

Research Paper for the History Competition of the President of Germany
“Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten”



Sophie Cahn – an (extra)ordinary woman

by

Isabelle Mewes, Jessica Jin and Leon Kohl

February 2009

Translated from German into English by Leon Kohl

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Dear reader,

When we started our paper for the history competition of the President of Germany in September 2008 and got to know the competition's topic "Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten", we directly agreed that our hero/heroine should not be a great and famous person. Our hero/heroine was to be one of many people who have acted much more heroically than much-loved and famous Achilles, Hercules and Co. However, this was the first time that we asked ourselves which features characterise a hero or heroine. That question is surely something one could discuss for a long time since there is not one definition of a hero/heroine. Everyone has to assess individually what to call a heroic action.

We finally found our heroine, Sophie Cahn, a woman with an outstanding personality: on the one hand an extraordinary woman, on the other hand a down-to-earth woman who did not want to be treated differently and who was a woman like any other. Her heroic actions were not less impressive than her character.

Our paper for the history competition is also meant to be a thought-provoking impulse. This September, the seventieth anniversary of the last Kindertransport which left Germany will take place. This paper is meant to allude to the fate of the Jewish population of Mainz, which was discriminated against, terrorised and murdered like Jews in the whole of Germany. We would like to show what Magenza (Jewish Mainz), which once epitomised Jewish education and is able to look back on a history of more than a thousand years, became.

On the one hand, we hope you enjoy reading our paper and that we were able to raise your curiosity. On the other hand, we hope to make you think about what happened about seventy years ago.

Kind regards,

Isabelle Mewes

Jessica Jin

Leon Kohl

This research paper was written by then fourteen-year-old German grammar school students for the History Competition of the President of Germany. It won the competition in the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate and was awarded a third prize in the national competition in 2009.

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II. Introduction

**1. Heroes
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by

Isabelle Mewes, Jessica Jin & Leon Kohl

Mainz, February 2009

Translated from German into English
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Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten

Who or what is a hero?

“Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten” is the topic of this year’s history competition of the President of Germany. But what exactly is a hero? What does a hero have to be able to achieve? Surely, that is a legitimate question. You read everywhere about heroes, in books and newspapers; you see them on TV; you hear about them on the radio and there are reports on them in the news. But does not everybody talk about a different kind of hero?

Books often deal with characters who are called “hero” because of their strength and their courage. You also see *Superman* and *Spiderman* on TV. On the other hand, you hear about the “heroic” goal of a football star and everybody celebrates him as one’s personal “hero”. Of course, there is also Odysseus, Hercules and all the other “heroes” who play an important role in Greek mythology.

Yet are all of them heroes? Can you put *Superman* on a level with German football player Michael Ballack? Can you compare Hercules to striker Kevin Kurányi? Or *Batman* and Boris Becker? Do you also talk about “heroes” when speaking about music? Are maybe also The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix or Elvis Presley “heroes”?

In order to choose a topic for this paper, it was important to think about these questions – and to find a definition for the word “hero”.

“A hero is someone who is characterised by courage and fighting skills”, writes German encyclopaedia *Brockhaus* about heroes. *“Particularly Germanic legends about famous warriors of noble descent treat of heroes.”*¹ This definition is common as well. There is also a different type of hero: the protagonist of a drama, novel or movie as described in film and literary reviews. As well as comic strip-heroes like Spiderman and Co. and athletes, their “heroic” abilities are predicated on their physical abilities. They are exceptionally fast, have particularly strong muscles, exceptional stamina or they have special abilities like the ability to fly.

Yet there is also a different, completely new type of being a hero. Suddenly, the hero does no longer have to be the great man who has got huge muscular arms or who climbs up house walls and jumps from roof to roof. No, now a hero is the one who has saved a child from a blaze, or who saved many lives in times of serious diseases by developing medicine or through medical treatment. Furthermore, it is possible to be called a hero because of one’s courage or will power. People who speak up for other people in hard times can also be considered a hero. These are often the heroes who serve as role models. Their extraordinary strengths are no longer predicated on their physical strength but rather on mental and personal strength. They are often the ones who are neglected or their action is so unavowed that you

¹ Der Brockhaus; F.A. BrockhausGmbH, Leipzig 2005, Band 4, p. 2058.

speak of everyday heroes. “Forgotten” is the attribute from the topic title of the history competition that fits everyday heroes best, as well as sometimes “misjudged”. These heroes are often true heroes. They act without causing a stir; their actions often have an extensive impact though.

