

Ruth Leiserowitz “ The Illusion of a transmigrative Existence. Jews in Memel in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **Introduction**

The historian’s task of drawing up an outline of the history of the Jews of Memel is appealing and simultaneously nearly unsolvable. The latter is quite simply to be ascribed to the striking lack of sources. Furthermore Memeler and Jewish history in Memel concerns a very short chapter in which there is a lack of a clear classification. One finds not only that this subject is granted little respect in the German Jewish historiography on the grounds of the considerable lack of sources, but it also appears as if this topic moved out of perspective after the secession of the region 1919. As well the Jews living in Memel region are dealt at best as a footnote in the Lithuanian-Jewish historiography.<sup>1</sup> This is the history of a minority in a reasonably small area during an extremely short time span in which numerous aspects are covered. On the one hand we have here the development of the Memeler Jews at the center of interest and a rather young Jewish community that experienced significant growth after the First World War--one might even say it enjoyed a blossoming period, and on the other hand, even though the numbers are small, the existence of Jews focused in settlements in the country. Finally we find in the area a unique symbiosis between German and Lithuanian Judaism that was visible in many different shades. In sum this article raises more questions for this short time span than it provides answers.

## **Sources**

Besides the few archival sources and articles in reference works like Joseph Rosin’s article, recollections of former Memelers were consulted,<sup>2</sup> including volumes from Trudi Birger (born

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<sup>1</sup> Dov Levin *The Litvaks. A Short History of Jews in Lithuania* (Jerusalem, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> I would like to express my appreciation to Dr Vacys Vaivada from the Research Center for Prussian and West Lithuanian History ( Klaipėda) who placed at my disposal the public telephone

Simon, 1928)<sup>3</sup> and Cherie Goren (born Sarah Fleischman, 1921)<sup>4</sup> and interviews with Dora Love (born Rabinowitz, 1923)<sup>5</sup> and Mike Rabinowitz (born 1921)<sup>6</sup> as well as letters from Maurice Hillman (born 1916)<sup>7</sup> and Hilde Sturmman (born Hilde Nafthal, 1914).<sup>8</sup> All of these authors have in common that they were children, i.e. young people, at the time of their residence in Memel. For this reason they comment only on specific topics and from particular points of view. It is interesting to note that all the authors come from families that emigrated from east (Lithuania, Latvia and Russia).<sup>9</sup> An interesting element of history that owes itself to chance, and yet it proves to be indeed symptomatic of Memel.

Biographical and autobiographical sources are almost the only available documentation especially for the period of the persecution and the Holocaust, so that the fate of the individual moves to the foreground and then stands as representative of the measures taken during the persecution and the extermination of the entire group.

### **Interface between East and West**

In 1910 the number of Jews in Memel was 851 persons (the entire population of the city was 20,685) of which 358 were not citizens and of Russian descent, and only with the possession of a residence permit were they able to live in the town. The majority of Memeler Jews consisted of

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books and reference works. Joseph Rosin, "Klaipeda" at <http://www.shtetlinks.org/memel/mem1.html> Internet.

<sup>3</sup> Trudi Birger. *Im Angesicht des Feuers. Wie ich der Hoelle des Konzenstrationslagers entkam.* (Muenchen, 1990)

<sup>4</sup> Cherie Goren. *Time to Keep.* (Merion Station), 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Dora Love (born Rabinowitz) Interview, Yad Vashem Archives 03/7504.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Rabinowitz, Interview with author, 14 November 1999 in Ramat Gan.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Hillmann to Ulla Lachauer, 17 July 1989. I would like to thank Ulla Lachauer very much for putting these documents about this topic at my disposal.

<sup>8</sup> Hilde Sturmman to Ulla Lachauer, 28 January 1989.

<sup>9</sup> The Simon family was naturalized in 1892 (GstA HA XX Rep. 18 Memel XVII Nr. 200). Sarah Fleishmann's father Leo Fleishmann came from Riga, the material Grandparents from Lithuania. Mike Rabinowitz's parents moved from Plunge to Memel in 1924. The Hillman family came to Memel in the 1920's. Nathan Nafthal became a citizen in 1906 (GstA Berlin, HA XX Rep. 18 Memel XVIII Nr.249, pp.127).

naturalized Russian and Polish Jews at that time.<sup>10</sup> In the relevant literature before the First World War we find that Jews are distinguished according to their land of origin---from Czarist Russia's sphere of influence or from the Kingdom of Poland—that is, either Polish or Russian Jews. If one examines more carefully the place of origin it turns out that in most cases it is a matter of Lithuanian Jews, so-called Litwaks who emigrated from the area lying on the town's boards in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal Memel they met a small group of German Jews who had arrived from the interior of Prussia (mainly West Prussia). One part of the new arrivals remained true to their customs and traditions; another group assimilated quickly and soon belonged to the next generation of the German-Jewish community. The grandchildren only knew through stories that their family had emigrated at one time from Lithuania. Till today the origins of particular personalities has been referred to in order to make out more clearly from which groups the Jewish community was constituted.

Like, perhaps, no other Prussian town in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Memel offered the opportunity for a variety of Jewish existence, which in turn had reciprocal effects. Thus the first town's Rabbi, Dr. Isaak Ruelf, who by the way came from Hessen, committed himself to the Russian Jews after he had taken a journey through Lithuania. He put his impressions together in a travel log "Three days in Jewish Russia".<sup>11</sup> With the great respect he described the active life of the Litwakian Talmudists who flourished in Memel till 1885; this deeply impressed highly educated man who received a doctorate from the University of Rostock.<sup>12</sup> His successor had similar encounters. Emanuel Carlebach from Lubeck counted among his most interesting experiences in Memel an encounter with Lithuanian Judaism, amongst others, with Rabbi Gabriel Feinberg and the Litwakian Talmud scholars. This opened up a new world to him. Later on after Carlebach had already taken office in Cologne he didn't avoid the long journey and still visited

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<sup>10</sup> GstA (Berlin) XX, HA, Rep 18 Memel XVIII Nr. 244, pp. 267. Certainly there exists other information. Please look below under Statistics.

<sup>11</sup> Published in Memel in 1882.

<sup>12</sup> Issak Ruelf. *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Memel*. (Memel: 1900), pp. 17.

the Talmud scholars in Memel. Representatives of different paths of life also meet at the Jewish literary society “Kiryath Sefer”, i.e. the “Society for Jewish History and Literature” that was founded there in 1896, a society that in particular aimed to introduce the German Jews to the history and literature of the Jewish people. The chairman of the society was Arye Leon Scheinhaus, a well-known literary figure, who came from a Russian-Jewish family that was naturalized in 1903.<sup>13</sup> Among the leading members were a teacher, Arndt, and a pharmacist, Lichtenstein.

