

A Jewish Family Visit Their Relatives in Gilserberg/Hesse (1928-1931)

Abstract

When 16mm film cameras came on the consumer market in 1923, amateurs and hobbyists began shooting footage of family gatherings, vacations, and scenes of domestic life. These scenes, captured by Salomon (Sally) Isenberg while he and his family visited relatives in the rural village of Gilserberg (in the state of Hesse), offer a rare glimpse into Jewish life in a rural region of central Germany, which stood in stark contrast to that of the majority of German Jews at the time, who lived in urban areas. A Jewish community had existed in Gilserberg since the eighteenth century, and it numbered around 70 people in the late 1920s, about 15% of the village's population. Isenberg made sure to get some frames of both Gilserberg's Jewish cemetery and its synagogue. He also trained his camera on village and farming life in general, as well as on his family and that of his relatives, the Sterns. Footage showed the coexistence of modern conveniences, such as a motorcycle and a Mercedes automobile, alongside the use of animal power and the gathering of hay by rake. It revealed the fashions of the time, too, such as dressing boys in sailor outfits. The Isenbergs, who lived in a larger city, sported slightly different clothing and hairstyles than their rural relatives, but everyone dressed up for social gatherings, such as for weekend afternoon strolls. A soccer game between boys near the end of this sequence also revealed the sport's ubiquitous presence by the interwar period, albeit almost always for boys only. The Isenberg family moved between Germany, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein in the interwar period, before eventually immigrating to the United States in 1938.

Source

Source: Isenberg family visits relatives in Gilserberg, USHMM: RG-60.1484. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Mark Isenberg.

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