

Bach Family

From Dan Rottenberg, *Finding Our Fathers : A Guidebook to Jewish Genealogy*, Dan Rottenberg (New York City : Random House, 1977), page 163 :

Information provided by Wilbur Hanson Kalb

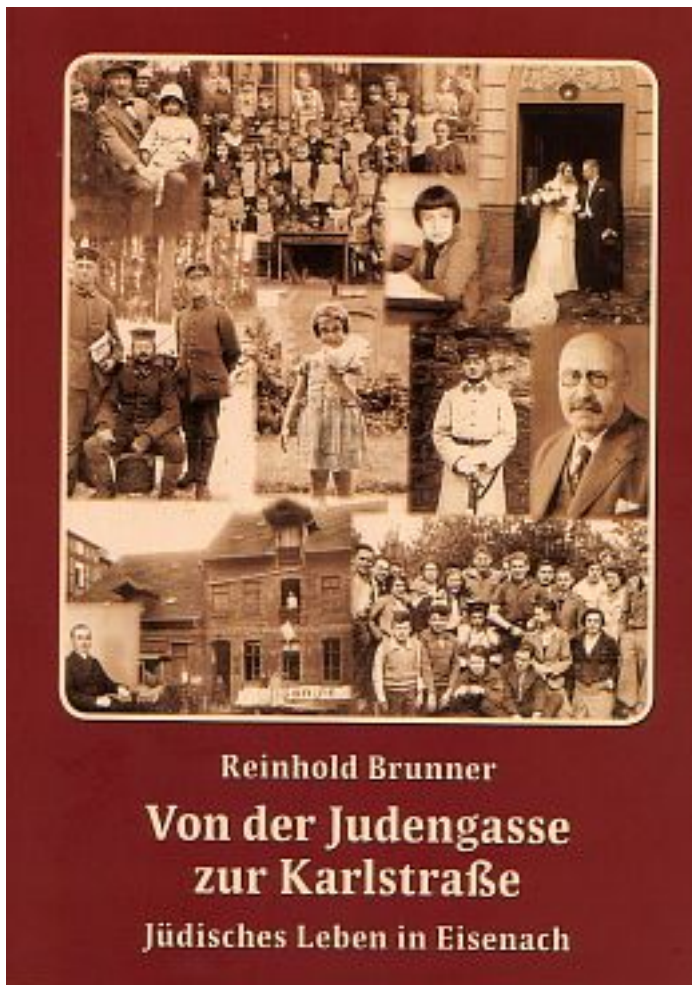
BACH (Also *Bache, Back*) — Ashkenazic family name found in Germany, Bohemia and Hungary [According to Herr Peter Bach, Jr, Johann Sebastian Bach's own family lived in Bohemia for a generation before moving to Eisenach. Its old hometown, Janegg, is now Jeníkov, Czechya, but it's across the border from Saxony.], 18th and 19th cent. LBI [Leo Baeck Institute in New York City] has family trees beginning 1540, 1726 and 1730; AJA [America Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio] has a family tree beginning 1854. JE [*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 volumes, 1901 - 1906, from Funk & Wagnalls] has several biographies. Related to JAFFE.

Bach is also an obsolete German word for “wild (female) pig”, according to Heinrich W. and Eva H. Guggenheim, *Jewish Family Names and Their Origins : An Etymological Dictionary* (Hoboken, New Jersey : Ktav Publishing House, 1992), page 50. Page 51 adds that **Bach**, in its current German incarnation, is also **Patak** in Hungarian. **Pataki** is well known as a Jewish surname, just like **Potok**, the Russian version. The Czech equivalent would be **Zátoka** but Janegg / Jeníkov is in the Sudetenland so Bach would be more likely as a Jewish surname. Nearby Moravia has a diminutive — **Bachel** (*Ibid.*, page 51).

From Wilbur Hanson Kalb:

If Matthaues Bach were really Jewish, would there be any Jews in Eisenach during his lifetime? I got to wonder about that, so I took a look around and found enough information in English (and German) for the answer and it's a no.

