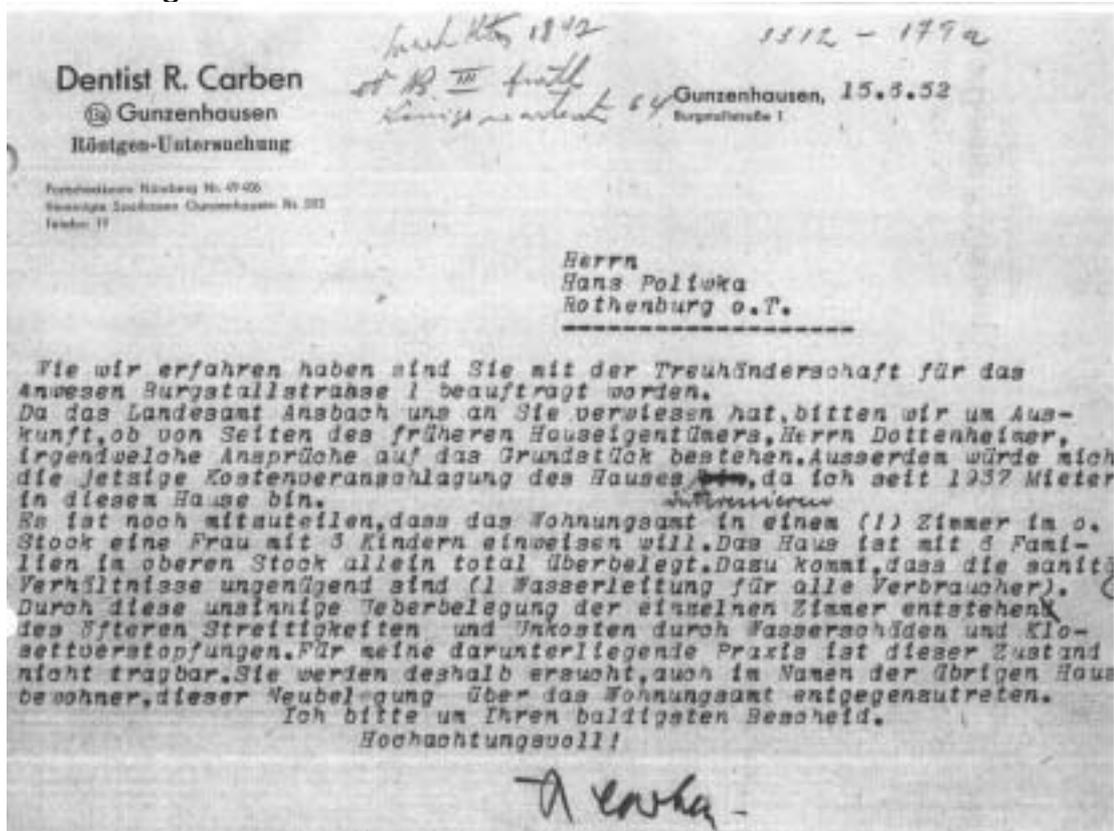
At this time paying larger amounts of money to Jewish people isn't permitted anymore. Apparently they receive the money though, because the family uses it to move to Frankfurt after the two men have been released from the concentration camp.

After this, the house goes through various owners. Mr Carben, the dentist, is drafted in 1940. He has to close his office. In 1944 the ‚Großdeutsche Reich‘ buys the house for the NSDAP, which has its quarters here from this time on.

Time After WW II

The house is rented to various parties after the war.

When Reinhard Carben came back from the war, he wanted to reopen his office. Albert Hesselman has taken his place for the time being in 1945.



Many letters were written, especially by refugees, complaining about the circumstances under which people had been living in this house after the war

The JRSO (Jewish Restitution Successor Organization) informed former Jewish house owners about the state of their homes in 1946. They were compensated for their losses. Not one member of the Dottenheimer family took up contact until 1952. Sigmund Dottenheimer had put a mortgage on his

home. In 1950 banker Gerst had requested compensation for this dept.

II. Rückerstattungsanspruch:
=====

Von dem jüdischen Vorbesitzer Sigmund Dottenheimer, unbekanntem Aufenthaltes ist bisher bei der Wiedergutmachungsbehörde ein Rückerstattungsanspruch nicht gestellt worden, wohl aber von dem Hypotheken-Gläubiger, dem ehemals jüdischen Bankgeschäft Gerst, derzeit in Los Angeles, Californien.

Die Anmeldung durch den Treuhänder an das Z.A.A. in Bad Nauheim erfolgte fristgerecht.

Herr Gerst hat die Süddeutsche Treuhand-Gesellschaft A.G. in München, Ottostraße 16/III mit der Wahrung seiner Interessen beauftragt.

In 1952 Fred contacts the IRSO on order to assert his rights to his parents home. On 13.8.1953 he receives 11,305 DM for compensation.

Telefon 72921-72923

Freilassungsreg. Nr. 12/54
 Az.: III 604718-a 74393-B/JR 2558 2-Kto. 3500.-
 Ser.-Nr.: YG 3312-1292

Pfl. Nr.			
09.2.1954			
Gültig	Fällig	Erl.	Zd.
Ja			Ja

Freilassungsverfügung

Das Rückerstattungsverfahren
Freistaat Bayern (Verf. Dottenheimer Sigmund, fr. Gunzenhausen) Antragsteller
 vertreten durch OFD. Nürnberg, Zweigstelle Ansbach, Aussenstelle Fürth
 gegen NSDAP - gem. Art. 61, Abs. 2, MRG. 59-Freistaat Bayern Antragsgegner
 vertreten durch OFD. Nürnberg, Zweigstelle Ansbach, Aussenstelle Fürth
 ist abgeschlossen. Die Erledigung erfolgte am 26. Jan. 1954 durch Verpflicht.

