

Remembering the Jewish Community of

Niederstetten, Germany

Remembered by Eldad Ganin

On Shavuot we remember Ted Stern, one of our founding members. He started the tradition of decorating the Torah with flowers on Shavuot. This was done in his home town of Niederstetten, Germany.

Niederstetten is a small town in Baden-Württemberg, in South West Germany. It is located about 150 miles north of Munich. It is an area with rich agricultural lands -- famous for wine making, grain, and fruits. The area also supported large livestock businesses.

The Jews of Niederstetten were engaged in trade associated with these products -- merchants and wholesalers of wine, leather goods, and textiles. Ted Stern was trained as a leather goods merchant. He continued working in this field after he came to the United States in 1930. Ted's brother Bruno Stern, also emigrated to America. He published two volumes about the history of the Jewish community in this area -- one in 1968, and the other in 1985.

Jews lived in this part of Germany for more than 700 years -- twice as long as Jews have been in America. The German language and culture was deeply embedded among the Jews of Niederstetten. The Stern family, like many other Niederstetten Jews was fully engaged in the public life of their community. They owned businesses, paid taxes, voted in elections, and held public office in the local council -- just like other upstanding German citizens.

Yet, Jews in this area had been subject to periodic attacks for hundreds of years. Jews in Niederstetten were recorded as victims of pogroms as early as 1298.

The Jewish community was never large – at its height there were 215 Jews in 1854 out of a general population of 1700. As anti-Semitism rose in the region, Jews started leaving the town. By 1900 the community was down to 163. With a dwindling community, they stayed very close. Bruno's book tells a story that much of the community would gather at a Jewish owned café after Shabbat or Holiday services. The last census of the community showed 81 Jews in 1933. In that year, boycotts of Jewish merchants sparked further emigration.

In 1941-1942, the Nazis deported the remaining Jews of Niderstetten. Only 3 survived the war. The ancient synagogue of Niederstetten survived Kristallnacht in 1938, but was destroyed by allied bombing in early 1945.

Today, there are plaques in several locations recalling the location of Jewish sites in the town. The cemetery is all that remains of the small, but once vibrant community.

Additional information. The cemetery was desecrated in 1929 when swastikas were painted on 15 tombstones. Forty two members of the Jewish community were deported, some to the Riga ghetto on December 1, 1941, and the remainder to the Thersienstadt ghetto in September, 1942. Only three survived. This [site](#) provides a lot of information about the cemetery, including many pictures.