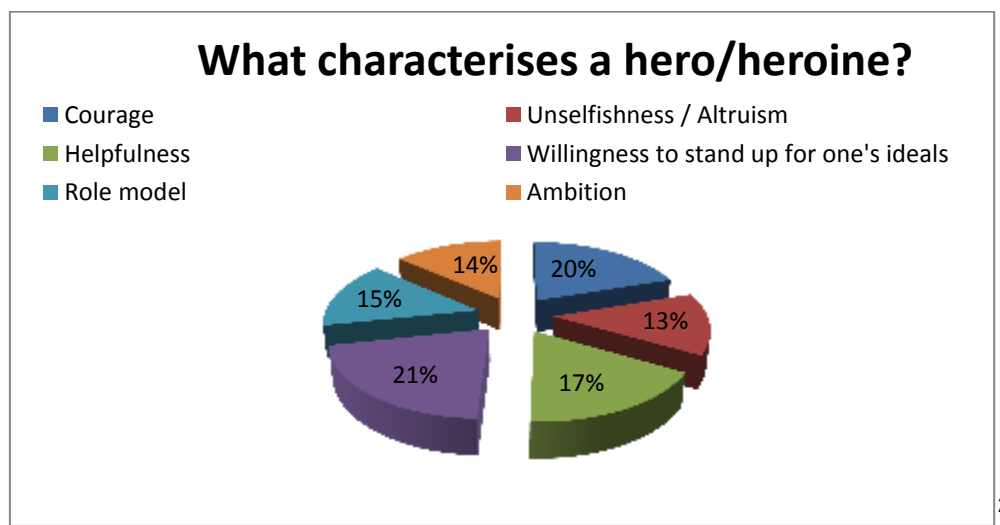
Heroes are humans who are willing to speak up for the ideals, who fight for their fellow citizens and who put aside their own well-being. They have the courage to stick by their opinion and to fight for it when it is in accordance with the well-being of the general public. These heroes should be role models to us. But it is important to keep in mind that not every role model is a hero, and not every hero is a role model.

Politicians can also be heroes. Standing up for women’s suffrage or the abolition of slavery are actions that qualify to be considered a hero.

Some people also call athletes, for example the German national football team when they have won the World Cup, “heroes”. Our survey showed though that only a small percentage would consider athletes to be “heroes” and that, for example, the victory in the World Cup is rather considered an extraordinary achievement than a heroic deed.

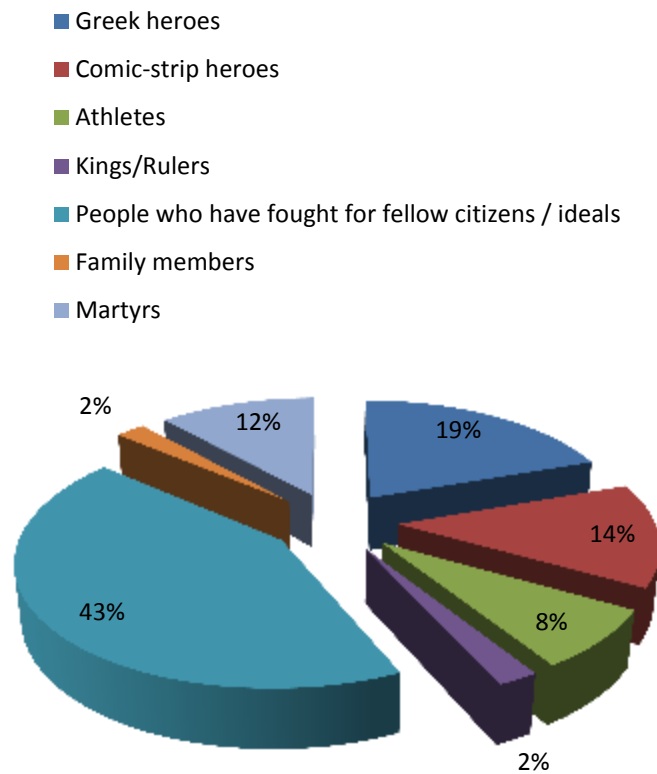
Elvis Presley, “King of Rock ’n’ Roll”, is no hero either. No doubt, he strongly influenced musical history as well as The Beatles and many other important musicians but, for example, they did not save any lives with their music. Musicians can be considered role models but not heroes.

In the Third Reich, people were acclaimed as heroes who had fought in the war as soldiers. The *Heldengedenktag* (Day for the Commemoration of Heroes) was introduced for them. The term “hero” was exploited for political goals in this case. In the GDR, some people were also awarded the title “hero”. They were awarded the title *Held der Arbeit* (Hero of Labour) for exceptional merits in agriculture, industry, trade, transport, etc.



