

RG-50.322.0022: Hans Liebermann

Dr. Hans Liebermann, born on September 9, 1900 in Beuthen, an industrial town of about 50-60k people and about 1,500-1,800 Jews, in the agricultural district in Upper Silesia; he discusses his grandparents having lived in Upper Silesia for the previous 100-150 years; his one younger brother who served in the British army in South Africa (and later died in the U.S.); his mother and his father's poppa, momma hardware business at Beuthen, Oberschlesien, Rink 8; growing up lower middle class; speaking German but not Yiddish; attending synagogue and Hebrew school; his aunts, uncles and cousins living in nearby towns; his mother keeping a Kosher household; professions and trades closed to German Jews, except retail, medicine, law, and press workers such as editors and publishers; German Jews assimilating into German society; growing antisemitism in Germany, on the basis being that the Jews killed Christ; receiving his Matura, Abiturium in Germany in 1918 and being drafted into the German army as a 5 foot, undernourished 101 lb. boy with rickets; being stationed in Breslau (today Wroclaw); going home for Jewish holidays; being discharged a few months later when the war was over; the war lost being blamed on the Jews; the rise of "Judenzalung" - the counting of the Jews in the army and comparing that to the percentage of Jews in the general population; only 3 or 4 Jews amongst a hundred that served in his detachment; he discusses discrimination he experienced in the army; attending Breslau University as a medical student in the 1920s; also studying in Freiburg and Berlin; practicing the ear, nose and throat specialty in Breslau; finishing medical school in 1923; opening a practice in Upper Silesia in 1928 in the town of Leibitz (30 miles from Beuthen), a city of about 90k with a Jewish population of about 1,100 (and 15 Jewish doctors); marrying his wife Lotte (born in Opeln) in February 1928; news suppression in The Hamburg Jewish Family Newspaper; the first Nazi newspaper in Silesia in 1927 or 28; Nazi marches in 1931-32; Hitler coming to power in 1932; anti-Semitic actions taking place (repression, Jews thrown out of jobs, Jewish artists cut from performing, unable to go to movies, city parks, and restaurants, and signs that read "Jews are not Permitted"); Upper Silesia being protected by the Geneva Treaty until 1937; Synagogues filled from despair and the need to pray; the Nuremberg Laws being enforced in 1937 after the Treaty lapsed; his medical license being revoked in 1938; people scared and refusing treatment from him because he was Jewish; his meeting with the Gestapo in Berlin in 1938 and being accused of swindling money; the Central Organization of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith misleading Jews that there was nothing to fear, that things would blow over, and discouraging emigration; the Reichstag Fire in February 1933; learning of concentration camps in 1933-34; the sterilization laws for the unfit, for Doctors, in January 1934; his shock and disbelief when non-Jewish physicians accepted these laws with no questions about ethics; fellow doctors turning against him; no longer being allowed to work for insurance companies; the formation of Judenrat after Kristallnacht; his father dying from pneumonia in Theresienstadt on his way to Cuba in 1942 or 43 (after the U.S. had closed its doors); his decision to come to the U.S.; arriving in the U.S. in 1938 on a visitor's visa to try to get an affidavit of support; his wife going to Palestine (Israel); returning to Germany at the end of 1938 after receiving an affidavit of support from a fraternity brother (also a doctor that had lost his license in Germany); obtaining visas and leaving Germany permanently to return to the U.S.; being reunited with his wife Lotte and 9 year old son Franz in October 1938; taking his medical examination; learning conversational English through radio; the challenges and persecution he experienced when he opened a practice in Dayton as a foreigner; being voted down for membership into the Medical Society; still calling the U.S. the best country in the world; returning to Germany many times; the subject of war being avoided in Germany; his many world travels; retiring from active practice after 1973; staying married for 50 years at the time of this interview and stating that if he were 18 years old today, that he would do it all over again.