The Jewish community of East Prussia suffered essentially heavy losses in the areas of culture and commerce through the events of the year 1885 when the Prussian Interior Minister, Robert Puttkamer, instructed leading officials (Oberpraesidenten) of the four East provinces to grant Russian subjects German citizenship only in exceptional cases and, moreover, to expel those who were not naturalized. Among those that were expelled included many who had already lived there for 20-40 years. There still lived 1,214 Jews in Memel in 1880; their number decreased to 861 in 1890.<sup>14</sup> Similar statistics were reported for the populations of Koenigsberg and of Tilsit.

Foreign trade suffered great harm in Memel and the commercial losses produced, of course, effects on the financial strength of the community that had already been severely affected alone by the deportation of one third of their members. The extremely rigid handling of the immigrants weakened the image of the city to the point of making sensitive its claim to be the hub of the East-West commerce.

### **The New Upturn**

After the Memel region was actually divided in 1920 the French governor rescinded all restrictions for Jews. The port, commerce, the good conditions for industrial development, the

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<sup>13</sup> GStA (Berlin), XX. HA, Rep 18, Bd. 244, S.257ff.

<sup>14</sup> Issak Ruelf, pp.13.

possibility to learn a profession or a trade and the easing of restrictions for immigration motivated many Jews to settle in Memel after 1923. Thus the glass merchant Rabinowitz came from Plunge with this family to the city. Among the newcomers were Jews who came from Kaunas and had earned their university degrees in Germany, for instance, the physician, Leon Rostowski, who was head of the Jewish hospital, but also Jews who came from Russia, for instance, the flax merchant, Boris Segalowitz from Witebsk. Another group consisted of Lithuanian Jews who were banished to the interior of Russia during the First World War and now were able to choose freely a location at the time of their return, thus, for example, the merchant, Zalman Hilman.<sup>15</sup> In the 1930's in particular there were laborers who came from the provinces who were glad to find employment in Memel's industrial firms during the general crisis period.<sup>16</sup>

The Lithuanian government was pleased with the increase in the Jewish population, because it was their view that the Jews together with the Lithuanians made the German majority noticeably weaker. Their number came to already 4,500 in 1928, i.e. the number of newcomers already predominated.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless one must take into account the generally dynamic growth of the town (20,884 inhabitants in 1918, and 47,412 inhabitants on 1 January 1936) in the evaluation of these numbers too. The town experienced an astounding upturn.

## Statistics

Various statistics include different figures. Thus, there are already 2008 Jews entered for 1910,<sup>18</sup> while the Prussian statistics show 851 Jewish persons in the same year.<sup>19</sup> For the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1920 1,350 Jews are entered for the entire Memel country; this number appears to

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<sup>15</sup> Maurice Hillman to Ulla Lachauer 17 July 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Amongst others, Liebe Bunka's family from Plunge. See <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yiskor/plunge/plu001.html> Internet.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Schulman. *Memel/Lite*, (New York: 1951), vo1.1&2 pp. 282

<sup>18</sup> Shulman, J. *Memel*, pp.282

<sup>19</sup> GstA (Berlin), XX. HA, Rep. 18 Memel XVIII Nr. 244, pp.267.

be unreliably low in the opinion of the attorney Rudolfas Valsonokas who had live in Memel at the time.<sup>20</sup> The same author remarked that approximately 2,000 Jews from Greater Lithuania had moved into the area by the start of 1932. They settled mainly in the town of Klaipeda, and he adds the statistics for the Jewish community in Klaipeda at the beginning of 1932 reported 888 Jewish families as members.<sup>21</sup>

Various sources cite 6,000 Jews (12.5%) for 1938 and 7,000 Jews (14%) for 1939 with the entire population of the town's inhabitants calculated at 51,000.<sup>22</sup> 9,000 Jews are said to have abandoned the entire region in 1939.<sup>23</sup> Since it can be established that the migration of Jews out of the city and region had already started in 1938, the figures must be called into question once again for an increase in the Jewish population. It is conceivable that at this time many Jews stayed for a time in the town in order to get training for immigration to Palestine (Haschara). Mike Rabinowitz reports, however, that many Jews from Germany and Austria spend time in Memel before 1939.<sup>24</sup>

How visible was the Jewish section of the population in the Lithuanian period? Where did Jewish and non-Jewish worlds or social spaces come in contact? What relationships were relevant? How heterogeneous were the Jewish domestic spaces? Based on the fact, already mentioned, that there is a lack of adequate sources one can only answer these questions to some extent. Important areas represented are contact in the professions, neighborhoods, schools and associations.

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<sup>20</sup> Rudolfas Valsonokas. *Klaipedos problema. Fotografuontinis leidinys.* ( Das Problem Klaipeda Reprint) Vilnius 1989, pp.270. (Nepatikimai Mazas)

<sup>21</sup> Valsonokas, R. pp. 273.

<sup>22</sup> Shulman, J. Memel, pp. 282. Other sources report 9,000 Jews for Memel. Kurt Benjamin, "Zur Geschichte der Juden in Memel." *Aufbau*, 18 May 1984.

<sup>23</sup> Dov Levin, *The Litwaks*, pp. 184.

<sup>24</sup> Mike Rabinowitz ,Interview with author 14 November 1999 Ramat Gan. As an example he mentioned his gym teacher, Fritz Marcuse, who first went from Berlin to Kaunas, then to Memel and to Siauliai in 1939.

## Economics

Through the establishment of a chamber of commerce (11 October 1919) the town's merchants had an organization that not only strengthened the confidence of the circle of merchants but also had a positive influence on the closing of commercial contracts.<sup>25</sup> The main factor in the local economy, the timber trade, was at times severely restricted through the Lithuanian and Polish conflict. Nathan Nafthal, timber merchant and vice-president of the local chamber of commerce, developed a new import idea. A large amount of Russian timber would be run over the Baltic Sea and the Memeler timber syndicate, whose establishment was initiated by Nafthal, would process it. The industry flourished. Through the opening up of the remote regions of Lithuania and the surplus production there, the flax export increased by leaps and bounds. The introduction of artificial fertilizers to Lithuania took place by way of Memel as well as the import of machines for the agricultural industry. There was an upturn in the food industry and in the production in luxury foodstuffs, i.e. coffee or tea, as well as, in particular, in the processing of tobacco and the textile industry.<sup>26</sup>

In all of these mentioned areas one cannot help to notice Jewish economic power. According to the government's survey there were 471 businesses in the town in 1931, and 119 (25%) were owned by Jews. In the same survey it is stated that there were 151 industrial enterprises in Memel, and Jews owned 31 of them (i.e. 20%). In addition there were also businesses that showed mixed ownership like E. Appelhagen A. G. (timber merchant), the Lithuanian Cotton Manufacturer, and the Memeler

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<sup>25</sup> Louis Jahn. "Memel als Hafen-und Handelsstadt (1913-1922)" *Schriften des Instituts fuer ostdeutsche Wirtschaft an der Universitaet Koenigsberg* ( Jena, 1926) pp. 74.