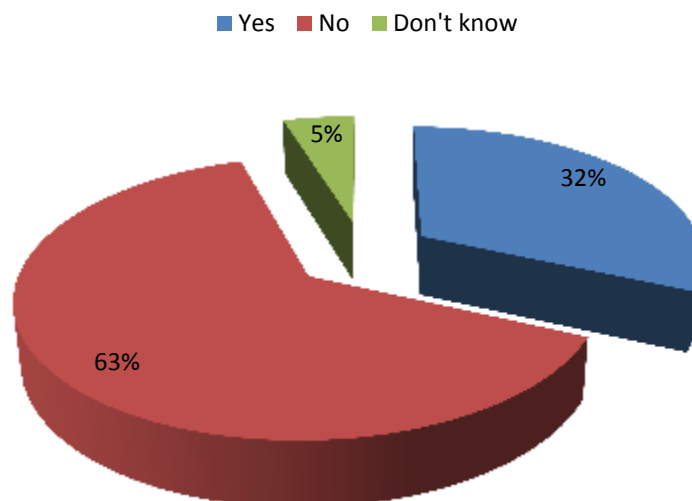
² Survey in Mainz, January 2009, conducted by Isabelle Mewes, Leon Kohl, Jessica Jin.

Who do you think of when you hear the term "hero"?



3

Would you consider an athlete to be a hero?



4

³ Survey in Mainz, January 2009, conducted by Isabelle Mewes, Leon Kohl, Jessica Jin.

⁴ Survey in Mainz, January 2009, conducted by Isabelle Mewes, Leon Kohl, Jessica Jin.

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II. Introduction

**2. Magenza –
the Jewish Mainz**

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Magenza – Jewish Mainz

The Jewish community in Mainz is able to look back on a long tradition and a more than a thousand year old history. Unfortunately, there is only little remaining of the formerly flourishing community of Magenza (Jewish Mainz's Hebrew name). The history of the Jewish community of this city is buried in oblivion for many current inhabitants of Mainz.

Archaeological findings from the fourth and fifth century prove that there already existed a Jewish community in Mainz in the fourth century. Similar to the regions around Cologne, Trier, Worms and Speyer, its members had come to the Rhine river region along with the Romans. The existence of a Jewish community in Mainz is doubtlessly evidentiary in the ninth century, confirmed by traditional documents of a council held in Mainz in the late ninth century. If a document is reliable, which was presented to the city council of Mainz during a trial in 1432 and which states that “the Jews of Mentz [Mainz] have existed 500 years and more before the abbey of Mentz [Mainz] was built”, Jews would have lived in Mainz since the first century BC, which would make Magenza one of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe.⁵

The relationship between the Christian population of Mainz and their Jewish fellow citizens was good until the Crusades: Regino of Prüm arranged a decree at the end of the 9th century that people who murder Jews or heathens because of hatred or passion, were to be treated like murderers, which was not a matter of course at that time.⁶ Christian sermons against this peaceful coexistence were not able to worsen the relationship. In 1084, the archbishop of Speyer tried to recruit Jews living in Mainz by offering protection and rights. These offers were approved and even amplified by Emperor Henry IV in 1090. In the following centuries, similar guarantees were repeatedly assured by emperors and princes, but also at least just as often ignored.⁷

In the 11th century, the chairmen and rabbis of the Jewish communities of Speyer, Worms and Mainz founded a union called “Shum – שׁוּמ”, which are the initial letters of the Hebrew names of the three member communities. They discussed and decided on religious questions and issues. Shum obtained more and more significance and at the end of the 11th century Shum was an important factor in the life and standardisation of German Jewish communities.⁸

⁵ Jüdische Gemeinde Mainz. Die Geschichte der Juden in Mainz (www.jgmainz.de/geschichte.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

⁶ Jüdische Gemeinde Mainz. Die Geschichte der Juden in Mainz (www.jgmainz.de/geschichte.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Juden in Mainz 1978, Katalog zur Ausstellung der Stadt Mainz im Rathaus-Foyer; Mainz November 1978. p.25.

⁷ Jüdische Gemeinde Mainz. Die Geschichte der Juden in Mainz (www.jgmainz.de/geschichte2.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

⁸ Jüdische Gemeinde Mainz. Die Geschichte der Juden in Mainz (www.jgmainz.de/geschichte2.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Probably in 1012, *Judensand*, the oldest known cemetery of Magenza, was established. The graves of many members of the Jewish community are situated at *Judensand*, which is also known as *Judenkirchhof* (“Jewish churchyard”). The tombstone of Jehudad ben Senior from 1049 is the oldest remaining tombstone of *Judensand* and the oldest Jewish tombstone in Central Europe. On the whole, *Judensand* is considered the oldest Jewish cemetery in Europe together with *Heiliger Sand*, the Jewish cemetery in Worms.