AUSSENST NURNBERG

**Betr.: Plan Nr. 472 1/4 - Wohnhaus Burgstallstr. 1 in Gunzenhausen,
 Lager, Garage, Hof u. Garten zu o, 0610 ha
 Gb. Gunzenhausen, Bd. IX, Bl. 1129, S. 25 ff**

Das Eigentum an dem Grundstück steht dem Freistaat Bayern zu.
 Die Berichtigung des Grundbuches dahin, dass der Freistaat Bayern als Eigentümer des Grundstückes im Grundbuch eingetragen wird, wird bewilligt und beantragt.
 Die Sicherungsmaßnahmen sind aufzuheben,
 Der im Grundbuch eingetragene RE-Vermerk ist zu löschen.
 Ein etwa bestehendes Treuhandkonto ist an den Freistaat Bayern auszusahlen.
 Die Freilassung hat an den Freistaat Bayern zu erfolgen.

(Bei Teilvergleich, Teilverzicht oder Teilrechtsübertrag ist das von dem Vergleich oder Verzicht betroffene Vermögensobjekt und die dazugehörige Teilhaft des Vergleichenden genau anzugeben. Gleiches gilt in Bezug auf unzulässige Objekte; sonst ist stichwortartige Wiedergabe des Vergleiches oder der Beschreibung und deren Anlehnung bei der Freilassung kennzeichnend vorzutragen.)

Die Freilassung ist an den Freistaat Bayern, vertr. durch die Oberfinanzdirektion Nürnberg, Zweigstelle Ansbach, Aussenstelle Fürth/Bay.

New Private Owners

Hairstylist Karl Marschall, who had formerly lived on Bahnhofstraße, bought the house in 1955 and opened a new hair salon. The houses are still in possession of the two families today

In 1956, Reinhard Carben and his wife buy the building with the former wine cellar, where he opens a dentists practise. Today, the cellar is still 5 meters deep. In those days, the depth was necessary to keep the temperature of the wine constant.

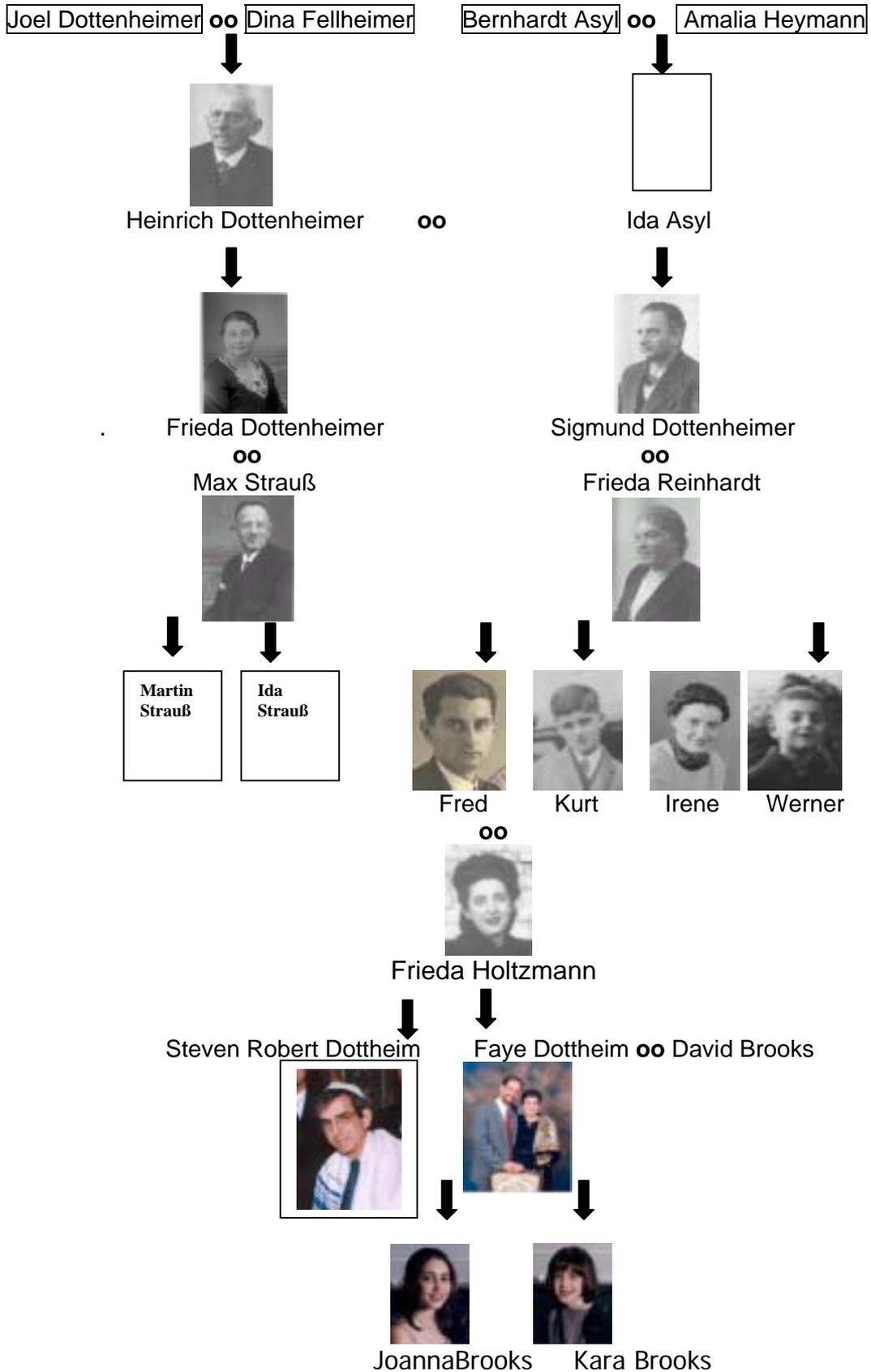


National Socialism in Germany

30.01.1933	Hitler takes power
20.03.1933	First concentration camp is built in Dachau
April 1933	Arian paragraphs: -Civil servants must be of Arian heritage -Jewish civil servants in public departments such as universities, schools, judicial departments etc. are given leave.
9.7.1934	Himmler takes command over the concentration camps
1935	Makes laws to protect the German blood and honour: To marry a Jew is against the law. From this point on Jews will be handled differently in our society
July 1937	Concentration camp in Buchenwald is built
10.11.1938	Reichspogrom night
27.03.1940	Concentration camp in Auschwitz is built
15.11.1940	There are 350,000 Jews in the ghetto of Warsaw.
24.9.1940	The film „Jud Süß“ is made on command of Goebbels. Clichés and prejudices about Jews are shown and increased
1940	600.000 Jews in the ghetto of Warsaw
1.9.1941	Police command for Jews to wear a star reading „Jew“
1942	A solution to the „Jew question“ is decided at the Wannsee Conference.
16.03.1942	Jewish homes have to be marked. The first Jews are deported to the concentration camp at Auschwitz.
1.4.1941	There are still 51,000 Jews living in Germany
27.1.1945	Concentration camp prisoners in Auschwitz are freed by the Red Army
28.04.1945	All concentration camp prisoners are freed
07.05.1945	Germany capitulates
1946	The JRSO (Jewish Restitution Successor Organization) is founded

