

# A TRIBUTE

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THE OBERMAYER GERMAN JEWISH HISTORY AWARDS

PRESENTED TO

HANS-EBERHARD BERKEMANN

IRENE CORBACH

HEINRICH DITTMAR

CARLA & ERIKA PICK

GERHARD JOCHEM & SUSANNE RIEGER

ABGEORDNETENHAUS, BERLIN

JANUARY 27, 2003

# HONORING THE WINNERS


*The Obermayer German Jewish History Awards were established to pay tribute to Germans who have made significant voluntary contributions to preserving the Jewish history, culture, and material remains in their local communities. A large number of outstanding nominations for the awards were received from throughout the world, especially from Jews who had a keen appreciation for the dedication and contributions of these German citizens. The jury, composed of individuals with broad familiarity with these types of activities and projects in Germany, selected the five prize winners.*

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# OBERMAYER GERMAN JEWISH HISTORY AWARDS

## A WORTHY TRADITION

his year marks the third annual presentation of awards that were created to honor the past and enrich the future. German life was once filled with contributions made by Jewish scholars, writers and artists. Music, science, literature and architecture were often collaborative efforts that brought diverse talents together. The collective history of Germans and Jews was profoundly connected and served to benefit the world. The Nazi regime and its obliteration of the German Jewish community ended a long period of collaboration and mutual trust.

However, many German citizens, ranging from academics to those working in business and professions, did not let go of their interest and commitment to Jewish history and culture. Many worked at great personal cost to preserve and reconstruct aspects of Jewish life, which had contributed to the cultural richness of their lives and the lives of their respective communities. These individuals have researched, reconstructed, written about and rebuilt an appreciation of Jewish culture that will enrich life today and in the future.

In many cases, diverse individuals, without thought of reward, have helped raise awareness about a once vibrant community. Their ongoing efforts pay tribute to the importance of Jewish subject matter and its value to German society as a whole.

Many volunteers have devoted years of effort to such projects, but few have been recognized or honored for their efforts. The German Jewish Community History Council and its cosponsors believe it is particularly important for Jews from other parts of the world to be aware of this ongoing work. The annual Obermayer German Jewish History Awards provide an opportunity for the Jewish community worldwide to acknowledge German citizens who have rekindled the spark of Jewish thought that once existed in Germany. The award winners have dedicated themselves to rebuilding destroyed institutions and ideals. Their achievements reflect a personal connection to Jewish history and a willingness to repair a small corner of the world.



*Awardee*

## HANS-EBERHARD BERKEMANN

Bad Sobernheim, Rheinland-Pfalz

*Nominated by Margrit Schneeweiss, Vilsbiburg, Germany; Kathrin Krakauer, Clinton, MA;  
Margot Lebach, N. Andover, MA; Deborah Pressman, Dennis, MA;  
and 10 other descendants of the Marum family*

Normally, Hans-Eberhard Berkemann is a soft-spoken man. But when his principles are violated, the preacher's son raises his voice and fights—even if it takes more than 20 years to be heard. One of his most closely held beliefs is that all places of worship are sacrosanct. So when Berkemann, now 59, found out that general reconstruction in his hometown of Bad Sobernheim meant to claim a former synagogue, his reaction was instinctive. "It was absolutely against the values I was taught that a house of God—whether it was being used or not—would be torn down," he said.

Though he was often an army of one, he used all manner of strategies to prevent the synagogue's destruction. He twisted people's arms, butted heads with community leaders, recruited allies and pestered officials into legal action. And Bad Sobernheim's building is not the only one he has saved. In 1993, he helped rescue a synagogue in neighboring Staudernheim. He also has been involved in other activities: co-publishing a magazine on Jewish history, organizing exhibitions and commemoration ceremonies, and documenting every gravestone—names, dates, inscriptions and familial relations included—in Bad Sobernheim's Jewish cemetery, as well as eight others.

Berkemann impressed many people not only with what he achieved, but how. "He gets furious when he thinks things are not right," says Margrit Schneeweiss, whose family once lived in Bad Sobernheim. "He doesn't have long discussions; he acts." Mayor Hans-Georg Janneck describes him as "charming and persistent, just like you have to be if you really want to be successful."