The formerly good relationship between the Christian and Jewish population changed dramatically with the Crusades. The call for the “liberation” of the Holy Land from the Muslims radicalised the mood towards Jews, who were commonly considered the murderers of Jesus. The First Crusade of 1096 ended in a massacre. Spurred fanatics moved murdering through the country in order to wipe out Jews in their own country. Archbishop Ruthard fled the city and exposed the Jewish inhabitants to carnage. Between 700 and 1200 Jews were killed in Mainz. Archbishop Ruthard was also accused of having enriched himself from the persecuted Jews’ wealth. On the whole, domestic and foreign political problems led to aggressions against Jews.⁹ During the Black Death epidemic of 1349, Jews were suspected of having poisoned wells, which caused another pogrom by the angered crowds.¹⁰ At that time, Jews already had to show their religion by wearing Jewish hats and a yellow cloth circlet. In the 15th century, power struggles over the Archbishop of Mainz’s see dominated everyday life of the city. The culmination was the revocation of the city charter and the war over the mitre of Mainz. Jews were thereby cast out of the city over and over again. In 1471, the whole Jewish population had to leave Mainz. The whole property of the Jewish population became property of the electorate of Mainz and the synagogue was turned into a Christian chapel.¹¹

Magenza is known until today for its famous scholars because Magenza used to be a cultural centre of Judaism and an embodiment of education and spiritual life. Magenza mostly owes this reputation to Gerschom ben Jehudad (960-1040), who was born in Metz but spent most of his life in Mainz. He was one of the most distinguished occidental scholars, one of the first rabbis in the Holy Roman Empire. He established a specifically Jewish culture by means of arrangements and judgments whose validity has persisted until today. He structured family and community life by constituting divorce law, the right to privacy of correspondence, the prohibition of polygamy and the right of the majority of the community to decide on issues related to community life. Moreover, he was the formative figure of the studies of the Talmud in Western Europe, which led to a standardisation of religious education. Furthermore, he headed a Talmud academy, which became a centre of

⁹ Juden in Mainz 1978; pp.26f.

¹⁰ Juden in Mainz 1978; pp.34f.

¹¹ Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Jewish tradition and eruditeness.¹² Further famous Jewish scholars were Schlomo bar Isaak (1040-1105), better known as Rashi, the probably best known commentator of the Talmud and the Hebrew Bible,¹³ and Maharil (1375 in Mainz- 1427), one of the leading German rabbis in the 15th century.¹⁴

In medieval times, the Jewish population lived closely together as it was also common practice among the guilds. The Jewish residential area, which was not isolated from the rest of the population (yet), was connected to the trade quarter between *Fischtor* and Carmelites Church in the northwest. Jews and Christians lived together in direct vicinage. The community had a largely autonomous community life with its own cultic institutions like a synagogue, butcher shop, bakery and mikvah.¹⁵

After having been expelled from the electorate of Mainz in 1471,¹⁶ at first, Jews rarely resettled in Mainz. The resettlement was only possible with a temporary but prolongable residence permit, which could be obtained by paying “protection money”, which constituted actually only an additional source of income. A community with a reputable number of members did not establish until the middle of the seventeenth century. However, this development was eyed distrustfully. Suffering economically after the Thirty Years’ War, the guilds complained about the emerging competition by Jews. On 8th December 1662, Prince-Elector Johann Philipp von Schönborn imposed further economic restrictions on the Jewish population, which had already been excluded from guilds and thereby from most manual jobs, so that Jews were not allowed to maintain “open jobs” and were only allowed to trade with special goods. Moreover, the number of Jewish families was limited to twenty at first, later even to ten, and these families were only allowed to live in *Judengasse*, which was barred on both sides. The restriction on the number of Jewish families was soon increased to 101 families, but the boundary of the Jewish quarter to *Judengasse* remained. In the course of the decades, the Jewish quarter was enlarged by *Offene Judengasse* (open Jewish alley) which was freely accessible from the east side and ran parallel to (closed) *Judengasse*. Both streets (which were called *Vordere Synagogengasse* and *Hintere Synagogengasse* (synagogue front and back alley) in the 19th century) were situated between *Klarastraße* and *Löwenhofstraße*. In 1790, the Jewish community had approximately 543 members. Due to the constantly

¹² Juden in Mainz 1978; pp.25f.

