



A TRIBUTE

THE OBERMAYER GERMAN JEWISH HISTORY AWARDS

PRESENTED TO

GISELA BLUME

JOACHIM HAHN

OTTMAR KAGERER

GERNOT ROEMER

MORITZ SCHMID

BERLIN, NOVEMBER 2000

OBERMAYER GERMAN JEWISH HISTORY AWARDS

HONORING THE PAST



For hundreds of years Jewish life flourished throughout Germany. Music, art, literature and architecture were often collaborative efforts that brought both communities together. The collective history of Germans and Jews was intertwined, rich and of long standing. The Nazi regime and the final obliteration of the German Jewish community ended a long period of shared cultural endeavors.

However, many German scholars, writers, artisans and artists continue to demonstrate their interest and commitment to Jewish history and Jewish culture. Many work at great personal cost to preserve and reconstruct aspects of Jewish life that will provide a reminder of what had been lost in their communities. These individuals have researched, reconstructed, written and rebuilt an awareness of Jewish culture.

In many cases, both scholars and artisans have, without thought of reward, helped raise awareness about a once-vibrant culture. Their ongoing efforts pay tribute to the profound contribution of Jewish culture to German society.

Many volunteers have devoted countless hours to such projects, but few have been recognized or honored for their efforts. The German Jewish Community History Council believes it is particularly important for Jews from other parts of the world to recognize and encourage such work. By establishing the annual Obermayer German-Jewish History Award, the Jewish community worldwide, will pay tribute to German citizens who have raised awareness about the rich and vibrant Jewish life that once existed in Germany. The award winners have dedicated themselves to rebuilding destroyed institutions, within their own communities. Their achievements reflect a personal connection to Jewish history, and a willingness to repair a small corner of the world.

PRESENTING THE AWARD WINNERS

The Obermayer German Jewish History Award honors individuals who have made specific contributions as volunteers. The award winners were selected after extensive research by members of the Jewish community who are knowledgeable about these complex projects that increase their nation's understanding of Jewish history, while re-establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect. The awards, presented by the German Jewish Community History Council of the Obermayer Foundation, take place on November 13, 2000, during the official week of Jewish Culture in Berlin.

GISELA BLUME

ZIRNDORF, GERMANY

Nominated by Willie Glaser of Quebec, Canada; Frank, Helen, Werner and Sylvia Spiegel of Atlanta, Georgia; and Michael Bernet of New York

For the past ten years, Gisela Blume has devoted her life to preserving, memorializing, and continuing the interaction with the once flourishing Jewish community of Fuerth. Her character, energy and courage is an ongoing inspiration. The first overwhelming task that she undertook was the restoration of the old Jewish cemetery in Fuerth. The Nazis had removed all of the tombstones, and when they were returned, they were piled on top of each other, far from each of the gravesites. She scoured the world for plot plans, photos, family records, and other information that would allow her to properly replace the tombstones. After a few years of dedicated work, she was able to reconstruct the entire cemetery. She then went on to other important projects. Her searching of the archives for tombstone information led her to produce a database with vital records of more than 15,000 Fuerth Jews going back over 300 years.

Her next major project was the creation of a Holocaust memorial in the new Jewish cemetery inscribed with the names of 886 victims. In conjunction with the dedication of the Holocaust memorial, she prepared and had published a Gedenkbuch (a book of memory) which personalized each of these victims by including photos, biographies and stories about them which she obtained from relatives from all over the world. Her work has been a fitting tribute to those who died and a rich resource for those who wish to learn from history.

Ms. Blume continues to teach students and visiting groups about Jewish life in Fuerth, as it once was, and is regularly invited to the annual reunion in New York of Jews born in Fuerth, which this year attracted 500 people. She has become fluent in Hebrew, visited Israel many times, and has a thorough knowledge of Jewish customs and history.



JOACHIM HAHN

PLOCHINGEN, GERMANY

Nominated by Werner L. Frank of Los Angeles, California

Werner Frank and his family fled from Baden-Wuerttemberg to the U.S. in 1937. With the help of people like Joachim Hahn, he has identified over 23,000 relatives, many originating from that region and going back to the 13th century. Of the many Germans he has met, the one person who stands out is Dr. Joachim Hahn. The passion and commitment demonstrated by Dr. Hahn in bringing Jewish memories back to life, knows no bounds. He has written eight books dealing with Jewish history and culture in Baden-Wuerttemberg, including publications specifically relating to Stuttgart, Ludwigsburg, Kraichgau and Esslingen. He has contributed significantly to the enrichment of Jewish genealogy and research, while educating the German public.

Dr. Joachim Hahn was born in 1954 in

Stuttgart, studied Protestant theology at Goettingen and received his doctorate at Tuebingen in 1980. After teaching theology at Tuebingen, he became a minister at the Evangelische Landeskirche Wuerttembergs in Stuttgart, and in 1988 became town minister in Plochingen.

Dr. Hahn has searched endlessly to find Jews who were taken from their German homes, and has worked to link their post Holocaust stories to the events of the thirties and early forties. In the course of this work, he has become a well-known source for those seeking German Jewish genealogical data. Dr. Hahn has generously made his research available to any and all interested parties. Thus, he has established a considerable following among those Jews who seek information about family ties to Germany.