<sup>26</sup> Eginhard Walter. *Das Memelgebiet. Bevoelkerung und Wirtschaft eines Grenzlandes.* (Koenigsberg: 1939) pp. 80.

Muehlerwerke GmbH, among others.<sup>27</sup> A total of 9 cotton and wool weaving-mills were established, including the Israelit u. Co., in Memel from 1925-1935.<sup>28</sup>

In 1939 the Jews of Memel owned 330 factory and industrial enterprises: cereal mills, timber mills, manufacturing facilities for textiles, soap and chocolate, a brewery, an amber processing facility, a cigarette factory and so on, in which 70% of the Memeler's labor capacity were employed. Jewish owned property has been estimated to be 300 million Sterling in 1939.<sup>29</sup> Just how large the influence of Jewish merchants and industry was for the economy of the city and region became obvious when Jews began to move their businesses to Lithuania or abroad.<sup>30</sup> Jewish merchants took leading positions, for instance, in the chamber of commerce or held diplomatic posts like Nathan Nafthal who was not only the vice president of the chamber of commerce, but also held the office of Portuguese royal consul.

Among other capable Jewish merchants who were also represented in the chamber of commerce and acted as experts, there was the honored merchant Leopold Alexander, chairman of the Jewish community for many years, who was granted honorary membership in the chamber.<sup>31</sup> Efim Konikoff 's Kredit-und Kommerzbank (Credit and Commerce Bank) and Jawschitz's private bank played an important role in the town's system of public finance. As well the Juedische Volksbank (Jewish People's Bank) established in 1925 numbered already 300 members by 1929 and took an important position in the economy of the town.

## **School**

Another area where Jewish and non-Jewish worlds constantly came in contact was school.

Traditionally Jewish children, regardless of their origins, attended German schools: the boys the

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<sup>27</sup> Walter, E. pp. 82.

<sup>28</sup> Martynas Ansysas. *Kova del Klaipedos ( Der Kamp um Memel)*, (Chicago: 1978) pp. 222.

<sup>29</sup> Shulman, J. *Memel*. pp. 282.

<sup>30</sup> Walter, E.pp. 137.



Luisen-Gymnasium and the girls the Auguste-Victoria-Lyzeum. Only a few Jews went to the Lithuanian Gymnasium. Recollections of school- days are various. Maurice Hillmann, whose family had earlier lived in Pensa, had fond memories of his school-days, "I had a happy youth in Memel: good teachers, good friends, plenty of sports in the Jewish athletic club, (and) a good music teacher of Polish descent".<sup>32</sup> Cherie Goren recounts, "My sister Fanny and I went to a German school.[ ] Once I entered in the Lyzeum, I spent a lot of time dissecting sentences. We also spent much time on Geography, studying what once was Germany. After school I had to go to an apartment where two old, smelly, genteel ladies fallen on hard times, helped children of all ages with their homework. I guess German schools were hard. We memorized Goethe and Schiller. We sang songs by Heinrich Heine.. [ ].A great portion of Jews identified with the Germans and their culture. There were also the Ostjuden, eastern European Jews. Lithuania encouraged them to settle in Memel to help establish a more eastern European atmosphere. They did not attend German schools; we did not mix."<sup>33</sup> Hilde Sturmann, who also attended the Auguste-Viktoria-Lyzeum, recalls many German girls among her friends.<sup>34</sup> Trudi Birger came from Frankfurt am Main to Memel in 1933, and she reports, "I can't recall having experienced any Anti-Semitic incidents in school, although we were only a few Jewish students. The teachers treated us fairly."<sup>35</sup> Dora Love (born, Rabinowitz) recounts that she also felt Anti-Semitism as a child. One was neither chosen as a playmate nor invited on birthday celebrations.<sup>36</sup>

Mike Rabinowitz played on the Luise Gymnasium's soccer team. He traveled with the team to Danzig in 1934 and then to Koenigsberg in 1936. At the time the others already were afraid to

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<sup>31</sup> *Die Selbstverwaltung der Kaufmannschaft in Memel von ihren Anfaengen bis zur Gegenwart aus Anlass ihres ersten Jahrzehnts der Industrie- und Handelskammer fuer das Memelgebiet 1919-1929.* (Memel: 1929) pp. 141.

<sup>32</sup> Maurice Hillman to Ulla Lachauer, 17 July 1989.

<sup>33</sup> C. Goren, pp. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Hilda Sturmann to Ulla Lachauer, 28 January 1989.

<sup>35</sup> S. Birger, pp. 35

<sup>36</sup> Dora Love (born Rabinowitz) Interview, Yad Vashem Archives 03/7504

take him along and never called him by his last name. But they needed him to play for them. Then the atmosphere changed in the school. “I had many good friends, but before we were about to take our final exams in the last year many turned their backs on me. Whether they were ashamed of me or they were afraid of me or they became Nazi through the Hitler Youth... I don't know. One friend remained a true to me.”<sup>37</sup>

After various objections by the board of directors on the one hand and in particular by speaker for the school, Mr Kurmis, who was especially committed, and on the other hand by the German-oriented Jews, a Jewish public school, *Tarbut*, was established in 1936. It was modeled after the school network wide spread in Lithuania.<sup>38</sup> *Tarbut* is the Hebrew word for culture and was a synonym for a secular Zionist education. Hebrew was the language of instruction in these schools. A primary emphasis was conveying knowledge about the land of Israel and its present development.

Since the majority of Lithuanian Jews were Zionist minded and their influence gradually increased in Memel, that is, the position of the German Jews gradually crumbled in light of the Anti-Semitic development in Germany, the opening of the school was a logical development.

### **Linguistic Usage**

What did Jews speak in Memel, German, Lithuanian, Yiddish or Hebrew? Dora Love (born, Rabinowitz) recalls, “German, Yiddish, Russian and colloquially Lithuanian. I grew up with four languages.” She still remembers that it was common in her family to switch from one language to another. Maurice Hillman writes, “At home we spoke Russian. We learned German in the German schools in Memel.”<sup>39</sup> Trudi Birger reports, “As long as we lived there I often visited my mother's parents. We always spoke German with them, never Yiddish; we didn't know it at all.