Jüdische Gemeinde Mainz. Die Geschichte der Juden in Mainz (www.jgmainz.de/geschichte2.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

¹³ Magenza – Stiftung für Jüdisches Leben in Mainz. Geschichte der Mainzer Synagogen (www.magenza-stiftung.de/index.php/geschichte-mainmenu-32) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

¹⁴ Magenza – Stiftung für Jüdisches Leben in Mainz. Maharil in Mainz (www.magenza-stiftung.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=30) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

¹⁵ Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

¹⁶ Juden in Mainz 1978; p.41.

growing community, there was little space in both *Judengassen*, which was the reason why the narrow buildings rose up to a great height and had deep cellars.¹⁷

During the time of enlightenment, the Jews of Mainz were granted more rights. The Jewish population was allowed to live outside the Jewish quarter, obtained the right to study medicine at the university of Mainz and Jewish children were allowed to attend Christian schools for the first time during the reigns of Prince-Elector Emmerich-Josef von Breitbach-Bürresheim (1763-1774) and Prince-Elector Friedrich Karl Joseph von Erthal (1774-1797).¹⁸ Legal equalisation of the Jewish population was introduced during the French occupation of Mainz from 1792 to 1793 and from 1798 to 1814, but they distrusted their new rulers. In 1808, their distrust turned out to be with good cause when Napoleon introduced a discriminating decree, which enjoined the so-called “morality patent” on Jews.¹⁹ Besides, there were authoritarian interventions in Jewish community affairs. After the German Campaign and the end of the Napoleonic era in Europe, some restrictions remained valid but the legal situation of the Jews of Mainz was way better compared to the one in Frankfurt. The Napoleonic “damaging decree” was not repealed until 1847. Jews were still refused entry to the civil service for a long time.²⁰ With the foundation of the German Empire in 1871, the Jewish emancipation movement reached its legal completion. At first, Christians were not willing to tolerate Jewish fellow citizens in their neighbourhoods but Jews gradually settled in the vicinity of the ghetto at *Flachsmarkt* and in the *Bleichen* quarter. Caused by the new contact to the city outside the ghetto, some Jews became interested in the principles of Enlightenment and began to critically question the traditional conception of Judaism.

Due to the requirements of a new civil society, the Jewish pedagogue and later teacher at *Philanthropin*, Michael Creizenach, founded a new school in 1814 in order to convey foreign languages and secular knowledge. Isaak Jakob Bernays from Mainz, who later became rabbi of Hamburg, endeavoured to implement reforms. In 1849, when the Jewish community comprised 2128 members, which constituted 6% of the city’s population, it split into the orthodox “Israelite religious community”, which adhered to traditional Judaism, and the liberal “Israelite religious community”. The Jewish community did not split officially although both branches of the community

¹⁷ Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

¹⁸ Juden in Mainz 1978; pp.52f.

Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

¹⁹ Juden in Mainz 1978; pp.61-64.

Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

²⁰ Juden in Mainz 1978; pp.72ff.

had their own community life with their own institutions like for example their own schools.²¹

On 11 March 1853, the liberal “Israelite religious community” consecrated their own synagogue in *Synagogenstraße*, which was designed by Ignaz Opfermann in Moorish architecture and whose prayer hall accommodated 764 people.²² In 1856, the orthodox “Israelite religious community” received their synagogue on the corner lot *Flachsmarktstraße/Margarethenstraße*. In 1879, this synagogue had to be replaced by a synagogue designed by town master mason Eduard Kreysig in Moorish architecture at the same site due to severe structural damage. The synagogue of the traditional branch of the community accommodated 300 people.²³

In 1880/1881, a new Jewish cemetery including a mourning hall by town master mason Eduard Kreysig was established next to the main cemetery, whereupon *Judensand* was not used any longer.

Jewish communities also existed in the later incorporated suburbs of Mainz. A Jewish community has existed in Bretzenheim since the sixteenth century and had a synagogue, religious school, ritual bath and two cemeteries. In 1861, there lived eighty-six Jewish inhabitants in Bretzenheim. Eighty-eight Jews lived in Weisenau in 1830 and the synagogue of Weisenau, which was built in 1773, is the only synagogue in Mainz which survived the Night of Broken Glass and the bombing raids on Mainz. However, it was forgotten after its pillage in 1938 and was not rediscovered until 1978, when it was found in a very bad condition. The Jewish community in Bischofsheim, which has existed since the eighteenth century, had a synagogue, a religious school and a ritual bath and had forty-eight members in 1830. The Jewish community in Kastel was founded in the seventeenth century but it is assumed that Jews already lived in Kastel during Roman times. In 1905, the community had sixty members and owned a synagogue, which had been built in 1833/34. There also existed a Jewish community in Hechtsheim with its own synagogue. Furthermore, there were small Jewish communities in Ebersheim (1830: thirty-eight members) and in Laubenheim (1830: five members).²⁴

²¹ Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

²² Mainz (Landeshauptstadt von Rheinland-Pfalz) Jüdische Geschichte / Synagogen (http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].
Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; pp.49-61.

²³ Mainz (Landeshauptstadt von Rheinland-Pfalz) Jüdische Geschichte / Synagogen (http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].
Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; üp.63-87.