The History of the Dottheim Family

Family Tree



Family History

Heinrich Dottenheimer is born on 15.11.1855 in Berolzheim to father, Joel Dottenheimer, and mother, Dina Fellheimer. In 1883 he moves to Gunzenhausen and married Ida Asyl, born 19.3.1861 to salesman Bernhard Asyl and wife Amalia Heymann in Cronheim, on November 5th. This family must have moved to Gunzenhausen a little earlier because in 1880 they become official residents. They probably live in the house on Nürnberger Straße 10, owned by Leonard Asyl in 1875. Heinrich Dottenheimer opens his wine and spirits store here, though it is possible that it had already been opened by his wife's family.

The couple has five children between 1885 and 1893. Three of them die before even reaching the age of one.

Only two children grow up to adulthood:

Frieda *10.7.1886

Sigmund *18.10.1887

After receiving residency on 29.12.1897, Heinrich and his wife decide to build their own house on Burgstallstraße.

The house is finished in 1900. The family moves the wine store to this location. Many elderly residents of Gunzenhausen remember the 'immensely large' wine store Dottenheimer.

This is where the two children grow up.



The house across the street is a butcher, Knöllers, the only butcher who sells kosher meat to Jews in Gunzenhausen.

Meateary Knöllers, Bühringerstraße 1 around 1900

The daughter of the house, Mrs. Ehmann, remembers the family Dottenheimer well. She still has a book that they have given to her before their departure.

The Story of Frieda Dottenheimer

In 1904, at the age of only 18, Frieda marries salesman Siegfried Weißmann, born on 11.12.1873 in Baiersdorf. The young couple lives on Burgstallstraße 1. Their first son Martin is born there on 4.7.1905. Sadly, Siegfried Weißmann dies on 6.8.1907. In January of the same year, Frieda's mother Ida had died.

Three years later, Frieda marries salesman Max Strauß, born on 20.8.1877. He is the son of locksmith Hermann Strauß from Amberg, and his wife Peppi born in Neuburger. The couple takes over the wine and spirits store together with Heinrich and Sigmund Dottenheimer.



Frieda and Max Strauß

Daughter Ida is born in 1911. The young family continues to live and work in the house on Burgstallstraße.

In 1920 Martin, Frieda's son from her first marriage takes on the last name Strauß. The family moves into their newly built home on Bismarckstraße in 1927.

(See History of Bismarckstraße 7)



Bismarckstraße 7 today

They sell their new home on 18.4.1934, probably due to discriminating experiences with nazis in Gunzenhausen. According to the town archives, the family left Germany and emigrated to Palestine that same year.

The History of Sigmund Dottenheimer



Brother Sigmund marries Frieda Reinhard, from Gerolzhofen in lower Franconia, on January 20th 1913. She is born on 15.1.1889 as the only daughter of cattle trader Meier Reinhard and his wife Emily, maiden name Schloss. Among the wedding gifts was a breastplate, that was

photographed by Theodor Harburger in 1927.

Though it is not marked, it is – beyond any doubts - a work of silver from Nürnberg from the early 18th century. It belongs to a group of extraordinary pieces of work, that are not made of silver, which is usually the case. Instead it has a number of silver appliquéés, for example unicorns, lions and an eagle on a simple basic platform.

The precious piece has been temporarily given to the city synagogue for all to see.

Synagogue of Gunzenhausen


The couple has four children:

Joel Fredi	*31.10.1913
Kurt Moses	*5.10.1915
Irene	*25.10.1920
Werner	*14.9.1923

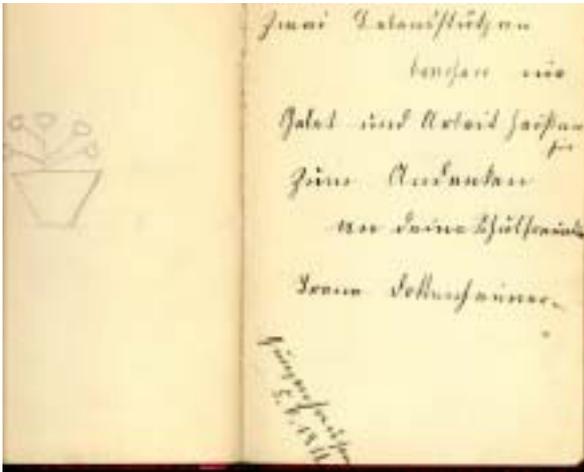
The children attended the Jewish elementary school for the first four years. Max Levite was their teacher. All Jewish children in grades 1 through 7 are here together.



**Jewish schoolchildren with teacher Max Levite in 1934
Werner Dottenheimer (third from the right, back row)**

It is up to the children if they want to continue attending school, at a higher level, together with the children from surrounding areas, after completing the 5th grade.

Only those who would like to experience higher education attends the secondary modern school after completing the grade together with the children of surrounding areas.



Irene's entry in the poetry album 5.6.1931

**Zwei Lebensstützen brauchen wir
Gebet und Arbeit heißen sie'
Zum Andenken an deine Schulfreundin**

Irene Dottenheimer

**We need two things in life
Namely Prayer and hard work
In love, your schoolmate**

Irene Dottenheimer

Interview with Mrs. Raab

In an interview with Mrs. Raab, we discovered many things about her childhood during the NS-Regime.