Courage of conviction was drilled into Berkemann by his family. His grandfather opposed the Nazis and was beaten for it in 1933. His father preached against them and narrowly escaped arrest by the Gestapo. "For your convictions, you have to do something," Berkemann says. "You must not hide when facing opposition."

He was always there when help was needed.

After a local Jewish cemetery was repeatedly vandalized, Berkemann—an expert in the preservation of monuments—oversaw its restoration. In 1992, when a street was going to be built across an unused part of the cemetery, he successfully fought against it. A year later, in Staudernheim, he found out that the synagogue was going to be auctioned off. He bought it himself for 10,000 DM because a local preservation committee didn't have enough money. "It was a chance you get only once in 50 years," Berkemann remembers. He sold it to the committee once it had raised enough money.

Berkemann, who teaches elementary school students, leads tours through local Jewish landmarks. Still, his greatest efforts have been reserved for the Bad Sobernheim synagogue. After World War II, it fell into disrepair and was used to store furniture and groceries. In 1981, he heard that the building would be torn down.

For two years, he pressed authorities to declare the synagogue a protected monument, all the while worrying that it would be destroyed. "For some time, I went every morning to the building," he recalls. "I wanted to stop the cranes." He finally convinced them, but it took a town lawsuit against the owner to make it happen. In 1989, he and others founded a "synagogue *verein*," a committee for the preservation of the synagogue, which pressed for the town to purchase the building despite some opposition by Bad Sobernheim officials.

In March 2002, after two decades of struggle, the synagogue *verein* signed a contract with the town allowing the organization to use the Bad Sobernheim building. After raising money to restore it, the committee plans to make it a kind of community center rather than a traditional museum. Berkemann wants it to be a place for both Jews and non-Jews, with concerts, lectures and a library in addition to documentation of Bad Sobernheim's Jewish culture. "A museum would admit it's all over," he says. "I want the house to be full of life."



## *Awardee*

# IRENE CORBACH

Cologne, Northrhine-Westfalia

*Nominated by Gerti L. Pena, Los Angeles, CA; Fanny Englard, Moshav Beth Chanan, Israel; Max and Marianne Strassman, Palo Alto, CA; Gisela Davidsohn, Rishon Letzion, Israel; Anita Steinacher, Los Altos, CA; Jeanette Rosenberg, London, England; and Alice Turner, Overath, Germany*

Without Irene and Dieter Corbach, the name “Erich Klibansky” would have faded away. A teacher in the 1930s at the Jawne Gymnasium—a Jewish high school in Cologne—Klibansky saved at least 130 children from the Nazis. Class by class, he sent them to England as part of the Kindertransport. He was killed in Minsk after being deported there.

Klibansky’s is just one name among dozens that the Corbachs have kept alive. Starting in the mid-1980s, the couple used their spare time to research the history of the many Jewish schools in Cologne, as well as deportations from the city. After Dieter’s death in 1994, Irene, now 65, continued the work on her own. No slow-moving bureaucracy, unwilling politician or lack of financial means has stopped her. “Due to her work, I met people whom I had thought lost,” says Fritz Bauchwitz, one of the students rescued by Klibansky.

Motivated by a strong sense of responsibility, the Corbachs—he a religion teacher, she with a small publishing business—had long promoted Christian-Jewish relations through their church. But about 20 years ago, Irene met a man at a conference who said that his father had once taught at a Jewish school in Cologne, this one on Luetzow Street. “I was shocked,” she remembers. “It could only have been the one that I had attended as a trade school.” None of her teachers had ever mentioned that part of the school’s history, she says. She decided she didn’t want other students to be ignorant of its past.

That was the starting point for the Corbachs’ research. They searched for contemporary witnesses, went to Israel, and soon made contact with people “who could still sing Cologne songs,” Irene Corbach says. They got more involved as they continued discovering Klibansky’s former pupils. “Today, she keeps in contact with almost all

of the survivors from the [Jawne] high school,” Fritz Bauchwitz says. Corbach’s e-mail account now includes 700 people worldwide, all of whom receive a newsletter from her once a year. “Through my work, I’m so familiar with their stories—it’s just as if they were relatives of mine,” she says.