²⁴ Mainz (Landeshauptstadt von Rheinland-Pfalz) Jüdische Geschichte / Synagogen (http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].
Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; pp.137-143.

In 1908, Eastern European Jewish immigrants founded the “Israelite Humanitarian Association”, whose members met for religious services in accordance with orthodox Polish rites in a prayer hall, the so-called “*Stübel*”, in *Margarethenstraße* 13.²⁵

Around 1900, the synagogue from 1853 of the liberal branch of the Jewish community became too small. In 1910, an architectural competition was advertised for a new building which was to be built in the centre of Neustadt. The concept of Willy Graf, an architect from Stuttgart, prevailed against 130 competing applicants. The foundation stone ceremony for the new synagogue took place on 4 August 1911, and the synagogue was consecrated on 3 September 1912. The main synagogue in *Hindenburgstraße* featured 580 seats for men and 482 seats for women. The central dome of the monumental central structure with low side wings had a diameter of twenty-seven metres and was twenty-five metres high. There was an organ over the torah shrine. After the completion of the main synagogue, the old synagogue of 1853 was sold and used as a municipal storehouse.²⁶

When the National Socialists seized power in 1933, there existed an agile Jewish community life with about 2600 members. The deprivation of rights progressed very quickly. Jews were dismissed from civil service, Jewish shops were boycotted and Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend Christian or public schools. In 1934, *Jüdische Bezirksschule* (Jewish district school) was established. Jews were deprived of their German citizenship with the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. In 1936, expropriation of Jewish companies and real estate started.

During the Night of Broken Glass on 9/10 November 1938, the main synagogue in *Hindenburgstraße*, the synagogue of the orthodox branch in the *Flachsmarktstraße* and the synagogues in the incorporated suburbs - with the exception of the synagogue in Weisenau – were pillaged and set on fire. The synagogue in Weisenau was plundered but was not set on fire because of the fear that the fire might flash over to neighbouring buildings. On the following morning, Jewish flats and shops were assaulted. The Jewish community was forced by police to have the rests of the main synagogue in *Hindenburgstraße* demolished for own account and the ruins disposed.

From 1939 onwards, Jews were forced to show their religion by wearing the yellow badge. They lived crowded in confined circumstances in so-called “*Judenwohnungen*” (Jewish flats). It became more and more difficult for Jews to move freely. Jews were forbidden to have their hair cut by a hairdresser and were only allowed to shop during special times of the day, only to mention a few examples.

²⁵ Mainz (Landeshauptstadt von Rheinland-Pfalz) Jüdische Geschichte / Synagogen (http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

²⁶ Mainz (Landeshauptstadt von Rheinland-Pfalz) Jüdische Geschichte / Synagogen (http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; pp.89-115.



Front, Synagogue of 1853;
Coloured lithograph²⁷



Prayer room to the east,
Orthodox synagogue in *Flachsmarktstraße*,
end of 19th century, Karl Hertel²⁸



Main synagogue of 1912, south elevation²⁹

²⁷ Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; p.57.

²⁸ Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; p.81.

²⁹ Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; p.99.



Main synagogue of 1912, south elevation after the destruction, around 1940³⁰

Many sought shelter for their children abroad if given the chance to but many Jewish families decided not to flee abroad. They refused to leave their homes and native country since they considered themselves German like everyone else; they only had a different faith.

Suppression, discrimination and humiliation were followed by extermination. On 10 February 1943, the last deportation train to the concentration camps left Mainz. In March 1945, only few Jews living in so-called “mixed marriages” were still in Mainz when American troops liberated the city. On the whole, it is assumed that about between 1300 and 1400 Jewish citizens of Mainz were murdered. No matter whether they were murdered in the concentration camps, died there from diseases or injuries or committed suicide in their hopelessness, they all were innocent victims of National Socialist racial fanaticism.³¹

After World War II, only few emigrants returned to Mainz since the memories of the humiliations and persecutions they had to suffer were too painful. On 17 October 1945, the Jewish community of Mainz was refounded. Its first chairman was Max Waldmann, who had returned along with twenty-three other survivors from Theresienstadt.³² At first, the mourning hall of the Jewish cemetery served as a prayer hall but in 1947 a synagogue was temporarily established in the former gym of *Feldbergsschule*. In 1952, a new community centre including a prayer hall was built on the grounds of the former community centre in *Forsterstraße 2* and its prayer hall was enlarged in 1966 so that it accommodated 100 people. In 1978, the synagogue of

³⁰ Die Mainzer Synagogen, Sonderheft der Mainzer Geschichtsblätter; p.116.

³¹ Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Juden in Mainz 1978, pp.84-90.