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<sup>37</sup> Mike Rabinowitz, Interview with author, 14 November 1999 in Ramat Gan.

<sup>38</sup> LVA F. 378, Ap 3, B. 3426, S. 140 (17 April 1934).

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Hillmann to Ulla Lachauer, 17 July 1989.

All the Jews of Memel spoke German.”<sup>40</sup> Hilde Sturman recalls, “my parents interacted only with Germans, they knew many Lithuanians too.”<sup>41</sup> Everyone had their own biography and their use of language was closely connected to it.

### **Life within associations**

By and large these seem to be the highlights of the external observable factors in the Jewish world in Memel. Till today no sources have been tracked down that describe the Jewish society from the German or the Lithuanian perspective at that time. One can make the provisional thesis here that the Germans and Lithuanians were so completely fixated on each other that they attached little importance to the next largest of the population. Only in the 1930's does the Memeler population appear to begin to perceive their fellow Jewish citizens too severely under the influence of the German development. Unfortunately the sources do not give us any information about either German or Lithuanian influenced associations in the town and region that certainly existed.

Contact between non-Jews and Jews took place outside of the professional associations in the veteran organizations, like the “Kriegerverein Memel” (Veteran Association Memel) as well as in the area of athletics. However it is not known to what extent Jews were members of non-Jewish sports clubs. The Jewish organizations were known and respected. Their participants placed not only well at the large sporting events like the Memel regional championships but also took part in the World Maccabi Games.<sup>42</sup> The fifteen anniversary of the “Bar Kochba” began with a large celebration and a commemorative volume in 1935. German and Lithuanian Jews participated in sports events together, while there were more Lithuanian or German oriented organizations elsewhere in the town. And yet they must have been a source of irritation to non-Jews, for we find in an article of the Memeler *Dampfbboot* from 1985 under the

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<sup>40</sup> T. Birger, pp. 38.

<sup>41</sup> Hilde Sturmann to Ulla Lachauer, 28 January 1989.

caption," Where remained the Memel's Jews?'.... and no one thought to draw a line between the Jewish and the non-Jewish population except the one that the Jews drew themselves in which they took care of athletics in their own sports club, Bar Kochba."<sup>43</sup>

Athletics was an important factor in how they depicted themselves as a nation every year. This way of thinking reached its peak with the Olympics 1936.

### **Jewish Life**

The rights of the religious community were based to a large extent on the Prussian law "On The Relations to Jews" from 23 July 1847 including the addendum in 1924 legislating autonomy. Thus community employees were subordinate to the board of directors and received their salaries through them.

In the period between the two World Wars there were four synagogues in Memel. From time immemorial there were actually two Jewish communities: a German oriented one and an orthodox one in which supporters of the traditional party "Aguda Israel" took it upon themselves to fight the Zionist Avant-garde and, in general, were against all attempts at modernization. The annexation of Memel region to Lithuania led to a strengthening of the Jewish community. The Zionist achieved a decisive majority at the time and influenced the activities of the community.<sup>44</sup> It was also true of Memel, what Erwin Lichtenstein from Koenigsberg described: Zionism had many supporters especially from families that came from Russia and in particular from Lithuania.<sup>45</sup> The participation in the religious community was not very strong, whereas there was substantial attendance at the Jewish associations. There existed some charities as well as Zionist and

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<sup>42</sup> Interview 14 November 1999 in Ramat Gan.

<sup>43</sup> "Wo blieben die Memeler Juden?" *Memeler Dampfboot*, Nr. 6, July 1985, pp. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Shulman. J. *Memel/Lite*, pp. 283.

<sup>45</sup> LBI MM 116, Erwin Lichtenstein, pp. 23.

cultural associations to committed to the fostering of general education along with those already mentioned, Verein fur juedische Geschichte und Literatur, (Society for Jewish History and Literature); there was the Verein fur Hebraeischsprechende (Society for Hebrew Speakers), the Zionistische Organisation fuer das Memelgebiet (The Zionist Organisation for Memel region) the Talmud Verein (Society for Talmud), the Juedische Turn-und Sport Verein Bar Kochba (The Jewish Gymnastics and Athletics Association Bar Kochba), an athletics organization, the Juedische Frauenverein Kadima / Vorwaerts ( the Jewish Women's Society Kadima/ Forwards), the Israelitischen Frauenverein ( Israeli Women's Organization) the Hilfsverein fur Juedische Arme ( Relief Organisation for the Jewish Poor), a Hebrew kindergarten starting 1936, Betar (right wing orientated youth movement), Ha Shomer Hazair (socialist youth movement), both of the athletic clubs and the Verein der Juedischen Teilnehmer an den Litauischen Unabhangigkeitskaempfen (the Organisation of Jewish Participants in the Lithuanian War of Independence).<sup>46</sup>

The Jewish youth were involved in organizations like Germans and Lithuanians of the same age. Dora Rabinowitz recalls, "If the Betar had more enthusiastic and better leaders we went to Betar. If HaSchomer was more interesting, and the holiday camp was nicer there we went to Hashomer for summer camp. It had no political significance to us."<sup>47</sup>

Similar to other towns the "Judische Volksbank" (Jewish People's Bank) played an important social and cultural role in the Jewish life of the town; among its activities the bank awarded scholarships and donated prizes to Jewish festivals.

An essential characteristic of the Zionist movement existed in the recruitment of young people and the financing of their training in agriculture and in skilled trades for later life in Palestine. The Memeler community was especially active in this respect. They bought a large piece of land

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<sup>46</sup> Kurt Benjamin, "Zur Geschichte der Juden in Memel," *Aufbau*, 18 May 1984.

in the center of the city and made available a large sum of money, acquired by donations, for the building of a pioneer house, Beth He Halutz, that was constructed for 400 pioneers in 1927. The community's board of directors provided for the training and the employment of the pioneers in nearby trades, factories and workshops. Memel became a center for the training and the immigration of thousands of pioneers from Lithuania and Germany. Along with Kaunas and Leopoltava it was the largest of its kind in Lithuania. After 1933 German young people came to Memel for a lack of other alternatives or in order to utilize the advantages of the region to prepare for their immigration.

At this point the forms of life of Lithuanian and German Jews touched, rubbed each other and then sometimes produced a new synthesis.

### **Society**

Although the influence of the Lithuanian Jews increased and their numbers already outweighed other groups at the end of the 20's, the German character of Jewish society remained in place. Many felt themselves drawn to the German culture without regard for the growing National Socialism that also could be sensed in Memel.