The exhibition “The Jawne of Cologne and a book by the same name—written by Dieter and researched by both—tells of Jewish schools in the city and about the deeds of Erich Klibansky. Places and streets have been named after him and other important personalities. A Lion of Judah fountain engraved with the names of the deported children commemorates where the Jawne School once stood. Another book begun by Dieter Corbach and finished by Irene illuminates the fate of 7,000 murdered Cologne Jews.

Irene Corbach herself has organized numerous commemoration ceremonies and discussions with contemporary witnesses about the former Jewish communities in Germany, and she serves as caretaker of the Jewish cemeteries in Cologne. Friends say she is also a determined researcher who has helped many to find out more about their families. “In an old-fashioned way, she goes directly to people when they need help,” says Helga Fritz. “She doesn’t think about it a long time or make long discussions. She just does it.”

Corbach relates her experiences doing research in a calm, quiet way. But her manner masks an enduring persistence that runs through her work, as well. Three years ago, Cologne officials rejected her proposal to erect a monument in the Muelheim district that would commemorate the former Jewish inhabitants of that area. Yet she has continued writing letters and prodding officials. “Those politicians will be out of office some day,” she says, “and I already have 80 names for the monument.”



*Awardee*

## HEINRICH DITTMAR

Alsfeld, Hesse

*Nominated by William C. and Judith Freund, Millington, NJ;  
and Michael Maynard, London, England*

Heinrich Dittmar began asking questions when asking questions was taboo. It was the early 1970s in Alsfeld, a small town in Hesse where Jews had once lived. “I squeezed people. ‘There were lots of Jews here—where are they now?’” the 68-year-old remembers asking. “They just replied, ‘I don’t want to talk about it.’”

But Dittmar did talk about it. He collected material bit by bit, piece by piece. Through three decades, he assembled the history of a generations-long partnership that had existed between Jews and other Hessians. As a local politician, he pressed for the repair and maintenance of the 16 Jewish cemeteries in the region and worked with the Alsfeld Museum to exhibit his material.

These days, he is a “central figure” for Jewish history in the Vogelsberg region, says Joachim Legatis, a journalist inspired by Dittmar to pursue Jewish historical work. Dittmar, who worked as a special-education teacher, arranges guided tours and lectures for school classes, and he is responsible for a yearly *Kristallnacht* commemoration ceremony. He also publishes books and articles in local papers and stays in contact with survivors. He brings this energy to his other pursuits, whether history, the church community, football clubs or local politics. “Contacting and working with people, like in his guided tours, organizing projects—that is really his world,” says his daughter, Christiane Sattler.

About 25 years ago, Dittmar found a dusty stack of documents in a corner of the town’s archive. “They were about the Jews of Alsfeld,” he said. “They had been separated from the others.” *The History of the Jews of Alsfeld*, a book that he researched and helped write, describes how closely Germans and Jews in the region had lived since the 17th century. (The relationship was so close, the two groups had even influenced one another’s mourning rituals.) He wanted to send a volume of his book to every survivor he could

find, regardless of where they lived. Town officials hesitated, so Dittmar decided to pay for postage himself. “My work is dedicated to the people who never got a gravestone,” he says.

The news of his efforts in Alsfeld eventually reached Arthur Strauss, who had been born in the town but emigrated to South Africa in the 1930s. After the war, Strauss went to Frankfurt, but he says Dittmar’s work motivated him to return to the place where his grandparents are buried. “Without him, there would have been no reason to build up relations in Alsfeld again,” Strauss says. Because of Dittmar, Strauss reconnected with a cousin, friends from his youth and schoolmates, among others.

When Dittmar started his research, his fascination with the German-Jewish past was inspired by simple curiosity. He even used family vacations to visit historic sites or do research for friends. But it quickly grew deeper. “When I saw how grateful and happy people were that I could help find out something,” he says, “that really gave me a tremendous pleasure.”