From 1458 to 1804, only a very few Jews were allowed to live in Eisenach and then only with a special permit from the authorities. One of them was a servant of Johann Ernst, the Duke of Saxe-Eisenach and the brother of our own Johann Casimir, and, around 1625, he came whenever the Duke decided to live in Eisenach. In 1725, there was a Jewish family in the town but its surname is not known. However, at least since 1510, the Jews were allowed to come to Eisenach and trade ; they just could not be allowed to live there.



[German, “From Judengasse to Karlstrasse : Jewish Life in Eisenach”. The author, Reinhold Brunner, is the city historian of Eisenach. He wrote several books about his city, including the *Geschichte der Stadt Eisenach*. Just last year, he released a paperback about Eisenach’s memorial stones about the local victims of the Holocaust. So he would know all about Luther and the Bachs.]

And here’s the long version of the story of the Jewish presence in Eisenach :

Hermann I, the Landgrave of Thuringia (reigned 1190 – 1217), is reputed to have asked the Jews to come to Eisenach and build their houses close to the market square but the first evidence of the Jewish presence was only in 1235. The Jews lived in the Judengasse [“Alley of the Jews”, now Karlstrasse] in the middle of Eisenach and they had a synagogue there. They also had a cemetery east of the city, between the roads to Langensalza and Gotha. Their actual

number is not known but it was probably small because, during the Middle Ages, Eisenach had only 4,000 to 5,000 residents. One of them was a famous poet, Jehiel ben Jaakov (living 1235), who wrote poems for the synagogues. Many of them made their living in trade. They worked as retailers, merchants and cattle dealers. In 1283 the City Council made allowances in the city's laws for the Jews. In 1343, a part of the Judengasse burned down so the homeless Jews, along with their synagogue, were moved to nearby Loebergasse. But the goodwill turned sour during the Black Death. The Jews were accused of poisoning the town's wells so, in 1348 and 1349, they were driven out of the city. But a few years later they returned to Loebergasse and one of them was mentioned in 1375. In 1418 they made ten payments of their taxes. But forty years later, in 1458, they were told to leave and never come back. Eisenach did not see any more of them until the 1850s, when the Jewish Emancipation made it possible for them to come back. Unless, of course, your Bachs stayed in the closet the whole time!

But an online paper by Saskia Schulz, "Traces of Jewish Life in Thuringia", notes in English and German that, in the 16th Century, Jews were allowed to trade in Eisenach but not to live in it and, in the 18th Century, there were Jews living there under special protection. The same paper also adds that Hildburghausen's own Jewish community was founded at the end of the 13th Century by the exiles from England and France. The Max-Michaelis-Strasse in Hildburghausen is named after the wealthy Jewish merchant.

My sources are four websites. The first two are in English — East German Synagogues and Destroyed German Synagogues and Communities, which both used two German sources for the information — the Alemannia Judaica website and the 2008 book by Klaus-Dieter Aliche, Lexikon der jüdischen Gemeinde in Deutschen Sprachraum [Dictionary of the Jewish Communities in the German-Speaking Lands]. The Lexikon is also available online, in German only, as Aus der Geschichte der jüdischen Gemeinden im deutschen Sprachraum and it is one of my two German sources, along with the Alemannia Judaica.

Eisenach's number of people during the Middle Ages is from the English Wikipedia. In comparison, in the Modern Age, Eisenach had 16,000 in 1875 and 30,000 in 1900 while the Jews had only 287 in 1877 and 440 in 1905. That's an average of about 1.6%. If it were to apply to Eisenach's total, 4,000 – 5,000, from the Middle Ages, Eisenach would get between 64 and 80 Jews. Of course, that would be too many to the Christians in those days!

Since your ancestor was once a Mintmaster, you may be interested to know that, when Herr Aliche wrote about Eisenach, he claimed that, in the Late Middle Ages, a coin from Eisenach did not show the town's coat-of-arms or its sovereign. It showed a Jew's hat!