She told us about her friendships with Jewish girls, Irene Dottenheimer and Friedl Sommer from Hensoltstraße 5.

Her parents were scared to spend time with their Jewish friends and to let their children play with their Jewish friends. The Jews also changed their lifestyle, becoming reclusive and taking a different way to school in order not to bump into their non-Jewish friends.

And then, all of a sudden, they disappeared. Nobody knew where they had gone to, but they hoped they were in safety.



Some pictures from Mrs Raab's photo album.



Winter in 1932; from left to right: Irene Walz, Inge Jordan, Lieselotte Rahner, Friedel Sommer, Ilse Lehmann, Hella Schlotter, Irene Dottenheimer



Wandertag in 1932. The girl in the pleated skirt is Irene



Else Lehmann Irene Dottenheimer

Fred is Leaving the Town

It is unknown which school Joel Fredi attended, but the eldest son moves to Augsburg in 1929 in order to join the work force.

We gather, from a letter of Fred written to his lawyer Felix Friedmann, that he worked in the Jewish company Nordschild and in the weaving-mill Landauer for some years.

Apparently he was a good soccer player, because there are many photographs of him playing on the regional soccer team of Augsburg.



Fred (right) in Augsburg on the regional soccer team



It is possible that he moved to Augsburg in order to play soccer, since the playing possibilities in Gunzenhausen were minimal. He would not have had the chance to play on a regional team in Gunzenhausen.

The First Pogrom in Gunzenhausen

It is strange that Sigmund Dottenheimer deregisters his wine and liquor store only a year later.

Though the first discriminating acts against Jews had begun by now, it isn't likely that this was the reason.

When Hitler takes power, his followers in Gunzenhausen gained power as well. Every little occasion for marching up and rallies particularly in connection with Julius Streicher are made use of.



20 metres in front of the Dottheim-House in 1935

By the year 1933, there are already many followers of national socialism in Gunzenhausen.

The Nazis harass the Jews with violent words like „ Get ,em, get ,em“ and „The Jews must go, the Jews must go!“.

On Palm Sunday, March 25th 1934, SA leader Kurt Bär and his men break into the Jewish restaurant „Strauß“. They beat up the owners son, Josef Strauß. His parents are beaten up as well and being threatened with a revolver. Bear holds demonstrative talks against Jews in front of the restaurant. On this day, many Jewish men are arrested. Jakob Rosenfelder is hanged. Max Rosenau is found stabbed to death. Both cases are declared as suicide.

A troupe of SA soldiers violently storms many Jewish homes. The men are brought out of their homes and ,herded' to the city prison. The witness Dottenheimer claims that his iron gates were blown up in order to gain access to the house. Dr. Liebl's maid unlocked the front door. The first floor of the house was stormed by ca. 30 persons.

Dottenheimer opened the apartment door on command. Before him stood the accused (Kurt Bär) and arrested him.

The men only had to spend one night in the prison, they were released the next morning. Yet this situation was quite demeaning to the Jews. The destructive behaviour of many of Gunzenhausen's citizens was shocking. Because of this many Jewish families decided to leave town that year.

The Dottenheimers had faith in their name and status in this town, so they decided to stay. Even when young Josef Strauß is shot to death in the summer of 1934, they still stay.

They do however, make sure that son Fred is able to emigrate to America.

Fred leaves Germany

It is unknown who paid for his trip in the USA, but his trip across the great blue ocean begins in 1937.



Fred Dottenheimer on the ship headed towards in 1937

In his passport, we are able to retrace his footsteps. His daughter Faye wrote us:

"With regards to his travels, his passport is stamped in Augsburg on May 21, 1937, Hamburg on May 25, 1937 and Southampton,

England on May 28, 1937. He arrived in the United States sometime in 1937 and settled in St. Louis, Missouri.....



My father arrived in America in 1937 and moved straight to St. Louis. He lived with a family named Saenger and was given financial help by them. During his stay with the family, he worked at their coat store. Here he helped make and sell women's coats. He even had his own coat store for a time. My mother, Frieda

Holtzmann, was born and raised in St. Louis. The two met each other on a blind date."

We are unsure of who took over the payment for Fred's emigration to America. Yet he appears to have found work and a place to stay straight away. This was easier in 1937 than two years later.

The rest of the family still stays in Gunzenhausen. They experience the Reichskristallnacht on the night of November 9th and 10th of 1939.

A witness reported that the beds had been torn apart and set on fire at the Dottenheimers'. A fire fighter reported that all the dishes in the house has been smashed as well as many other personal objects. The rooms looked completely deserted.

The synagogue was also damaged. It was not burned down, the way many other synagogues in Germany were, but the towers were destroyed and the synagogue was burglarised. This is how the breastplate disappeared. Only now does the family decide to leave Gunzenhausen. Grandfather Heinrich finds refuge in an Israeli nursing home in Munich. The rest of the family wasn't quick enough. They were probably still figuring out who goes where. They stay in town until early December 1939. So Sigmund and Kurt are deported to the concentration camp at Dachau. Almost all the men that had stayed in town had already been transported to the concentration camp there.



**Train station Gunzenhausen in November of 1938
Jewish men are deported to the concentration camp at Dachau**

The Concentration Camp in Dachau

Women and children are left behind, Frieda Dottenheimer and Irene, and Werner.

Sigmund and Kurt were at the concentration camp at Dachau with other men from Gunzenhausen, so with Hugo and Salomon Walz (Burgstallstraße 5) in December of 1938.



The Entrance to Dachau

We were able to get some information about what it was like in the concentration camp at Dachau, from a letter that Hugo Walz wrote to the great grandfather of one of our classmates.

He wrote:

[... They tortured us until everything we owned, even most of our clothing, had been stolen....]

In winter of 2002 we took a trip to the concentration camp at Dachau. This way we were able to get a better picture of what life must have been like there, in the bitter cold, with little to no clothing.

After a few weeks, the two men are able to go back to Gunzenhausen. The family leaves town in January of 1939. All the children, except for Joel Fredi, are still in Germany at this point.

The Years in Frankfurt

Until now, nothing was known about the time in the Hessish city. We are able to get some information out of the letters that father Sigmund sent to his son Joel Fredi, in America.