His pleasure has been tempered by difficulties, however. While open hostility was rare, Dittmar vividly recalls the time when researching German-Jewish history met with resistance at every turn. “One day, I came to use a village’s archive,” he says. “When I mentioned that my research was about Jews, suddenly the door key was lost.” But problems like that one didn’t stop him. Getting past them just required patience, something Dittmar learned from nearly 30 years of teaching special-education students.

Today, his tracing of the past continues. For his latest project, he interviewed an Alsfeld Jew who shared memories about growing up there. Dittmar next wants to talk to other Germans and juxtapose the stories on video. “He is never resting,” his daughter says. “His brain always needs new nutrition.”



## *Awardee*

# CARLA & ERIKA PICK

Borken, Northrhine-Westfalia

*Nominated by Manfred Gans, Leonia, NJ; Mechthild Schoeneberg, Borken, Germany; Herbert Jonas, St. Louis Park, MN; Gershon Kaddar, Ramat Gan, Israel; and Fredi Kaddar, Netanya, Israel*

Carla and Erika Pick work with the precision of German bureaucrats, but they radiate the warmth of a pair of favorite aunts. At 75, the twins are the oldest members of the Arbeitskreis (the Committee for Jewish Life in Gemen and Borken); they are also the engine that helps the group run.

On behalf of the Arbeitskreis, the Picks invite ex-Borken Jews to visit the town's schools, where they talk about their experiences in Nazi Germany and about Jewish life and culture. The sisters, who taught at the same school for 12 years, keep in contact with survivors through frequent letters and greeting cards. They have also built an extensive archive of interviews, family photos and stories. "They move heaven and hell just to find out details," says committee member Mechthild Schoeneberg. "They bring to light unbelievable things."

The twins may push the engine along, but they are part of a five-person team. Social scientist Schoeneberg, 42, and historian Thomas Ridder, 44, contribute in-depth knowledge to the Arbeitskreis and do most of the archival research. Maria Wolters-Hoeyng, a 56-year-old business executive, is in contact with banks and businesses. She is responsible for fund-raising and organizing.

In 1988, Schoeneberg, who had been active in local politics, was asked to organize an exhibition for the 50th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. Erika and Carla Pick joined the 12-person committee working on the event. Until then, the retired teachers were just known for a puppet collection they had in the town museum. "Originally, we thought we might do the writing work, summaries and such things," Erika says. Carla adds: "During Nazi times, we were pretty young, but we thought we could talk about what we remembered as

contemporary witnesses."

More than 10,000 visitors ultimately saw the exhibition, which goes back to the 14th century. Five committee members decided to continue the work and now make up the Arbeitskreis. "We thought: 'If we stop now, all of our research will be lost again,'" Ridder says.

Since then, the group has added a guide to the exhibition, titled "The Life and Fate of the Jews in Borken." The members have developed a program for local schools that teaches about Jewish history, culture and religion through a workbook and a suitcase with ceremonial artifacts. And at least once a year, survivors come to the schools to tell their stories.

"It is much more vivid if somebody recounts how he was forced by the [Nazis] to stand on the street in his sleeping clothes, trembling from the cold, rather than just explaining during *Kristallnacht* that there were attacks on Jews," Ridder says.

Ex-Borkener Gershon Kaddar has traveled from Israel to speak. "After World War II, I felt that I had settled my accounts with the Germans, and I had no desire to even visit," he says. "The Arbeitskreis had a serious impact on Borken and on the capability of our families to reconnect to our historic background."

The committee as a whole is today concentrating on maintaining contact with survivors and collecting information about their families. It is unclear what will happen when the last of the contemporary witnesses can no longer return, however. The survivors are getting older; only five have been able to come back in recent years. But the Pick sisters—and the rest of the Arbeitskreis—are collecting ideas to continue the exchange with descendants.



## *Awardee*

# GERHARD JOCHEM & SUSANNE RIEGER

Nuremberg, Bavaria

*Nominated by H. Peter Sinclair, Middlesex, England; Micheline Gutman, Paris, France; Willie Glaser, Quebec, Canada; Michael Bernet, New Rochelle, NY; Gerard & Nicole Langlois-Cerf, Paris, France; and Martha Lev-Zion, Israel*

More than 200 people visit Susanne Rieger and Gerhard Jochem in Nuremberg each day, but the couple never sees most of them. Still, together they make plans, assemble projects and occasionally exchange jokes.