Maurice Hillman reports, " My parents were well off. They could afford to acquire a group of friend 'befitting' their social standing through charity and community work. Mother was on the committee of the WIZO (Women International Zionist Organisation). My father was on the board of directors of the Jewish Peoples Bank and loved to donate money for charitable causes. Nonetheless he, a merchant from Russia, didn't belong to the German Jewish aristocratic community."<sup>48</sup>

From the recollections it is evident that there was a well off and rich Jewish life in Memel during the time between the World Wars. Many residents of Memel did well financially, and the

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<sup>47</sup> Dora Rabinowitz, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/7504

<sup>48</sup> Maurice Hillman to Ulla Lachauer, 17 July 1989.

city prospered in a liberal atmosphere. There were theatres, concerts, cinemas and also cabaret.<sup>49</sup> Cherie Goren recounts that her father, the textile merchant, Leo Fleischman, “He spent the mornings at his store and the afternoons at the bridge club or a café. He spent the summers in Czechoslovakia, either Karlsbad or Marienbad for the *Kur* (health spa).”<sup>50</sup>

She reports about the cafes that Black performers, - singers and tap dancers- appeared there; which was very exciting because there were no blacks in Memel.<sup>51</sup> Trudi Birger recounts that as she was still a child an aunt “dressed her up and showed her the cafes where tea dances were given during the afternoon for children. A band played, and there were contests for waltz and tango dancing.”<sup>52</sup> There were Purim balls with striking evening dress accompanied by German and American dance music and Vienna waltzes.

Hans Adam Sturmman, a law student from Koenigsberg, who went through vocational training as a backer in order to go to Palestine, reported of the warmth and benevolent behavior of the Jews from Memel. The former students were “citizen kibbuzniks” by day, but evenings they were allowed to mimic social lions in the Jewish community in Memel.<sup>53</sup>

### Threatening Signs

One got first impressions of the worsening of the situation from the neighboring East Prussia even before Hitler took power. The specifics were reported by Haschara-claimants who were trained in Memel and lived for free in a home that the Jewish community had put at their disposal.<sup>54</sup> There was already scrawling on the windows and fences of Jewish shops in 1934.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://shtetlinks.jewish.org/Gargzdai/23diary.html>

<sup>50</sup> C. Goren, pp. 1.

<sup>51</sup> C. Goren, pp. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Trudi Birger. *Im Angesicht des Feuers. Wie ich der Hoelle des Konzenstrationslagers entkam.* (Muenchen, 1990), pp.38.

<sup>53</sup> Hans Adam Sturmman, “Der rettende Hafen. Erinnerungen an die Hachschara in Memel”, Israeli News, 11 March 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Hans Adam Sturmman, “Der rettende Hafen. Erinnerungen an die Hachschara in Memel”, Israeli News, 11 March 1997.

There were swastikas painted or inscriptions put up “Memel wake up”.<sup>55</sup> The German General Consulate also started up harassment. For example, the Consul Nafthal received a simple visa instead of a requested multiple visa.<sup>56</sup> As was already mentioned Nafthal belonged to the politically prominent Jews. In 1935 National Socialists were reported to the police for hooliganism. Thereupon the German press spoke of “The victim of a Jewish Conspiracy” because Jewish judges and prosecutors participated in this criminal case. In the same year the German authorities prohibited for the first time German traders to travel to the Memeler’s annual market.<sup>57</sup> Tensions were heated up by completely fabricated means. The Olympics dominated the news in 1936. Cherie Goren still recalls, “I started to notice the girls in my class were very blond and athletic. They was much marching and singing of German songs about the “Heimat” or Homeland [ ].<sup>58</sup> A young woman moved into our home. We were to learn to speak Hebrew. She was a chalutz (pioneer) working her way to Palestine. She spoke only Hebrew to us and we tormented her [ ] Keren Kayemet boxes (money for Palestine) appeared in our home.”<sup>59</sup> Was Palestine an alternative to Memel? The tensions increased there. For the first time all the Jewish businesses closed in protest for the Jewish holidays in the autumn of 1936, and this had not yet happened in Memel until then.<sup>60</sup> The Memeler town council passed a law on 26 February 1937 that restricted Jews from practicing their professions. The windows of synagogues were often broken. There was an attack on Jewish vacationers by German young people in Schwarzort a resort sandbar. Schwarzort was considered to be a favorite resort for more than 80 years—including kosher food from the guesthouse Eisikovicius-- and this was especially true

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<sup>55</sup> LVA F. 378, Ap. B. 3426, pp. 382, 16 March 1934.

<sup>56</sup> LVA F. 378, Ap. B. 3426, pp. 154, 15 April 1934.

<sup>57</sup> *RADG Zeitung Wochenzeitschrift fuer Marktfahrer, Hausier, Neuheiten-Verkaeufter, Schausteller, Markthaendler, Markthallen-Standinhaber und Strassenhaendler Berlin und Poessneck 1935.* (14 Jahrgang) Nr. 14, 6 April 1935.

<sup>58</sup><sup>58</sup> C. Goren. pp., 29.

<sup>59</sup> C. Goren. pp., 31.

<sup>60</sup> *Di Yiddishe Shtime* (Kaunas) 5 October 1936.



after 1933 when Schwarzort became a summertime refuge for the Jews of Koenigsberg who could spend a few quiet weeks on holiday there behind the German boarder.<sup>61</sup>

Likewise 10 Jewish students from the commercial college and pedagogical institute were victims of an attack by Lithuanian students in 1937. Although the Lithuanians put a lot of stock in not displaying such behavior they were nonetheless influenced considerably by German propaganda. The situation for the Memeler Jews became worse in autumn 1938 as the Germans painted swastikas on Jewish shops or attempted to prevent customers to enter Jewish shops. After the Munich Pact the fear of a National Socialist coup d'etat in Memel increased and so began the Jews to leave and go to Lithuania.<sup>62</sup> When the state of emergency was suspended on 1 November 1938 supporters of Dr Neumann organized a torchlight procession and rally. A few days later the Memeldeutsche Ordnungsdienst (Memel German Service for Regulations) was founded, and shortly thereafter they marched through Memel for the first time. A commemorative rally was held for Hindenburg in November and 30,000 citizens of Memel participated. All of these events led Jews to make swift decisions. 2.5 Million Litas were withdrawn from banks in the city just in the month November 1938.<sup>63</sup>

The Lithuanians called upon Jews to vote Lithuanian in the state elections on 11 December 1938 with the following text: "Jewish citizens! 110 Jewish cemeteries have been ravaged by Hitlergangs! This doesn't happen in Lithuania. 50 Synagogues have been covered in dirt and not in Lithuania. Non-Lithuanians have drawn the blood from Jewish business people in Upper Memel. Those who are Hitler spirited want to drive out the Jews, not Lithuanians. Jews work for the Lithuanian administration and for the commandant in Memel. Rathenau, a Jewish minister in Germany, was cowardly murdered blindly by Hiltergangs. Therefore Jews, Open your eyes! Choose list 3!"<sup>64</sup> The German party achieved an overwhelming victory. The board of directors

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<sup>61</sup> Klaipedos Zinios, 20 June 1924 (Nr. 113).