OTTMAR KAGERER

BERLIN, GERMANY

Nominated by Siegfried Jarosch of Berlin

Mr. Kagerer, a stonemason, worked with his hands, yet his conscience was never idle. He used his skills to support the values that were important to him. He helped to restore the Jewish graveyard in Berlin Weissensee, free of charge, after one hundred graves were demolished and smeared with Nazi symbols in October of 1999. This was not the first time that Mr. Kagerer had used his talents to make a profound statement. Yet, he wanted no special recognition for his good works. He wished to remain anonymous. After his company restored the tombstones, he began to receive serious threats. He ignored them. In November 1999 unidentified vandals entered his workplace and destroyed more than one hundred tombstones that he had created. It was a loss of about 80,000 DM for his company. The vandals were never found or prosecuted. The gravestones and the memorials lay side by side today, uprooted

and overturned, their desecration and simple inscriptions recalling the horrendous deaths of Jews in Germany. One tombstone marks the grave of Martin and Martha Dornblatt, who died in September 1942, “our unforgettable parents who fell victim to the Third Reich.” Another recorded the death of Amalie Guter in Berlin in October 1942, and memorialized her husband, David, “Killed in Theresienstadt,” the Nazi concentration camp. In Germany there are memorials to the more than 12,000 patriotic German Jews killed at the front fighting for their country during World War I. Just three decades later, six million European Jews were killed by the Nazis. Their tombstones are all that honor their history and their contributions to German culture, yet many have been destroyed. The work of Ottmar Kagerer involved great personal courage and pays enormous tribute to him and to those he wished to memorialize.



GERNOT ROEMER

AUGSBURG, GERMANY

Nominated by Arnold Erlanger of Melbourne, Australia

Since the early seventies, Gernot Roemer has dedicated himself to publishing a record of the contributions made by Jews in Schwaben to the cultural, political and economic life within that region of Germany. His research, writings and exhibitions span the entire province of Schwaben and reach a very large audience. For those like Arnold Erlanger, who experienced the Holocaust, Gernot Roemer's work is a sacred mission. His research and publications educate the German people about the past, while honoring those who died. His work is a living testament that can help educate future generations about the price of bigotry. From the time Gernot Roemer became editor of the important Augsburg daily, "Augsburg Allgemeine" in 1971 and even more so since his retirement in 1994, he used every opportunity to educate the public about the history and achievements of Jews in Schwaben. Through television documentaries, exhibitions, and articles,

he has become a keeper of history. He has never been deterred by the threats he received over the years. Gernot Roemer's historical accounts and his educational work in schools and with youth organizations detail the Holocaust and pre-Holocaust years in the Jewish communities of Schwaben. Many of his books and articles deal with the intense personal suffering of individual families. His repository of information has also helped many families to understand their family's experiences.

He has been of invaluable assistance to the Jewish Museum of Augsburg in the preparation of specific exhibits. Gernot Roemer took on the task of asking the City of Augsburg to put up a memorial with the names of the city's Holocaust victims. He has been conducting careful research for this project for over two years in order to insure that no name is omitted, since this stone tablet will be their only gravesite.



MORITZ SCHMID

ICHENHAUSEN, GERMANY

(Mr. Schmid passed away on August 3rd, 2000)

Nominated By Arnold Erlanger of Melbourne, Australia

Arnold Erlanger was born in 1916 in Ichenhausen. Right after Kristallnacht occurred, he was arrested and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp, released and later sent to a series of other camps including Auschwitz. During what was to have been his death march, he was liberated by the United States Army on April 23, 1945. In 1950 he emigrated to Australia.

Arnold Erlanger is proud to nominate Moritz Schmid who grew up in Ichenhausen, as well. Moritz was three years younger than Arnold Erlanger, but Arnold remembers the family vividly, particularly the elder Schmid, who vehemently refused to join the Nazi party. The father, Mr. Schmid was officially reprimanded for having contact with Jewish people. He was a man of great, personal courage.

His son, Moritz, eventually became Mayor of Ichenhausen and a member of the district government. Since his formative years had included extensive contact with Jewish people, Moritz Schmid

was very aware of the atrocities that occurred during the Nazi regime. When the German federal government decided to remove the remaining walls of the dilapidated Synagogue, Schmid realized that with the walls gone, nothing would ever be restored. In 1953 there was no money available for rebuilding synagogues, particularly in a community without Jews. He convinced the City Council to buy the building for the Fire-Brigade until money for restoration became available.

Moritz Schmid made it his lifetime ambition to restore the Synagogue in memory of the 164 out of 166 Jews deported from Ichenhausen who were subsequently murdered. This restoration project, which included the cemetery, honored his parents' wishes as well. Since the official opening of the "Haus der Begegnung" in December 1987, over 120,000 people have visited the rebuilt synagogue which is used for lectures, concerts, exhibits from Israel and a permanent exhibition entitled "Juden Auf dem Lande".



GERMAN JEWISH COMMUNITY HISTORY COUNCIL

is operating 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 regularly publishes *American Editorial Review*, which provides 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.

BOARD MEMBERS

KAREN FRANKLIN is the Director of the Judaica Museum in Riverdale, NY, 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.

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 (except 1942-45), primarily as a telecommunications and computer management consultant.

WERNER LOVAL was born in Bamberg and at 13 escaped to England with the Kindertransport. He then lived in Ecuador and the U.S. before immigrating to Israel in 1954. Until 1966 he served in the Israel diplomatic service in the U.S. 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, a Governor of Hebrew University and B'nai Brith World Centre. In 1999 he was named an Honorary Citizen of Jerusalem.

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 has done volunteer work for the annual Berlin Jewish cultural festival (Juedischen Kulturtag). Currently she is vice president of the support group for the Berlin Jewish hospital.

DR. ARTHUR OBERMAYER is a successful 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 internet genealogy supersite JewishGen, and initiated its German component.

PROFESSOR DR. MONIKA RICHARZ is the Director of the Institut für Geschichte der deutschen Juden (Institute for the History of German Jews) at the University of Hamburg. She is a world-renowned author and editor of numerous books and articles on German Jewish history.