Jochem and Rieger's hospitality is extended through their bilingual RIJO Web site. It is a kind of meeting place, a platform for German-Jewish interaction that includes digital memorials, resources for learning about the Nazi era, and a wealth of history. Work on the site often determines the couple's schedule in the evenings, on weekends and even during vacations. "I always call it my night shift," Rieger says.

Jochem, 36, is a city archivist. Rieger works as a civil servant during the day; she demurs when asked her age. In recent years, the two have steadily researched the local history of Jews and other Nazi-era victims in Munich, Fuerth, Nuremberg and elsewhere in Bavaria. They have contributed material to various databases and worked on Jewish genealogical and historical projects with people throughout the world. Based on their contacts with survivors, they promote the commemoration of the past in their hometown, lobbying for memorials, inspiring films and organizing discussions. They also fought for reparations for forced laborers by cooperating with victims' organizations and helping to put pressure on local businesses.

Many who contact Jochem and Rieger get extensive help. But they only catch a glimpse of their personalities. Michael Bernet, who was born in Nuremberg and now lives in New York, describes Jochem as a person with little tolerance for irrelevant social niceties but with a mix of dedication and irreverence. Fuerth native Willie Glaser, 82, has worked extensively with the couple on histories and compilations now posted to the Web site. "It is hard to single out a characteristic," says the Canadian resident. "They are very devoted to the German-Jewish cause."

Jochem and Rieger are clearly uneasy when attention is on them personally. They prefer to talk about their work on the RIJO site, at [www.rijo-research.de](http://www.rijo-research.de). In 1997, Jochem started contacting survivors from the Nazi era for a volume to memorialize Nuremberg-area victims. While conducting research, he uncovered more biographical material and developed more ideas than could be used in the final product. Impressed by Gerhard's work, Susanne began gathering material, as well.

Eventually, the two decided that the best way to make the information available was to put it on the Internet. They had no official backing, but Rieger says there are advantages to tackling such a project. "We are independent, we can write what we want to and we have no deadlines," she explains.

The Web site does not use sophisticated design. But the substance is there—in the early histories of Jewish communities in Bavaria, in maps of the formerly Jewish sections of Cham and Nuremberg, in the addresses of federal and municipal archives catalogued for researchers, and in the personal experiences posted by survivors. Willie Glaser, for example, writes of his family's life in Fuerth in the early 1940s. He also has detailed his experiences during World War II as a German-born soldier in the Polish army. "I always longed to make a written record of my memories," he says. "Gerhard Jochem gave me this chance."

In fact, the Web site—and the resources available through it—has had a profound impact on some visitors. Bernet considers it a way to experience again a place he remembers that no longer exists. "I am back in my home, my school and my synagogue," he says. "I have made friends with family members who died 100 years ago, I walked the old streets (many of which I still remember), I hear the old sounds and I smell the old smells."



## BOARD MEMBERS AND JURY

### German Jewish Community History Council

**ERNST CRAMER** is chairman of the Axel Springer Foundation. Born in Augsburg in 1913, he managed—after a stay at Buchenwald concentration camp—to immigrate to the United States in 1939. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II and later with the American Military Government in Germany. Since 1958, he has been in top management and journalist positions at the Axel Springer Publishing Group, the largest European news enterprise.

**KAREN FRANKLIN** is director of the Judaica Museum in Riverdale, N.Y., and director of the Family Research Program at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York City. She is former president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies and past chair of the Council of American Jewish Museums. Mrs. Franklin currently serves on the board of the American Association of Museums (AAM), the first director of a Jewish museum to be elected to this position. She also serves on the AAM Ethics Committee.

**WERNER LOVAL** was born in Bamberg and at 13 escaped to England with the Kindertransport. He then lived in Ecuador and the United States before immigrating to Israel in 1954. Until 1966, he served in the Israeli diplomatic service in the United States and Latin America. He is a founder and director of Israel's largest real estate brokerage company; former president of Har-El, Israel's first Reform Synagogue; and a governor both of Hebrew University of Jerusalem and of B'nai Brith World Centre. In 1999, he was named an Honorary Citizen of Jerusalem. He is a frequent visitor to Germany.