<sup>62</sup> J. Shulman, *Memel*, pp. 283.

<sup>63</sup> VDV 1938m. lapkr 29d., spaudos apzvalga, L.100.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.shetlinks.org/memel/mel1.html> Internet.

had already prohibited numerous clearance sales by 1 December 1938, nonetheless the termination of Jewish businesses increased.<sup>65</sup> Newspaper headlines soon read in Kaunas as follows: “Jewish firms liquidize in Klaipeda.”<sup>66</sup> Jawschitz’s Kredit und Kommerzbank (The Credit and Commercial Bank) liquidized with the closing of 1938 and moved its office to Kaunas.<sup>67</sup>

The wife of a businessman reports, “The National Socialist character was paraded around more and more in Memel. More and more one heard the demand to throw off the Lithuanian yoke and follow the Fuehrer; Nazis songs were sung very loudly. For us Jews that was certainly not a pleasant sound. I, who had many friends among the Christian Memel girls, had to see that a part of them turned away in order not to greet me. However, I haven’t the least bit forgotten that some, because I turned away, called “Good Day” and stopped me to show that I was the same in their eyes. My sixteen years old daughter, who was blond and blue eyed, was often shouted out by young people: ‘Heil Hitler, come today to the Ferdinandsplatz, there is a rally.’ That was really shocking. My husband had already gone to England on business and didn’t come back. I had to make all the decisions myself.”<sup>68</sup>

## Escape

The first Memeler Jews began to plan their escape in the middle of the 1930’s. Especially those who had at their disposal extensive business connections abroad and, in particular, in England looked into various alternatives early on. Cherie Goren recounts, “Papa went to England to meet aunt Rachel from America. He asked her to sponsor us for immigration, just in case.”<sup>69</sup> The

<sup>65</sup> *Amtsblatt des Memelsgebietes*, 1938, Nr. 125 (1 December 1938), Nr. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Lietuvos ziniuos*, 31 December 1938.

<sup>67</sup> Eginhard Walter. *Das Memelgebiet. Bevoelkerung und Wirtschaft eines Grenzlandes*. (Koenigsberg: 1939) pp. 115.

<sup>68</sup> Yad Vashem 0-33/2182 (under the name of Joseph Karmisch).

<sup>69</sup> C. Goren, pp. 31.

preparations lasted two years, and the Fleischman family left Memel in November 1938.<sup>70</sup> Many German Jews trusted, nonetheless, in their democratic rights; they had certainly fought for Germany in the First World War. Thus Cherie Goren also recalls, "The whole town was German, even the Jews. My uncle Nahny, who fought for the Kaiser and earned the Iron cross said, they wouldn't bother us and were only after the Ostjuden. Everybody seemed to agree, except my Papa."<sup>71</sup>

On 15 March 1939 there was a last radio program "Concerning the History of the Memel Jews" on Memel Radio. In this historical survey in which the culturally German oriented Memel Jews were once again reaffirmed it was said at the conclusion: "The immigration from East to West started after the First World War".<sup>72</sup>

At the beginning of 1939 over half of the Memel Jews left the town and moved to western Lithuanian towns and cities like Palanga, Kretinga, Darbenai, Jurbarkas, Taurage, Siauliai and Kaunas. The value of the Jewish property taken out of Memel is estimated at 100 Million Litass (\$1 equaled 6 Litass at the time).<sup>73</sup> Others sold their property for a low price to Germans, but as it became clear to all, that the town and region were soon to be annexed by Germany, all of the Jews from Memel fled to Lithuania. The possible means of transportation must have been so expensive that poor Jews left the town by foot in the direction of Gargzdai. The first refugees belonged to the most well off group in the town and could take out all their property without difficult. But later as the flight of capital increased the Memel authorities made the procedure more difficult by demanding that a special authorization was required for export. That continued to such an extent that the export of property was generally prohibited shortly before the annexation. A number of Jews, in particular, business people and physicians who remained in

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<sup>70</sup> C. Goren, pp. 40.

<sup>71</sup> C. Goren, pp. 35.

<sup>72</sup> Mokslinė Akademijos Biblioteka (Vilnius) F-255, B.1125.

<sup>73</sup> (\$1 equaled 6 Litass at the time).

the area were arrested and brought to concentration camps.<sup>74</sup> The Consuls family Nafthal left Memel in the night before Hitler came and fled to Kaunas.

A few days after the annexation, a picture, that became much later famous, appeared in the English press of two intimidated children holding the hands of their parents fleeing to the railway station through a double line of smiling SA people.<sup>75</sup> Photos from the photographer George Birman at that time show the completely overfilled trains leaving Memel in the direction of Lithuania.<sup>76</sup>

In the archives of the Lithuanian State Archive with the title "Jews in Memel 1939" one finds a sole personal card for a Rebekka Kaplan, Friedrichsmarkt 18/19, 61 years old with the stamp "Clothes card received" issued from the mayor of the town of Memel, Ministry of Food and Commerce.<sup>77</sup>

Trudi Birger recounts her departure, "We remained in Memel till the Germans took possession of it on 23 March 1939. After that we got away with my mother's parents and the rest of our family to Kowno in Lithuania. ...What caused me to lose my orientation was the change of schools. I went from a German to a Jewish school, where Hebrew, that I didn't have a good command of, was the language of instruction."<sup>78</sup>

The Jewish communities in Kaunas and in the provinces became committed to the refuges and support was provided by the few well off. Only one year remained to take a deep breathe and make plans.

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<sup>74</sup> Alfred Wittenberg was killed in Sachsenhausen.

<sup>75</sup> The picture portrays the owner of the printing house, Aron Puhn, with his wife Ella and daughters Civa and Aviva. (Lt. Yad Vashem) The family fled to Siauliai and was killed there.

