

**THE ASSOCIATION OF FORMER LEIPZIGER IN ISRAEL
AND THE LEIPZIGER JEWS BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION
IN NEW YORK**

With the kind support of the City of Leipzig and the Holger Koppe Foundation.



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The realisation of this book was supported and funded by the City of Leipzig's Office for International Affairs.

The Office organises the annual Leipzig Visitors Programme for Jewish Descendants on the basis of City Council Resolution RBIV-1504/09 from 2009, which extended the Visitors Programme – in place since 1992 – to include subsequent generations. It also maintains close ties with the Jewish Community of Leipzig and with Jewish friends and partners in Israel, the USA, the UK, and many other countries. The Office is also responsible for maintaining sister city relations, such as with the Israeli coastal city of Herzliya, the Texan economic hub of Houston in the USA, Kraków in Poland, Brno in the Czech Republic, Lyon in France, and the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. It also organises projects in and maintains relations with the respective countries. In many cases, these projects relate to Jewish life in the past and present, to commemoration and the culture of remembrance, as well as to mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Dedicated to Channa Gildoni, long-standing Chairwoman of the Association of Former Leipziger in Israel and the first female Honorary Citizen of the City of Leipzig. As well as to all those who have worked tirelessly on behalf of the connection between former Leipzigers world-wide.

Preface

This preface is intended to go beyond the usual character of such a text. It is a personal and sincere concern of mine to emphasize the outstanding way in which the former Jewish Leipzigers have shaped our city, its culture of remembrance, and me personally.

Over many years I had the great fortune to meet numerous former residents from all over the world in person. Whenever survivors shared their stories with me, I was repeatedly overwhelmed by the openness and trust with which they approached both me and Leipzig. In very personal conversations I felt the deep pain associated with Leipzig and heard unimaginable, tragic family stories. I was particularly shaken by accounts of the indifference, treachery, and brutality with which neighbours or even friends in Leipzig became perpetrators. It was these emotional encounters that continually gave me the strength, both as Mayor and as a human being, to commit myself with special dedication to the remembrance of the victims of the Shoah and to fight antisemitism loudly and with determination.

In addition to the many encounters in Leipzig – whether during the Visitors Programme for former Jewish Leipziger and their



Mayor Burkhard Jung during the Visitors Programme for former Jewish Leipziger in conversation with Stefanie Segermann (née Bamberger), 2015, and with Manfred Rosenbaum, 2019 © Silvia Hauptmann

Descendants, the Jewish Week, or on the occasion of the laying of Stumbling Stones (Stolpersteine) – it was above all the visits to Israel and the meetings with members of the Association of Former Leipziger that I carry in my heart. Together we not only spent time sitting together on Shabbat or exploring modern Israel, but also commemorated the victims of the Shoah and visited the Holocaust Remembrance Centre Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. I was often moved to tears when hearing both the beautiful and tragic memories of Leipzig, when we commemorated together those who had been deported from Leipzig and murdered, or when survivors told their stories of a Jewish Leipzig that no longer exists in that way.

What impressed me in these conversations was not only the remembrance of what had been, but also the firm determination of the former Leipzigers to establish new connections with Leipzig in the present and to look toward the future. It was the former Leipzigers who encouraged us to reconcile even their children and grandchildren with our city. It was their wish to show future generations that Leipzig takes responsibility for the crimes of the past, commemorates the victims, names the perpetrators, and keeps the memory alive. Therefore, it is a matter close to my heart that descendants also know that although Leipzig will always be a place associated with a terrible family history, it is also a city that is always ready to support Jewish life and to welcome the descendants of its former Jewish residents with open arms.

I am convinced that the identity of Leipzig and the constitution of the Jewish Community after 1989/90 would have developed differently without the contribution of the survivors in general, and of the Association of Former Leipziger in Israel in particular. We would be far poorer. It was especially the members of the Association who provided important impetus for the culture of remembrance and for rediscovering the invaluable contribution of Jewish Leipzigers to music, commerce, science, architectural history and culture. They promoted bridge-building and developed ideas for projects in youth and cultural exchange. They encouraged

the establishment of a sister city relationship with the Israeli City of Herzliya. The Association and its members supported the re-emerging life of the Jewish Community in Leipzig and assisted in the restoration of the Ariowitsch Haus.