The Situation in Frankfurt is tense, since they don't know when and how they will be able to emigrate. Their only hope of emigration to the US is their son Joel Fredi.

About 30 letters addressed to Fred from his father were sent to St. Louis, each one is asking him to stand surely for the family's emigration. Every single method of escaping is debated.

{...Now my dear Fred, let me tell you about the Cuba trip that didn't work out. After securing boat passes I discovered that they are no longer allowing us Jews to go to Cuba. Even the steamboat „St. Louis“ headed to Cuba with 975 Jews on board was not allowed to dock there, as I have been informed...}

"{... So now I have again received the assurance from the Konsulade de la Republica o del Uruquaj in Paris, that if I turn in my passport... medical records, certificate of conduct, and four wallet photographs to the consulate mentioned above, then I will receive the immigration permission...

Dear Kurt has sent me a writing from the Help organization in Munich, in which he is asked to sign up for emigration to Australia as a qualified craftsman.....Kurt registered himself in the meantime. Do you, dear Fred, think I should go there, with our dear family, as well?.....Australia is very far away from where you are living, my dear boy, and a reunion would be postponed even longer. But if there is no other possibility, I would even grab this...}“

„{...Brazil has been closed to immigrants once again, but I have heard that Venezuela as well as Argentina and Chile have reopened for them. Have you, my dear Fred, been able to get the \$700 up to \$1100 for our immigration and have you had any success? There is a rumour going around here, that the Jewish association ‚Aguda‘ has spoken to the president about making it easier for German Jews to immigrate...}“

{...I am awaiting the original letters of your good friend, that would like to help us make our emigration easier...
I went to my former English teacher today (bet you can't believe your old father is still interested in foreign languages at his age) and had him write a letter intended for Mrs Saenger...I sent this letter directly to Irene in Berlin. She shall sign it with her own name and send it on to Mrs, Saenger. Please, my dear Fred, speak to Mrs. Saenger when you get a chance, and tell her that she can help quicken and simplify our immigration. Our thousand thanks goes out to this good-hearted woman in advance...
Did you speak to my friend Bergmann (Sichlinger Straße) about our emigration yet? Why don't you ask my friend Adolf about this matter? You see my son, an extra payment would surely hasten our emigration....After all, you have been in the country for 4 years now, and have surely made many good friends by now. With a little help I'm sure you could fulfil our greatest wish...}

{...In 14 day, on August 15th (1941), my permission to stay will be cancelled again. I must request more time at the Gestapo. I hope I am successful, I seem to have new worries every day. It is a constant chase, so you can never really find peace of mind. Well, my dear Fred, be ready for

a result in our quest for emigrations/ immigration, because we cannot stay here longer, and I don't want to go back to where I was, if this is, in any way, possible.

Dear Irene is leaving her post on the 1st, tomorrow, and coming back here from Munich to sort out her things.... Irene now has two posts in England in view. She plans to stay there until she can get permission to go to the US....}

In every letter that Sigmund wrote to his son, he pleads with him to find a way to make the family's emigration to the USA possible. But because of constant complications, it never worked out. As you can see, he did inform himself of all possibilities.

But this task was apparently not easy for Fred. He did, in fact, get enough money together, with some help from friends, but the situation in the US in 1939 was anything other than good. There were ca. 10 million out of work, so the government had to put a hold on immigration. There was a specific number of people allowed to come into the country every year. Each of these persons had to prove they had a person who could pay for their trip and stay, so they would not become a burden to the government. And so it came that all Jews had to register at the consulate as soon as they had found an American who would pay.

There they received an immigration number, a so called quota.

Because of this, many Jews tried to find countries in which they could stay until it was their turn to emigrate to the US. Proof for this is the number of Jewish residents of Gunzenhausen that went to south Rhodesia or Argentina.

The letter also report the places of stay and the different activities of the family members.

{...We received good news from dear Kurt and dear Grandfather, who celebrated his 84th birthday on the 15th of November from Munich. Kurt still has work, thank goodness, and was able to..... give us 20 RM for Chanukah. This was a kind gesture.

Dear Irene, who awaits her departure in several months from Stuttgart at the American consulate, has taken a position for a Dr. Levi. Irene comes home every night, she

sleeps at home, and earns 20 RM a month, with everything for free..... Werner is still a carpenter, working in learning workshops. He is very happy with his choice of profession and has a good relationship with his manager...}

{... Dear Werner has been promoted. He took part in a workshop test 14 days ago and scored the best out of 200 students! He scored 100 points out of 100 possible, a very good grade..... After my three month long ...course in welding was finished, I started working at the shifting market garden on the grounds of an Israeli graveyard. I leave the house every morning at 6 o'clock....It's hard work but it's very healthy...Dear mother always has enough housework to do. She is happy when everyone comes together in the evening.... Werner comes home for lunch for half an hour every day, and Irene never comes home before 7.... }

{...Dear Werner must work at the brickworks, but he likes it just fine and earns good money. I myself am still working at the marked garden and earn 30 RM a week.....}

{...Dear grandfather is being taken good care of in a nursing home in Munich. He has everything he needs. Irene and Kurt visit him once a week, and he writes us satisfied letters....}

When you read these letters, you get the feeling the life in Frankfurt and Munich was relatively easy.

Werner was able to train as a carpenter, which we would not



have thought possible at this time. Kurt worked as a gardener and Irene travelled back and forth between Frankfurt und Munich as a house maid. Later she had to go to Berlin to work in a big firm: Siemens.

Sigmund probably has to do lowly unskilled work, but we never heard a single complaint. Everything is healthy and happy. Of course we can imagine why the letters were written this way. Mr Dottenheimer was afraid of censors

and repressions. He hoped Fred would have informed himself of the Jews' situation in Germany through the news and recognize the seriousness of the situation.

We learned, for the first time, from these letters, that the family had contact to Sigmund's sister, Frieda Strauß, and to her son Martin. On December 31st 1931 Sigmund writes:

{...My dear Martin, my dears,

Dear Fred has informed me that you have not been feeling well, but I surely hope you are feeling better now.....