<sup>76</sup> [http://www. Doubletakemagazine.org/mag/html/backissues/16/birman/text.html](http://www.Doubletakemagazine.org/mag/html/backissues/16/birman/text.html)

<sup>77</sup> LVA: F. 645, Ap. 2, B, 167.

<sup>78</sup> T. Birger, pp. 40.

### **Futile Attempts to Find a Way Out**

The majority of Jewish refugees concentrated in Kaunas. The perplexity was great; they searched frantically for alternatives. On 26 March 1939 Dr. Martin Rosenblueth from the Central Bureau for the Settlement of German Jews already formulated a letter to the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine in Jerusalem:

“Dear Sir,

We send you here enclosed copies of our letter today to the Palestine ministry Kaunas that wrote us a very desperate letter about 3000 refugees from Memel. We genuinely believe that one has to help in some way and that now the refugee problem has taken on such large portions that a refugee quote of 25 or 35 certificates in no way can justly meet the demands.”<sup>79</sup> One found possibilities for young people to journey to Palestine, but this number was in no way able cover the demand. The Second World War began a few months later and a wave of Polish-Jewish refugees splashed into Lithuania, in particular into Vilna, but also to Kaunas where more and more Jews inquired about possibilities of fleeing from Lithuania. By that time the Jews of Memel required new passports, for passports issued from Memel country became invalid at the end of 1939. On 23 March 1939 Germany enacted a law that the citizens of Memel country who had become Lithuanian citizens on 30 July 1924 and had their official residence in the region of Memel on 22 March 1939 or in Germany would again receive German citizenship. While the negotiations went on concerning the treaty between Lithuania and Germany (Deutsche Reich) regarding the citizenship of the people in Memel country, --which was completed in Kaunas on 8 July 1939 in Kaunas, -- the two parties finally agreed that every person who wished to become a Lithuanian citizen could apply within a certain time period.<sup>80</sup> The Lithuanian government was benevolent to the Jews from Memel country and granted them Lithuanian passports.

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<sup>79</sup> Jewish Zionist Archives (Jerusalem) KKL1-359 (3585).

<sup>80</sup> *Reichsgesetzblatt* ed, Reichsministerium des Innen 1939 Teil II pp. 999.

Soviet troops occupied Lithuania in 1940; the country became part of the Soviet Union. Instruction in Hebrew was now prohibited, i.e. replaced with Yiddish; Jewish scientists were arrested. Foreigners and capitalist were taken to be suspicious among them were also well-off Memeler refugees. Many family businesses were expropriated. Boris Segalowitz received the order, for example, to move from Panevzys to Kaunas; he was considered to be a suspicious German.<sup>81</sup> The government of the Soviet Union commanded all diplomatic delegations to leave Kaunas in July 1940. Only the Dutch and Japanese consulate didn't follow the order immediately. During the remaining 20 days the Japanese consul Sugihara issued travel visas for Jewish refugees in Kaunas. As far as can be ascertained at this time of the 2,139 persons with visas 2% were German Jews among them Memelers.<sup>82</sup> How many Memeler Jews perished during the Soviet reprisal during 1940/1941 has not yet been analyzed and evaluated. The fear was indeed great that one would get caught up in a wave of banishment. The Rabinowitz family was successful in Siauliai to have their name crossed off the deportation list. Other families like Trudi Birger's hid from the banishment commandos whereby they had already their train tickets for the exile in their bags.<sup>83</sup> Some were still able to leave for Shanghai-- the only place of refugee in which there wasn't required a travel visa. The events accelerated. While the wave of banishment still continued, the Lithuanians were surprised by the invasion of the German armed forces.

The wife of a Memeler businessman, who has already been mentioned, reports of her hurried departure from Kaunas, "My sister, my brother-in-law and I decided if it was still possible to go to the train station the next day and attempt to get away with a train. An aunt and my brother-in-law's two cousins joined us. But we had completely lost our heads. Everyone took

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<sup>81</sup> [http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia\\_doc/photos/3205?hr=null](http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_doc/photos/3205?hr=null).

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.jewishgen.org/databasas/sugihara.htm>. The exact number could not yet be determined.

<sup>83</sup> A comprehensive review of the NKWD archives for the Jewish refugees from Memel remains to be done. One cannot conclude at this time whether they became closely watched by the NKWD as the special group and how many of them were deported in 1941.

a small suitcase with things and carried a fur coat on an arm. But we forgot to take our food; our cake remained to greet the Nazi."<sup>84</sup> Some took the last trains in the direction of Moscow or like Mike Rabinowitz fought their way by bicycle and foot to Russia.<sup>85</sup> There was also great deal of skepticism toward these escape routes especially if one had just experienced what the NKWD officers were capable of.

Most of the people were no longer successful to leave Lithuania. Maurice Hillman reports one case that was coolly and methodically planned. Mother and sister traveled with a Lithuanian passport at the end of 1941 through Germany to Yugoslavia to their father. From there the family fled across Turkey to Palestine.<sup>86</sup>

## Extermination

Within a week all of Lithuania was occupied by German troops. Already on 25 and 26 June 1941 a pogrom took place in Kaunas in which Lithuanian partisan groups murdered an unknown number of Jews.<sup>87</sup> Till today it remains unclear what roles the Memeler Jews took in the Kaunas' society, that is whether they existed or not as a distinct group in the consciousness of the inhabitants.<sup>88</sup> A task force of the Gestapo Tilsit killed Jewish civilians among them Memeler Jews in the Lithuanian boarder town, Gargzdai, on 26 June.<sup>89</sup> In the following days task forces

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<sup>84</sup> Yad Vashem 0-33/2182 ( under the name of Joseph Karmisch).

<sup>85</sup> The Urdank family was shoot dead in Palanga.

<sup>86</sup> Maurice Hillman to Ulla Lachauer 17 July 1989.

<sup>87</sup> Yad Vashem Archives, Testimonies

<sup>88</sup> Files in Yad Vashem Archives suggest that a large group of Jewish intellectuals from Memel belongs to a group that was already killed in June 1941. Whether this was by accident or not can only be considered once the role of Memel immigrants can be clearly described in Lithuania in during the years 1939-41.