Whilst they worked towards reconciliation, they also consistently served as a voice of warning against forgetting, against misanthropy, against hatred, and against exclusion. The former Leipzigers emphasised the importance of democracy, openness, solidarity, dialogue and inclusion for our society. Without them, many personalities and their contributions to Leipzig would certainly be less well known today. By way of example, I would like to mention Rabbi Dr Ephraim Carlebach and the history of Jewish schooling, the fur traders Max and Louise Ariowitsch as well as Chaim Eitingon, the women's rights activist Henriette Goldschmidt, the publisher Henri Hinrichsen, the Nobel Prize laureate Samuel J. Agnon, and the bankers Jacob Nachod and Hans Kroch.

I would like to invite readers to learn more about the Leipzig survivors of the Shoah, their stories and their commitment. Let us not forget these people and their achievements. It is my firm conviction that the City of Leipzig, together with its citizens, must continue to work towards promoting and protecting Jewish life in our city. A strong and vibrant connection between the city and the descendants of former Jewish Leipzigers will enrich and strengthen all those involved.

As Channa Gildoni, the long-standing Chairwoman of the Association of Former Leipziger in Israel and the first Honorary Citizen of the City of Leipzig, said during a visit to Leipzig in 2007: "Leipzig has not forgotten its former Jewish citizens. It is a good feeling to see that they are welcome and glad to come! The Jewish people live on and will never perish. What has happened must be remembered until the end of humanity. Today, however, we have found new friends, built bridges, and forged partnerships. Together, we wish to shape the future."

Burkhard Jung
Mayor of Leipzig

Foreword

After Jews had been prohibited from settling in Leipzig for many centuries, it was only in 1847 that the Jewish Community of Leipzig (Israelitische Religionsgemeinde zu Leipzig) could be established in the city with its long trade fair history. Within just a few decades, the Jewish Community grew to become the sixth largest in the German Empire. During the Weimar Republic, it numbered around 15,000 members and maintained an active and multifaceted communal life, with numerous associations, foundations, institutions, and synagogues.

Alongside liberal Ashkenazi Jews with long-standing family roots in Germany, more than 70 percent of the community's members had family origins in Eastern Europe, particularly in regions that are now part of Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus. Often, they did not hold German citizenship. The majority followed Orthodox or Hasidic traditions and came to Leipzig fleeing discrimination, expulsion, and pogroms. They hoped of achieving economic prosperity as traders or within the fur industry (fur production and trade).

While Jews in Leipzig during the Imperial period and after the First World War did encounter antisemitism, Leipzig was above all a city that flourished economically in an open and cosmopolitan climate. Leipzig offered good opportunities for study and employment, and possessed a rich cultural life in which religious affiliation was not a determining factor. Discrimination and antisemitism did occur, but they were not all-pervasive. This changed dramatically in 1933 with the rise to power of the National Socialists. Calls for boycotts and professional bans were followed by numerous discriminatory laws, the "Aryanisation" of the economy and administration through the exclusion of the Jewish population, and a wide range of restrictions on both everyday life and communal life. After some Zionist-oriented Jews had already left Leipzig in the 1920s, the first members of the Jewish Community

began to flee in the 1930s from the threat posed by the National Socialists.

From 1938 onwards, life for Jews in Leipzig became increasingly impossible. In October, numerous members of the Jewish Community of Polish origin were arrested and deported during the so-called *Polenaktion*. Shortly afterwards, during the Pogrom Night (*Kristallnacht*) of 9 to 10 November, synagogues and prayer rooms were set alight, shops were looted and destroyed, and many men were deported to concentration camps. There were the first fatalities. In the period that followed, further members of the Jewish Community managed to leave the city and escape.

From 1939 onwards, Jews in Leipzig were forced into so-called *Judenhäuser* (Jewish Houses), before the remaining members of the Jewish Community were deported to the East from 1942, taken to ghettos, shot in forests, or sent to concentration camps where they were murdered. The Jewish community in Leipzig was almost entirely annihilated during the Shoah.

Only a small number of Jews succeeded in evading deportation. Together with the few who had survived the concentration camps and returned to Leipzig, they re-established the Jewish Community in 1945, immediately after the Shoah. With an initial membership of around 400, these survivors ensured the continuation of Jewish life in the city. The small Jewish Community preserved the memory of the once-thriving Jewish life in Leipzig before the Shoah, even though it was no longer possible to relink with the rich and diverse communal life that had existed prior to the persecution, escape, and destruction of the Jewish population.