**ERNEST KALLMANN** has been writing family histories within a broader historical perspective, especially with the Cercle de Genealogie Juive, Paris. He was born in Mainz, escaped to France in 1933, and has lived there since (except 1942-45), primarily as a telecommunications and computer management consultant.

**WALTER MOMPER**, President of the House of Representatives of Berlin and historian, as represented by Hendrik Kuebler. Walter Momper has been active in city politics and was Governing Mayor of Berlin when the wall came down in 1989. Kuebler has been in the Referat Protokoll since 1992.

**SARA NACHAMA** was raised in Israel, graduated from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, moved to Berlin at the time of her marriage, and has worked for German television doing documentary films. From 1992 to 1999, she did volunteer work for the annual Berlin Jewish Cultural Festival (Juedischen Kulturtag). She is currently the vice president of the support group for the Berlin Jewish hospital. Since 2001, Mrs. Nachama has been the executive director of the Berlin branch of Touro College (NY).

**ARTHUR OBERMAYER** is a high-tech entrepreneur in the Boston area who has been involved in many philanthropic activities. He is an officer and board member of the American Jewish Historical Society, chaired the Genealogical Task Force of the Center for Jewish History, started a Jewish museum in his ancestral German town of Creglingen, was on the board of the Internet genealogy supersite JewishGen, and initiated its German component.



## SPONSORS

### **GERMAN JEWISH COMMUNITY HISTORY**

**COUNCIL.** This organization operates under Obermayer Foundation, Inc., which has sponsored and directed projects in various parts of the world. For example, in the former Soviet Union, it has produced about 20 popular television programs on market economics shown primarily on their principal TV channel (Ostankino). One series, which compared the conditions in Russia (1995) with those in Weimar Germany, alerted Russians to the potential dangers of fascism they faced. In Israel, the Obermayer Foundation published *American Editorial Review*, which provided Israelis with an indication of how and why American news media reacts to events in the Middle East. In the U.S., it supports the Black-Jewish Economic Roundtable, which catalyzes business interactions between these groups. In Germany, it has also provided the seed funding and continuing support for the Creglingen Jewish Museum.

### **OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF BERLIN.**

President Walter Momper sponsors these awards. For many years, the Parliament has been commemorating the German Holocaust Memorial Day of January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz Concentration Camp. The decision was made in the year 2000 to have this event as its principal observance.

### **GERMAN JEWISH SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF JEWISHGEN.**

This is an internet-based organization with more than 800 daily participants who are involved in German-Jewish genealogy. It has been operating since 1998 through its discussion group and web site at [www.jewishgen.org/gersig](http://www.jewishgen.org/gersig).

## PREVIOUS AWARDEES

This year's awardees join the ranks of these ten outstanding award winners from previous years:

**GISELA BLUME** restored a cemetery, prepared a Holocaust memorial and *Gedenkbuch*, and developed genealogical records in Fuerth, Middle Franconia

**GUENTER BOLL** uncovered lost objects and preserved history from a synagogue and cemetery records in the counties of Baden and Alsace

**OLAF DITZEL** researched history, preserved a cemetery and prepared exhibits in small towns in Thuringia

**JOACHIM HAHN** authored eight books on the history and culture of southwest Wuerttemberg

**OTTMAR KAGERER** restored vandalized tombstones in the Weissensee cemetery in Berlin

**MONICA KINGREEN** authored numerous books and articles and initiated exhibits in communities of Hesse

**JOSEF MOTSCHMANN** wrote books and restored a cemetery and synagogue in Upper Franconia

**GERNOT ROEMER** prepared books, articles and exhibits and educated youth on Schwabian life

**MORITZ SCHMID** restored a synagogue in Ichenhausen, Schwabia

**HEINRICH SCHREINER** planned, organized and raised funds for the restoration of a synagogue in Mainz, Rheinland-Pfalz

Profiles: Hendrik Klein Editors: Joel Obermayer, Lani Harac Other Content: Nancy Korman