³² Landeshauptstadt Mainz. Magenza, das jüdische Mainz. Eine der ältesten jüdischen Gemeinden Deutschlands (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/hthn-5vgjlb.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Weisenau was rediscovered and its renovation started in 1989.³³ Since 1987, Mainz has been twinned with Haifa. The contact between the two cities had already existed since 1969 and the universities of the two cities had signed a partnership treaty in 1981. Mainz and Haifa decided to twin with one another in order to strengthen the contact between both countries and to contribute to a critical review of the past, the more so as many emigrated Jews from Mainz live in Haifa.³⁴

The construction of a representative synagogue in Mainz is overdue. The Jewish community has grown rapidly especially due to immigration of Jewish Eastern Europeans. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Jewish community comprised 140 members, today it comprises 1050 members. The current prayer hall, which accommodates 100 people, is not sufficient on high holidays. In 1998, an architectural competition for the construction of a synagogue in *Hindenburgstraße* was advertised by the Jewish community, which was won by architect Manuel Herz from Cologne. The serrated elements of the building imitate the five Hebrew letters of the word “qadushah”, which means blessing. In 2000, the building licence was issued and on 23 November 2008, the foundation stone for the building, which was financed by the city and the federal state, was laid at the very same place where the main synagogue once had been situated.³⁵

Today, *Judensand*, the Jewish cemetery next to the main cemetery including its mourning hall, the synagogue of Weisenau, the Jewish cemeteries in the suburbs of Mainz, the rests of the peristyle of the main synagogue in “Hindenburgstraße”, a cut stone of a spire of the main synagogue of 1853, which is today located in the courtyard of *Rheinland-Pfalz Bank*, and commemorative plaques testify to the history of Jewish Mainz.

³³ Mainz (Landeshauptstadt von Rheinland-Pfalz) Jüdische Geschichte / Synagogen (http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/mainz_synagoge.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

³⁴ Landeshauptstadt Mainz (<http://www.mainz.de/WGAPublisher/online/html/default/mkuz-5t3ea5.de.html>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

³⁵ Jüdische Gemeinde Mainz (<http://www.jgmainz.de/akt-20061206-magenza.htm>) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Research Paper for the History Competition of the
President of Germany

“Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten”

**Sophie Cahn -
an (extra)ordinary woman**

II. Introduction

3. Kindertransports

by

Isabelle Mewes, Jessica Jin & Leon Kohl

Mainz, February 2009

Translated from German into English
by Leon Kohl

Kindertransports

The possibility for Jewish children to flee Germany between 9/10 November 1938 and 1 September 1939 is described below. In general, “*Kindertransport*” (children transport) is a term used to describe the leave of approximately 10,000 Jewish children from National Socialist Germany and from countries threatened by Germany to Great Britain. Especially, children from Germany, Poland, Austria and former Czechoslovakia accepted the offer of a “*Kindertransport*”.

Many Jews had already emigrated from Germany many months before the Night of Broken Glass although there had been strict immigration restrictions in most European countries. As a consequence of the Great Depression of 1929, massive unemployment and deflation prevailed in all countries in the 1930s. The various governments feared that the numerous refugees would intensify the situation and would be dependent on support. Even wealthy Jews had difficulties to obtain a visa but it was almost impossible for less well-to-do people to escape the discriminations and persecutions by the National Socialists.

After the “*Anschluss*” of Austria, the US government began to look over the plight of the Jewish population and a conference of all American and European states – except Germany – was called on 23 March 1938 in order to deal with the refugee problem and – if possible – to find a solution. The result was that no country apart from the USA and the Dominican Republic was willing to assume financial responsibility for the refugees. The USA and the Dominican Republic determined annual immigration rates. Nevertheless, refugees had to anticipate a waiting period of approximately four years.

The pogroms of 9/10 November removed the scales from many states’ eyes. They recognised that German Jews were in deadly peril. However, they were not willing to ease immigration restrictions. Considering the events in Germany, they agreed to receive at least Jewish children. The children were to be reunited with their parents after the war and were then to find a new home in Palestine. No one suspected at that time that this temporary separation would be an eternal separation. Hardly any of the children got to see their parents again. Most Jewish children were received by England. The British government opened its borders pursuing the hidden agenda that the USA would also ease their borders although already having fulfilled their immigration rates. The US Congress refused this plan without further ado. Apart from England, some further states offered to open their borders for children, among which were the Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium.³⁶

³⁶ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 334f.

