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Summary of Oral History Interview with Bernard Ahrend, conducted 12-6-1988

Bernard Ahrend, born in 1915 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, describes his experiences as a high school student and young man in Germany when the Nazis took power on January 30, 1933 and the consequences for Jews in Germany in the years that immediately followed; he was the only child of an Orthodox Jewish couple; he relates his belief that the anti-democratic beliefs of professors and students in the universities and of the teachers in the high schools contributed to the rise of Hitler; his observations of anti-Semitism being ingrained into young boy by a parent who admonished his Christian son for playing with a Jewish boy; the Sabbath Boycott on April 1, 1933; the creation of the Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden [Representation of the Jews of the German Reich][September 13, 1933] by different Jewish organizations in Germany who felt that they lacked representation of their interests, and the telegram that the organization sent to Hitler to protest Julius Streicher's antisemitic and blood libel articles in *Der Stürmer*; the adoption of the Nuremberg race laws in 1935 that ended his aspiration to go to university to study medicine or dentistry after he passed the Abitur entrance examination and which also led to his father losing his job as a bookkeeper when his employer closed its import/export office in Frankfurt in 1937; his fear of repercussions after Herschel Grynszpan assassinated the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath [on November 7, 1938] in Paris, France; his experiences during Kristallnacht on November 9, 1938 where he observed the burning of the Friedberger Anlage synagogue which was near his family's apartment; his arrest on Kristallnacht and being taken through the streets to the screams of "dirty Jew" from the crowds on the streets; his processing at an office where the paper forms were already prepared and stacked high on desks; his assembly at the convention center where he was instructed by an officer to identify himself as "Jude [Jew] Bernard Ahrend" when he was asked for his name; how he and other Jews were marched to the train station and they had to sing an old German folk song, "Muss I Denn" ["When I leave the little town..."] while they marched; his transport by train to Buchenwald where upon arrival his head was shaved and he was given a uniform to wear; the release of arrestees, including his father, who were veterans of World War I one week after their arrival; how he secretly huddled together with other members of his congregation to pray; how he personally was not mistreated at Buchenwald but he learned that another person had been put to death, that some prisoners were punished by being made to stand at night outdoors in the cold or by being horsewhipped while strapped to a chair without a back; his release from imprisonment at Buchenwald on December 23, 1938 on the condition that he must emigrate from Germany within a short period of time, and how his head was shaved again to make him look like he was a criminal; his arrival back home in Frankfurt where he lit a candle for the first night of Hanukkah and realized that it was a miracle that he got home; after his release from Buchenwald he had to report daily to the Gestapo, and he was given an extension of time to leave Germany; his father's former boss gave him a permit to stay in London, England, and he left Frankfurt during the first week of February, 1939; his parents were eventually able to escape to Brussels, Belgium with assistance from his father's former boss; he learned that his father was sent to Saint-Cyprien, France, with other refugees and his father was later interred in the Gurs Camp in France; he lived in Finsbury Park, London, England, with the support of an unknown person who paid a certain sum of money to enable him to immigrate to England; he eventually received notice that he could immigrate to America; he departed from Liverpool on a Cunard liner and he arrived in New York on February 11, 1940 where he was met by his cousin who had left Germany before him.