Irene was not able to leave Germany, even with her permit, so now she has also drawn a number for the USA. Now she has to wait her turn (14700), just like Kurt. This does not takes as long as we suspected, the number 14000 are being checked at the consulate in Stuttgart right now. Aunt Frieda, Werner and I have numbers over 27000, so we will have to look for a country where we can wait until our turn comes along. I have heard that Venezuela and Paraguay are open to emigrants..... Why don't you ask dear Martin what the living conditions are like there, dear Fred will pay for our emigration. The good boy is trying every possibility and spending time and money in order to bring us closer. Well then, my dear Martin, don't forget to ask about Venezuela and Paraguay and let me know as soon as possible....}

{....Grandfather now knows about Frieda's death. Ferner says that he plans to go to St. Louis for ca. 4 weeks at the beginning of September, and hopes to be able to talk to you then. If you should come together, I ask you my dear Fred, to pay good attention to dear Martin. He is a very good boy and he deserves to be treated well. After all, you owe him enormous gratitude.....}

We see that relatives from Bismarckstraße 7 now live in the USA, so they either left Palestine or have never been there. Frieda dies in California. Her son, Martin, appears to have had contact to Fred. From the father's admonition, we take that Martin might have paid for Fred's immigration.

{...Now let us turn to the real reason I have written to you today, my dear Fred. Another year has passed, a year in which we were neither able to speak with nor see each other. What should I wish for you on your day of honour? I hope.... God hears my plea that all your hopes and wishes may be granted.

May the Lord protect you, bless you with his love, and give you happiness and health. I hope the day I will be able to give you my blessings is not all too far off. We still have many happy years of family togetherness to enjoy..... Please good news soon. I send you my love and an extra birthday-kiss. I love you and think of you often....}

The hopes of Sigmund Dottenheimer and his family are not granted. After the middle of the year, 1941, no more letters arrived in St. Louis.



Although Irene's large suitcase was sent to Antwerp, something kept her from her departure. The suitcase, that had been insured with 1000 RM was bombed, and the young woman was taken away to a concentration camp. It is unknown to which concentration camp she was deported. We must assume that this happened before the inevitable solution was found for the „Jews Question“.

Irene Dottenheimer

Heinrich Dottenheimer dies in the concentration camp in Theresienstadt at the age of 88.

Sigmund Dottenheimer and his wife Frieda are imprisoned in the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

Werner Dottenheimer dies at the age of 19 in the concentration camp in Majdanek.

Kurt and Irene Dottenheimer are declared dead in 1945, since no one knows what happened to them.

Fred in America

Young Fred is the only surviving family member of Sigmund Dottenheimer. It is not known how and when he found out the fates of his family members. He probably did the same thing many emigrants did after the war was over, he tried to find out if anyone survived.

In 1952 he contacts the headquarters of the JRSO in Nürnberg. „My parents were the owners of an exceptionally valuable breastplate covered with precious items.“



Yet the search for the breastplate was unsuccessful.

A few years later, a letter addressed to him appears. It is from Mrs Gertrud Schwarz, born Lehmann (Burgstallstraße 7), who also left Gunzenhausen.

[...Dear Fredi,

...When I came to the US about 8 years ago, I tried to find you, but was unsuccessful, since nobody knew where you were. Finally, Mrs Katten, born Herta Rosenfelder (Marktplatz 9) was successful in finding you.....You have a charming family, I find the young boy looks just the way I remember you, and the girl looks just like Irene did. You personally look very similar to your father...We were in Israel, and haven't been here for long, like many others....I would be very happy to meet you in New York sometime, why don't you give me a call when you are here...

The reason I was so interested in finding your address is because your house tailor said that she had saved some of the personal belongings of your parents. She would like to give these things back to you, as far as I know, were talking about silver and of that kind. Friedl is a good person, and would never take things that did not belong to her. She bought our store, and is now running it similar to the way it used to be run. She can probably also explain to you, what the benefits of compensation are. I hope you have everything under control.....there are many former residents of Gunzenhausen living in New York.....]

Fred writes to Gunzenhausen

[My dear Fräulein Wiedemann, ...I have shortened my name from Fredi Dottenheimer to Fred Dottheim. I am married and have a son, who is 6 ½ and a daughter, who is 2 ½. ...I would be overjoyed to hear, as soon as possible, from you, how I can get the belongings of my parents back. I am also very interested in whether things were stolen from my parents' home. I still have not requested compensation to this day.]

Frieda Wiedmann answers

[Dear Herr Dottheim,...this morning I was in Ansbach and had the customs cleared on your things, and have sent them to you.I hope the things get there in one piece, so that you may enjoy them for a long time to come. I have included a little something for the children too, I hope they'll enjoy it. Do not worry about reimbursing me. Old friendships are worth much more to me. I am glad that the package was not stolen from me and that I can send you a memory of your dear parents. You would be surprised to see how far Gunzenhausen has stretched itself across the world. Through the bunches of refugees, many things are being rebuilt, and stores are being modernized. ...

Do you have contact to your relatives, the Straußes? We have heard that Mrs Strauß has died. We are interested in how Mr Strauß is doing and how Ida is doing.....It must have been very hard for her, it was a goodbye for life....]

Here's what's in the Package:

6 knives
 6 forks
 6 tablespoons
 6 teaspoons
 1 sauce spoon
 1 sugar fork
 6 used tablecloths
 5 used napkins
 5 used pillows
 6 used quilt covers
 3 used sheets
 an old fur
 These things are in possession of Fred Dottheim in St. Louis.



This is the only letter correspondence with former residents of Gunzenhausen that has been found. We read that Fred now is married and has two children.

Ten years after the war, he discovers of the things his parents left behind. In 1954 he receives a small sum of money from his parents estate, but the contents of this suitcase probably meant a lot more to him.



Fred becomes secretive about the fate of his family. He never speaks one word of German. He never speaks of his relatives, so his children know very little about their family. None of them speaks German today. He will never come back to Gunzenhausen.

On Juli 5th 1986 Joel Fredi Dottenheimer dies as Fred Dottheim in the USA.