<sup>89</sup> Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Sammlung dt Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialist. Toetungsverbrechen 1945-1966/Verfahren Lfd. Nr. 465, Justiz und NS-Verbrechen Band XV, Amsterdam 1978 as well as Verfahren Lfd. Nr. 509, 521, Justiz und NS-Verbrechen Bank XVII, Amsterdam 1978, Verfahren Lfd. Nr. 547, 545 Justiz und NS-Verbrechen Band XIX, Amsterdam 1978

committed more murders in Kretinga<sup>90</sup> and Palanga<sup>91</sup> as well as Sveksna, Taurage, Jurbarkas and other places. Memel's uniformed police and Lithuanian police from Kretinga also participated in the murders in Gargzdai, Kretinga and Palanga.<sup>92</sup>

In the summer of 1941 the Jews from the country communities were shot dead by the members of the task forces and Lithuanians.<sup>93</sup> By the middle of August all of the Kaunaser Jews were placed in a ghetto; the same occurred in Siauliai. Executions by firing squads took place in both ghettos.<sup>94</sup> The survivors had to perform forced labor. In the summer of 1944 the Kaunas ghetto was liquidated; most of the female prisoners went to Stutthof, and the men went to Dachau. Most of them didn't survive the unspeakable prisoner conditions in both of these concentration camps.<sup>95</sup>

Trudi Birger describes her mood, as she had to go into the ghetto, "How can I communicate the strangest and dreadful feeling of disorientation that distressed me? German was my native tongue. In our family we did all we could to speak it flawlessly. My beloved children's books were all written in German. My friends and teachers were German in school in Memel. But now the Germans had become killers. And nothing, that they did or said, could one trust. Everything was only a mask for murder."<sup>96</sup> She survived the Kaunas Ghetto, where her father and her uncle perished and withstood the strain in Stutthof together with her mother and the final evacuation of the camp by the SS.

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<sup>90</sup> Verfahren Lfd. Nr. 639, Justiz und NS-Verbrechen Band XXIV, Amsterdam 1998, Pescha-Lea Mendelowitz, the Kahn family, Mark Gutmann, Mirjam and Joseph Burstein, Isidor Hurwitz were shot dead in Kretinga.

<sup>91</sup> Avraham Movsovic, Motte Karpus, the Arnowitz family were shot dead in Palanga.

<sup>92</sup> Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Sammlung dt. Strafurteile wegen nationalsozialist. Toetungsverbrechen 1945-1966/Verfahren Lfd. Nr. 499, Justiz und NS-Verbrechen Band XVI, Amsterdam 1978.

<sup>93</sup> The Schwartz family was shot dead in Kaltinenai, the Grossman family in Vilkijia, the Bernstein family in Skuodas, the Bella family (all of them from Memel) in Alytus, the Rosenberg family from Schmallengenken in Jurbarkas

<sup>94</sup> The family of the pharmacist, Sagenkahn, from Heydekrug perished here.

<sup>95</sup> Nathan Nafthal perished in Dachau.

<sup>96</sup> T. Birger, pp. 42.



Dora Love also survived Stutthof; her mother and small sister died of typhoid there; the older brother was gassed in Stutthof; the father survived Dachau. Mike Rabinowitz left Russia and went to the Lithuanian state in the Soviet Union where he lived first in Klaipeda then in Vilna; till he left for Israel in 1966.<sup>97</sup>

A few other Memeler Jews who survived the Second World War inside Russia likewise later returned to the town of their childhood as did the Gritzmacher brothers too.<sup>98</sup>

### **Memel without Jews**

In the negotiations to the treaty between Lithuania and the German Reich that were carried out concerning the citizenship of the Memel country in summer of 1939 the Lithuanians' wish was satisfied by the German side that all of those persons effected by the treaty would be safeguarded by special relief in the question of property. This regulation concerned, in particular, all Jewish property in the city of Memel that was not so easily "Aryanized".

In the " Reports from the Reich" dated 19 January 1942 it says:

"The owners of Jewish property absconded almost without exception at the home coming of the Memel region and their whereabouts cannot be established; their assets are considered enemy assets....this legal fact leads to the following: that the developed property deteriorates, because the appointed trustee (Treuhand GmbH und Finanzamt Memel) does not have sufficient resources for its maintenance at its disposal. The rent is not sufficient in many cases. Furthermore the tenants complain that nothing is done in their apartments or houses."<sup>99</sup>

In many situations it lead indeed to bankruptcy proceedings as in Pogegen. "Concerning the assets of the firm Mendel Kahn, Pogegen, (whose) last foreign address of the owner Mendel

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with author 14 November 1999 in Ramat Gan.

<sup>98</sup> To Benno Grizmacher see: Ulla Lachauer, *Ostpreussische Lebenslaufe*, Reinbek, 1998.  
To Mendke Grizmacher see: Edgar Verheyen, " Einer musste ja bleiben. Deutsche Spurensuche in Litauen. (Television Film), SWF 1998.

Kahn (was) Tauroggen Lithuania Kestucio G-ve 55, a bankruptcy proceeding has been opened today 7 October 1940, 10:00am, where the appointed bank director, Horst Schlicht, responsible for trusteeship of the administration of its assets, demonstrated its insolvency. The merchant, Ernst Retzlaff, in Tilsit, is named bankruptcy administrator.”<sup>100</sup> The traces of Jewish existence were so thoroughly erased that later recollections of Jews disappeared too.

### Summary

From 1850-1885 Memel had already experienced a clear economic upturn and in this context a noticeable immigration of Jews from neighboring areas. “Here Chassidic enthusiasm collided with German Jewish intellectualism“ described Joseph Shulman the special image of Memeler Judaism.<sup>101</sup> Likewise the strong Jewish commitment there to the idea of a free state in the beginning of the 1920’s tried to connect in some way with earlier lines of development. Memel lost admittedly its geographical position as a boarder town with secession, but at the same time the barriers to settle came down for the first time as well (especially for Jewish immigrants). However the town retained its character as lying on a boarder. After its incorporation into Lithuania the political borders moved, the cultural ones remained in place, and the cultural differences became even more clearly visible in the town. This arose not only in the use of language and religious practices but also appeared in with great breadth throughout the press, in holiday rituals and education policy for children. The reasons for migration were primarily economic, whereby one ought not to neglect the fact that Jewish migration to Memel was also supported by the state.

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<sup>99</sup> Meldungen aus dem Reich, 1938-1945, Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS. Edited and integrated by Heinz Boberach. Complete text from the holdings of the Bundesarchiv. (Meldungen aus dem Reich, 1938-1945; 9)

<sup>100</sup> LVA: F. 1573, Ap.6, B.171, pp.12.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Shulman, *Memel*, pp. 282-283.

Upon the lifting of the emergency situation in the Memel area and the subsequent clear election result in favor of Germany the development of the Jewish society was radically severed in Memel. The short route over the boarder proved to be to short a distance for the persecutors. Just one year later the Soviet Union's occupation policy crossed off other plans to settle and flee. The National Socialist policy of persecution was implemented in Lithuania in 1941. The majority of the Memeler Jewish community fell victim to it.