While little remained of the former Jewish Community and its activities in Leipzig, former residents who had managed to escape the crimes of the National Socialists or who had survived the concentration camps, were now living in Israel, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Latin America, or Africa. In the countries in which these former Leipzigers now lived, they built new lives, integrated into their societies and often benefited from personal connections dating back to the time before the Shoah. For many, Leipzig remained their lost home – a place of cherished

memories, of their youth, and of cultural and social rootedness. At the same time, Leipzig was also the city of discrimination and expulsion, of shattered dreams and of friends and family left behind. Leipzig was the site of a destroyed community, of confiscated property, and of deportation as well as murder.

From among these former residents emerged two organisations: the “Association of Former Leipziger in Israel” and the “Leipziger Jews Benevolent Association in New York”. Through their wide-ranging support, events, excursions, and activities, these organisations came to play a formative role in the lives of many former Leipzigers, fostering a sense of community, exchange and remembrance of their former home. While the Association of Former Leipziger in Israel was the first of its kind and remained active for many decades, very little is now known about the short-lived existence of the Leipziger Jews Benevolent Association in New York.

This book seeks to honour the work of the Association in Israel and to commemorate its members and achievements. At the same time, it aims to present the little that is known about the Association in New York and to encourage further research. Overall, the authors endeavour to recall as many details, activities, and stories of both organisations as possible, placing the individuals involved at the centre of the story.

The research findings presented here are not intended merely to focus on a comparatively small group of individuals at a specific moment in time in Israel or the United States. Rather, they also address the significant contributions made by former Leipzigers to the city’s and the region’s history, as well as their considerable influence on Leipzig’s culture of remembrance and their important achievements in supporting Jewish life and the Jewish Community in the city. The organisations discussed here stand as examples of a particular facet of German-Israeli and German-American relations after the Second World War. They laid the foundations for the intensive exchange that continues to this day between the descendants of former Jewish residents and Leipzig.

Three central aims of these organisations are explored in a variety of ways throughout this book. Firstly, the members were concerned with commemorating the almost completely annihilated Jewish Community of Leipzig and remembering the victims of the Shoah. Secondly, they sought to support one another and to assist former Leipzigers in their new countries of residence. They advocated for compensation, established an old age home (*Elternheim*), organised language courses, helped with job placements, and arranged social gatherings as well as excursions. The third focus of their work was reconnecting with Leipzig, ultimately aiming at reconciliation and the building of bridges to the city.

Both authors write from a very personal perspective. They live in Leipzig and work in the Office for International Affairs of the City of Leipzig, where they have for many years organised the “Leipzig Visitors Programme for Jewish Descendants”. Through this work, personal contacts and friendships have developed with many of the individuals featured in this book or with their children and grandchildren. Shared experiences have been incorporated into the text, alongside the memories and accounts of those involved and their descendants. It is therefore a matter of great importance to both authors to bring readers – above all the descendants – closer to the connection their parents and grandparents had with Leipzig, to write on the commitment and associational life, and to preserve the legacy and memory of both organisations and the people involved in them.

The most important sources for this book, in addition to the collections and documents provided by contemporary witnesses and their descendants, were the news bulletin (*Mitteilungsblatt*) of the Association of Former Leipziger in Israel, newsletters, documents from the archives of the City of Leipzig, the commemorative publications marking the 35th and 40th anniversaries of the Association, the newspaper *Aufbau. Das jüdische Monatsmagazin*, and archival materials from the Leo Baeck Institute, the National Library of Israel, the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), and other collections. Although extensive information and background on both organisations can be presented

here, many questions remain unanswered, and there is hope that further aspects of these organisations can be preserved from oblivion in the years to come. In particular, photographs, documents, and publications that bear witness to the activities and individuals involved should be secured and further explored.

This book is not intended solely as a retrospective of the activities of former Jewish Leipzigers in Israel and the United States. Rather, it aims to encourage readers to remember the Jewish Community of Leipzig before the Shoah, to commemorate the victims of the Shoah, and to preserve the legacy of the survivors. It also seeks to inspire active engagement in strengthening the connection between Leipzig and the descendants of its former residents, thereby ensuring that the global network of descendants of former Leipzigers remains connected to the city of their parents or grandparents in the future. Furthermore, the account of these Leipzig-based organisations is intended to stimulate, in particular, further academic research into such organisations in Israel and elsewhere, about which very little academic work has so far been undertaken.