The Present

The Breastplate leads the way to Reconciliation

In early 1990, a man from Nürnberg went to the city museum of Fürth, and handed over some Jewish ritual objects. He said that his father in law has bought them as a private salesman in Gunzenhausen in the early thirties.

Only years later, in 1997, when the new museum in Fürth was being built, did they clean these objects. For the first time, they saw the beauty of the breastplate. And a further surprise: In a hollow inside the unicorns the restorer found a small slip of paper, saying „hineingelegt a. 3. Okt. 1901/21. Tischri 5662 als hier Sali Haas Schiur hatte. Gerolzhofen, 3. Okt abends 7 Uhr – Julius Godlowsky.“

Gerolzhofen in is Frankonia, but it is about 130 kilometres north west of Gunzenhausen. The solution came from art historian Theodor Harburger, who had photographed the ritual objects of the Gunzenhausen Synagogue in 1927. The breastplate was named private possession of Sigmund Dottenheimer.

In the city archive, we were able to find a connection between the Dottenheimer family and Gerolzhofen quickly. Sigmund's wife came

from Gerolzhofen, and it was clear that this was a prized possession of the family.

The Descendants are Found

Bernhard Purin, director of the Jewish museum in Frankonia, now began his search for possible descendants of the Dottenheimer family. After much trial and error, he begun looking for a shortened name. This was common with Jewish emigrants. He found something under the name Dottheim. A man with this name lived in Jefferson City, Missouri.

It was Steven Robert, Fred's son.

But Fred had already been dead for 14 years.

And his children didn't know much about the history of their family.

And now Faye comes into the picture. Faye Dottheim-Brooks, the little 2 ½ year old girl Fred had written about to Frieda Wiedemann.

She now lives with her husband, David, and her two daughters, Joanna and Kara in New York. She is a lawyer. Her father's history had always been of much interest to her. She had even visited Gunzenhausen in the early eighties.

She wrote: "I had visited Gunzenhausen 20 years ago and had only been shown the foyer of my father's house at that time".

In March of 2001, she takes her whole family on a trip to Germany with her. They visited the museum in Fürth, to see the breastplate, and the concentration camp at Dachau, to see where her uncle and grandfather died, and they came to Gunzenhausen.



We Meet Each Other

This is how our story begins. Coincidentally, we are working on the Dottenheimer house, and we make contact with Faye.

In many e-mails, she told us the things she herself has only just learned about. But she wasn't satisfied with that. The institute of NS-research in Nürnberg receives an order to find out anything about the family that is not yet known.

The new Residence of the Breastplate

The Dottheim-family lends the breastplate to the Jewish museum in Fürth for an extended period of time.

They has only one condition, by which we were deeply moved:



The youngest daughter, Kara, is celebrating her bat mitzvah on February 22nd in 2003. This celebration can be compared with the evangelist holy communion or confirmation.

And for this celebration, the breastplate shall be brought to New York and set up in the synagogue.

There was even an article about this breastplate from Gunzenhausen in the New York Times.

29.08.2001

Museum Helps Jewish Family Regain Relic Nazis Stole

By CELESTINE BOHLEN

Last fall Dr. Bernhard Purin, director of the Jewish Museum of Franconia in Fürth, Germany, began an Internet search for descendants of Siegmund Dottenheimer, the original owner of an early-18th-century Torah breastplate in the museum's collection.

When he had no luck with the full name, Dr. Purin began to shorten it, just as an immigrant to the United States might have done. He happened on a Web site belonging to the children of Fred J. Dottheim who fled Nazi Germany for St. Louis in 1937 and was the son of Siegmund Dottenheimer, a wine merchant from the Bavarian village of Gunzenhausen who perished in Auschwitz.

This month the city of Fürth and Dottenheimer's heirs negotiated an agreement whereby the breastplate — an intricately decorated object of gilt and silver, featuring distinctive unicorn heads, used to shield the mantle on the Torah scroll — will return to the family in 2003, on the occasion of the bat mitzvah of Dottenheimer's great-granddaughter, Kara Brooks, in New York.

Until then it remains on loan to the Fürth

Because of all of the e-mailing over the Atlantic, the family decided to take a trip to Germany in March of 2002. This is when our class met up with them.

The Dottheim-Brooks' visit in March 2002



The family Dottheim-Brooks visited our class in March 2002. We asked them questions about their family and their lives in small groups.

We tried to communicate with our best possible English.

David Brooks wrote us a Jewish prayer in Hebrew and told us much about his life in New York.



Mrs. Dottheim-Brooks showed us a street map of Manhattan, where the family lives, and we talked about September 11th 2001.



Kara told us about her school. We tried to teach her some German, and she learned fast.

Joanna and her group discussed her upcoming visit in June 2002 to our class.



This was the first day we

experienced the family in real life. It was exciting and wonderful for all of us. Even though they don't speak a word of German, and our English is not the very best, we had interesting and funny conversations. We were happy that the whole family regarded us with openness and without any discrimination. It is not easy for us to interact with Jewish people with knowing what our folk did to them all those years ago here in Gunzenhausen, and in all of Germany. We are ashamed of this and would like to find a resolution.

Faye and her family made this easy for us.

Joanna's Visit in July 2002



Joanna, daughter of Faye and David Brooks has decided to learn German, so she will be able to read our website in the future. Faye is also dismayed that she does not understand the language of her ancestors. So we invited Joanna to attend our school, for a time, so she could learn German. She visited us in July 2002 for about four weeks. She had decided that by the time she went home she would be able to speak some German. After

the usual beginners problems, she learned pretty well.

She spent the afternoons with us students. Two of us always went somewhere with her. This way she got to know the country and the country-life better, something that was totally new to her. Joanna tried everything there was to try, tractor driving for example. She had lots of fun spending the afternoons with us.

We shot some photographs together.





She made friends with many of us, and some still have e-mail contact with her. Before she left, Joanna decided she would come back in 2003. We are looking forward to see her and her family again very often.

