

Speech in Bruchsal on the handover of the petition

Dear Mayor Petzold-Schick, dear city councilors, dear representatives of the press, dear Mrs. Rau, dear Dr. Majewski, dear attendees,

I am U. Schüler, I live near Hamburg and I am very sorry not to be able to attend today's meeting in the Bruchsal town hall due to corona.

I would therefore like to thank Dr. Majewski, Chairman of the Association for the Promotion of the House of the History and Culture of the Jews of Baden, for agreeing to hand over the petition to you, Mayor Petzold-Schick.

Since 1995, I have visited the grave of my great-grandparents Gutmann and Hannah Straus in Bruchsal on the Jewish part of the municipal cemetery almost every year.

Shortly before I learned of their still existing grave here in Bruchsal in 1995, I had found my mother's brothers again in Brazil.

My grandfather Dr. Heinrich Straus was born in Bruchsal, Schlosstraße 3 and had to emigrate to Brazil via Switzerland in 1938. Unfortunately, I was never able to meet him, as he never returned to Germany. My mother said little about him or her brothers, but we three siblings knew a lot of what she had to go through in the time until 1945.

Deeply touched, I stood at the grave of my great-grandparents in 1995, overjoyed that there was a grave I could visit. I am very grateful to the city of Bruchsal for this.

Since 1995, a lot has changed for me. Little by little I learned how big the Straus family once was and that Bruchsal was their home.

In recent years, I also met new family members, such as P. Odenheimer from Basel, who is my great cousin and one of us four petitioners.

With the two petitioners S. Grosz from London and R. Schrag from New York, two other descendants of Jews from Bruchsal participate and bring a large number of letters through their families.

Not surprisingly, the families of the four of us petitioners are all spread around the world.

Last fall, I was surfing the internet and came across the site: "House of the History and Culture of the Jews of Baden." The idea of telling the world about the history and culture of the Jews of Baden immediately fascinated me. Quickly the idea was born to contact other descendants and exchange ideas about a House of the History and Culture of the Jews of Baden.

It seems so very important to us that this long and fruitful period of shared culture between Jews and Christians should be brought to the fore again much more. The immense suffering happened and to deny and forget it is not possible. But that is precisely why it is so important to remember the time before 1933 and to offer future generations an opportunity to learn about the common history before 1933.

We, the descendants of the Jews of Bruchsal and the surrounding area, are proud of the long and very often successful history of our ancestors.

It is so important to tell about the fruitful and harmonious time before 1933. We would like to have a place of remembrance, a place where visitors from all over the world can learn about the history and culture of the Jews of Baden.

As future generations learn more about German-Jewish history before 1933, the life achievements of the Jews of that time will be honored and the great hope is that people will join hands in peace and mutual trust.

The House of History is not intended to be a memorial, a place of remembrance of the Holocaust, but to show the many exciting lives of the Jewish families of that time.

So we, P. Odenheimer from Basel, R. Schrag from New York, S. Grosz from London and I got together and each used his contacts to call for this idea. The result surprised us immediately. Very quickly we received over 100 individual letters, with a total of 131 people signing. 19 people from Germany, another 13 from Europe, 42 people from the USA, 15 people from Israel and 38 people from South America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand signed the petition.

Who are these people, where are their roots? Most of them are descendants of Jews from Bruchsal: Descendants of Otto and Emma Oppenheimer, the author of the local anthem "de Brusler Dorscht", after him the Otto Oppenheimer Square was named, descendants of the last rabbi Dr. Siegfried Grzymisch and his wife Carola, descendants of the great family Fuchs, whose relative was the composer and architect Richard Fuchs. Descendants of the families Schrag, Sicher, Majerowitz, Löb, Hirsch, Bär, Heinsheimer, Straus, Bravmann and Marum...

I would like to read you three texts [from the petition], which I quote verbatim:

Text 1 from S.G. from England:

„Bruchsal has done much to remember its Jewish citizens who were victims of the Holocaust. But the story of the Jewish community in Baden is much more than one of victimhood. Families like mine, and those of the other petitioners, can trace their roots in Baden over centuries; and those families formed a significant part of Baden’s society. The proposal for a House of Jewish History and Culture is therefore not just a memorial to those individuals and families destroyed or dispersed in the 1930s and 1940s; it will be a place which records and celebrates the Jewish contribution to Baden’s history.“

Text 2 from E.S. from Israel:

„Thank you for sending me the information about your plans for developing the reclaimed site of the former Bruchsal synagogue, which my family attended before their deportation to Gurs eighty years ago.

I think the proposed „Haus der jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur von Baden“ is of the utmost importance for the town and the entire region. It memorializes the Jews of Bruchsal and Baden, who otherwise would be eliminated from collective memory, just as the Nazis wished. It will serve a vital tool for educating future generation about the history of Baden Jews, which goes back more than a thousand years. It will educate the population about the consequences of racial hatred and state discrimination of German citizens from ethnic minorities. It will do something, however small, to mitigate the injustice of the destruction of the synagogue on Reichskristallnacht.

I urge the city mayor and the local and regional authorities to give priority to this project, especially now, at a time of resurgence of intolerance and on the first anniversary of the murders at the Halle synagogue. This project could contribute to the resistance to racism and the campaign for public awareness of intolerance in general“

Text 3 from J.R. from USA:

"It would be an honor to be counted among the signatories. During the time I spent with my family in Bruchsal at the town's gracious invitation, I reconnected with my family's deep roots in the region. It is truly meaningful to my family that Bruchsal has chosen to remember and, in doing so, to avoid the mistakes of the past and provide for a more prosperous and just future. My family and I wholeheartedly support the petition. We can think of no better place for the House of History of Baden Jews than at the former site of the synagogue in Bruchsal, which served as the spiritual home of the town's Jewish community for so many years. Reborn as a place of meeting, remembrance, and fellowship for all of Bruchsal's people as well as the descendants of Bruchsal's Jewish diaspora, the site of Bruchsal's old synagogue can once again help bring people together in the hope of understanding and mutual betterment."

Many of these descendants have visited Bruchsal in recent years, and you will see from their contributions the attachment they feel to the hometown of their ancestors.

We have not received one negative or criticizing letter! But all of them emphasize the great desire to be able to come to Bruchsal and to be able to remember, to exchange and to inform themselves in the House of History and Culture.

This petition was prepared by us in February/March of this year, not knowing when and how the city would decide. All the greater is our joy now that you, Mayor Petzold-Schick and the City Council of Bruchsal have decided in favor of this place of remembrance of the Jews of Bruchsal and Baden.

Some things are not yet understandable to us by the plans published so far, but this is usual when you are at the beginning of such an extensive project.

We, the descendants of the Jews of Bruchsal would be pleased if we were included in the further planning up to the realization. I am sure that together we will create an important institution for Bruchsal, which will shine far into the world.

Thank you for your attention.