

German Jewish History Award

Arthur Obermayer, Boston, MA, USA

Karen Franklin, New York City, NY, USA

Obermayer Award

She was in her mid-80s and had never before traveled by plane. Yet this arduous trip was worth the hardship. As Mrs. Schmid slowly made her way to the podium in Berlin to accept the German Jewish History Award for her late husband's lifetime of service to the former Jewish community of Ichenhausen, the audience was hushed and deeply moved.

Mrs. Schmid, the widow of Moritz Schmid, accepted one of five awards presented on 13 November 2000 in Berlin's historic Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue building. The event was the culmination of an idea that was set into motion months earlier.

On 30 June 2000 the award program was made public on GerSIG (the German Jewish Forum of the internet site, JewishGen) where it was announced that the German Jewish Community History Council of the Obermayer Foundation would be presenting awards to five Germans who have made extraordinary contributions to preserving the Jewish history, culture, heritage and structures of their own communities.

There are hundreds – perhaps thousands – of Germans who have volunteered enormous amounts of time or dedicated their lives to such activities. Jewish genealogists are the beneficiaries of their extensive work. The awards demonstrate our recognition and expression of our appreciation.

There was an outstanding response

to the Call for Nominations, and as a result, we received many nominations from all over the world. The committee selecting the awardees consisted of Karen Franklin (New York), Ernest Kallmann (Paris), Werner Loyal (Jerusalem), Sara Nachama (Berlin), Arthur Obermayer (Boston) and Monika Richarz (Hamburg).

The five awardees honored at the Berlin ceremony at Centrum Judaicum on November 13 were: **Gisela Blume** (Fuerth) -- nominated by Willie Glaser (Quebec), Frank, Helen, Werner and Sylvia Spiegel (Atlanta, Georgia), and Michael Bernet (New York); **Joachim Hahn** (Plochingen, near Stuttgart) -- nominated by Werner L. Frank (Los Angeles, California); **Ottmar Kagerer** (Berlin) -- nominated by Siegfried Jarosch (Berlin); **Gernot Roemer** (Augsburg) -- nominated by Arnold Erlanger (Melbourne, Australia); and **Moritz Schmid** (Ichenhausen, near Ulm) -- nominated by Arnold Erlanger (Melbourne, Australia).

The awardees received a framed certificate, an honorarium, recognition in national and local press, and travel to the award ceremony. The committee was surprised to realize that all of the nominators were Jews who were born in Germany. The selection process was extremely difficult; over 20 worthy nominees who were not selected for awards received Certificates of Commendation by mail.

The German speakers at the ceremony were Rabbi Andreas Nachama, President of the Berlin Jewish Community and Richard Fuehrer, the President of the Berlin

Bundestag. The international speakers were Karen Franklin, Rabbi Andrew Baker (American Jewish Committee), and Arthur Obermayer. Another extremely moving presentation at the ceremony was made by eighty-four-year old Arnold Erlanger and his daughter, who came all the way from Melbourne, Australia to honor the memory of awardee, Moritz Schmid.

The award ceremony received very good press coverage in Berlin and other German cities. Photos and more information can be found about awardees, the selection board and the nature of the award at: <http://people.ne.mediaone.net/obermayer/award>

The committee is presently planning for the next award process and ceremony. The ceremony is expected to be held in January 2002 in conjunction with the 27 January 2002 German Holocaust Memorial activities, and may be coordinated with ceremonies in the Berlin parliament. Postings about the award process will be made on GerSIG and *Stammbaum* in the near future.