Return of the Breastplate

In February, Kara will be celebrating her bat mitzvah. This huge celebration has been made even more important because the family breastplate will be returned on this day as well. It will be brought to New York by several selected guests, including the mayor of Gunzenhausen, Herr Gerhard Trautner, our principal, Herr Franz Müller, the city archivist, Herr Werner Mühlhäußer, and the museum director, Herr Dr. Bernhard Purin. Our teacher was also invited to this event, but we have an mountain of tests and such coming up, and she did not want to leave us alone with substitute teacher.

At the bat mitzvah, a Hebrew text will be read. Since the torah is read within one year, with a certain verse every week, Kara already know which verse she will be reading: 2 Moses 30:11–34. Here a clipping of it:

Sh'moth (Exodus / II. B.M.) 30:11-34:35
Hefarah: I Koenige 18:1-39

הפרשה "כי תשא" - "Ki Tisa" haParashah:

שמות פרק ל'. Kapitel XXX.

וידבר יהוה, אל משה לאמור.	ל,יא*
כי תישא את ראש בני ישראל, לפקודיהם, ונתנו איש כופר נפשו ליהוה, בפקוד אותם; ולא יהיה בהם נגף, בפקוד אותם.	ל,יב*
זה ייתנו כל העובר על הפקודים, מחצית השקל בשקל הקודש: עשרים גרה השקל, מחצית השקל תרומה ליהוה.	ל,יג*
כול העובר על הפקודים, מבן עשרים שנה ומעלה, ייתן, תרומת יהוה, העשיר לא ירבה, והדל לא ימעיט, ממחצית, השקל - לתת את תרומת יהוה, לכפר על נפשותיכם.	ל,יד*
ולקחת את כסף הכיפורים מאת בני ישראל, ונתת אותו על עבודת אוהל מועד; והיה לבני ישראל לזיכרון לפני יהוה, לכפר על נפשותיכם.	ל,טו*
(פ)	
וידבר יהוה, אל משה לאמור.	ל,יז*
ועשית כיור נחושת, וכנו נחושת - לרוחצת; ונתת אותו בין אוהל מועד ובין חמזבת, ונתת שמה מים.	ל,יח*
ורחצו אהרון ובניו, ממנו, את ידיהם, ואת רגליהם.	ל,יט*
בבואם אל אוהל מועד, ירחצו מים - ולא ימותו; או בגשתם אל המזבח לשרת, להקטיר אישה ליהוה.	ל,כ*
ורחצו ידיהם ורגליהם, ולא ימותו; והייתה להם חוק עולם, לו ולורעו - לדורותם. (פ)	ל,כא*
וידבר יהוה, אל משה לאמור.	ל,כב*
ואתה קח לך, בשמים ראש, מור דרור חמש מאות, וקינמון בשם מחציתו חמישים ומאתיים; וקנה בושם, חמישים ומאתיים.	ל,כג*
וקידה, חמש מאות בשקל הקודש; ושמן זית, חין.	ל,כד*
ועשית אותו שמן משחת קודש, רוקח מרקחת מעשה רוקח; שמן משחת קודש, יהיה.	ל,כה*
ומשחת בו, את אוהל מועד, ואת, ארון העדות.	ל,כו*
ואת השולחן ואת כל כליו, ואת המטרה ואת כליה, ואת, מזבח הקטורת.	ל,כז*
ואת מזבח העולה, ואת כל כליו; ואת הכיור, ואת כנו.	ל,כח*
וקידשת אותם, והיו קודש קודשים; כל הנוגע בהם, יקדש.	ל,כט*
ואת אהרון ואת בניו, תמשח; וקידשת אותם, לכהן לי.	ל,ל*
ואל בני ישראל, תדבר לאמור: שמן משחת קודש יהיה זה לי, לדורותיכם.	ל,לא*
על בשר אדם לא ייסך, ובמתכונתו לא תעשו כמוהו; קודש הוא, קודש יהיה לכם.	ל,לב*
איש אשר ירקח כמוהו, ואשר ייתן ממנו על זר - ונכרת, מעמיו. (ס)	ל,לג*
ויאמר יהוה אל משה קח לך סמים, נטף ושחלת וחלבנת, סמים, ולבונה זכה: בד בבד, יהיה.	ל,לד*
ועשית אותה קטורת, רוקח מעשה רוקח, ממולת, טהור קודש.	ל,לה*
ושחקת ממנה, חדק, ונתת ממנה לפני העדות באוהל מועד, אשר איוועד לך שמת; קודש קודשים, תחיה לכם.	ל,לו*
והקטורת אשר תעשה, במתכונתה לא תעשו לכם; קודש תהיה לך, ליהוה.	ל,לז*
איש אשר יעשה כמות, להריח בה - ונכרת, מעמיו. (ס)	ל,לח*

The Jewish Community in Gunzenhausen

Jewish inhabitants were known to be living in our city since the middle of the 14th century. In time, the community grew and established a Synagogue, a Schächter and hired a Rabbi. Even a cemetery was founded. In the middle of the last century the Jewish elementary-school was built, where one teacher taught all classes.

The number of Jewish inhabitants increases until the change of centuries. In the year 1910 they counted 291. In 1925, given the town's address book, there were only 219, and in 1933 they decreased to 184, only 33 of these were children. We don't know the reason for this decrease in number, but perhaps it was forced by the attacks against members of the Jewish community starting in the 20th.

By this time there are three bank-buildings existing in the city; one Jewish restaurant and a coffee-house. Two Jewish physicians were practicing; a general practitioner and a dentist. Most of them are traders, scarcely manual workers.

The Rabbi came down from Ansbach and looked after the community as well. On Hafnermarkt 13 there is a Ritual-Bath.

On March the 25th, 1934, on Palm-Sunday, the first pogrom took place, and two Jewish inhabitants were killed. In July 1934 the Jewish innkeeper was shot.

Because of this the first families left town. First off, they all searched for shelter in the big cities. Many of them went to Nürnberg, Munich, Stuttgart and Frankfurt. Years later they actually left the country.

In 1933 two Jewish shops are closed, in 1934 six and in 1938 another twelve.

On November 9th, 1938 the town counted only 56 Jewish inhabitants and in January 1939 the Town is called "judenfrei".

More than 50 Jewish citizens lost their lives.

Until today no Jewish people have moved to Gunzenhausen.