School life of Jewish children in Mainz from 1933 to 1939

The situation of Jewish children worsened continually from 1933 to 1938. They were increasingly often squeezed out of public schools. In 1934, the Jewish community opened *Jüdische Bezirksschule* (Jewish district school) in *Hindenburgstraße* for these children, which had been permitted by the Hessian ministry of state on 28 February. Many Jewish children directly started school there because their parents wanted to spare them bullying and humiliations. Amongst others, these children were to be prepared for emigration and received Modern Hebrew lessons. The highest school enrolment amounted to 202 children in 1936/1937 but constantly decreased subsequently due to emigration. According to reports of former pupils, Jewish children had happy schooldays without bullying at the Jewish district school. The teaching staff mainly consisted of highly-qualified teachers who had taught at grammar schools but had been dismissed due to the “*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*” (Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service). However, the sheltered and happy schooldays ended abruptly when numerous classrooms and synagogues were destroyed during the Night of Broken Glass. Henceforward, lessons took place in the office of the Jewish community in *Forsterstraße*. “*Bondi-School*”, a Jewish primary school which had existed in the complex of buildings of the orthodox synagogue in *Flachsmarktstraße* since 1859, was increasingly made use of at that time. In the aftermath of 9 and 10 November 1938, many Jews, who had previously hesitated to emigrate, decided to register their children for Kindertransports. Most Jews had lived in Germany for generations, felt and lived exactly like Christian Germans so that they had not been able to imagine that they could also be affected by persecutions.³⁷

Aid organisations and their work

As early as 1936, four hundred Jewish children and dissidents’ children were brought to England with the aid of the “Save the Children Fund” and the “Inter-Aid Committee for Children from Germany”.³⁸ After the Night of Broken Glass, a whole clutch of organisations and individuals strove towards organising a transport for German and henceforward also Austrian Jews. A few days after the pogroms, Lord Samuel and “The British Refugee Committee” called on Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in order to negotiate a temporary admission of Jewish children aged under eighteen. The Jewish community offered to bear the expenses and the guaranteed amounts for the journey and resettlement amounting to fifty pound sterling per child (equivalent to about €1500). Moreover, the Jewish community promised to allocate the children across the country, to find a foster family and to provide the children and adolescents with appropriate education. Hence, the British exchequer would be disencumbered and would not have to bear any expenses. The number of immigrating children was

³⁷ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 338f.

³⁸ The Kindertransport Association (http://www.kindertransport.org/history02_1933.htm) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

to be determined by the ability of the aid organisations to support the children without state funding. Parliament approved of the admission of children and adolescents. Passport formalities and transport facilities were to be resolved as soon as possible. The National Socialist regime in Germany wanted to get rid of a great number of Jewish children and thus did not impede their emigration. Quite the contrary: They rather arranged for the issuance of travel documents, which usually took long, to be processed quickly. The children were barred from taking along valuables; their luggage consisted of only one suitcase, one bag, ten Reichsmark and one photograph. It was prohibited to take along toys and books. Ruth Metzger (14) from Mainz fled to Switzerland by means of a Kindertransport on 4 January 1939. She later reported on her emigration:

“At the border – I had such a big suitcase and I was so short, I could not even lift it – the Nazis entered the train in order to check whether we had necklaces and gold and and then, one guy, the officer, opened the bread roll which I was eating in order to check if I had hidden any gold in it!”³⁹

The news regarding the possibility for children to emigrate were mainly spread by word of mouth or by the Jewish press. Every child needed a sponsor. The Refugee Children’s Movement wanted to take care of organising sponsors. Yet only when children had found a sponsor, they were granted admission. In England, they were to be accommodated and educated in their sponsor’s family. During the issuance of immigration documents, the children’s parents were required to give their consent to having their children raised in a non-Jewish household if not otherwise possible. In addition to the “Refugee Children’s Movement”, there were further aid organisations, e.g. Youth Aliyah. Founded in 1933, Youth Aliyah made it their business to teach young people Hebrew and, by imparting agricultural skills, prepare them for their emigration to Palestine. In most cases, the separation from the parents took place tearfully.⁴⁰

Children from Mainz in Belgium, the Netherlands and France – no happy ending

On 29 November as well as on 6, 8, 13 and 22 December 1939, the first Kindertransports with children from Mainz left the country. They found refuge in Belgium, the Netherlands and France, yet only for a short time as it would soon become evident. The Gestapo caught many of these Jewish children in these countries and deported them to extermination camps. Only a few were able to hide effectively. Until today, it is unclear whether the transport to France was official or whether it was organised privately by parents.

³⁹ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 345.

⁴⁰ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 335.

The transports to Belgium also ended inauspiciously. Johanna Charlotte Bondi (14) took refuge there. Her parents were murdered in Piaski in Poland in March 1942. When the Germans invaded Belgium, Johanna Charlotte Bondi was no longer safe and lived in fear in various hideouts. She was also finally arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Auschwitz. However, she was saved and survived. Other children, like for example Gertrud Fraenkel (14), had to go through similarly bad circumstances. When arriving in Belgium, they were accommodated in Middelkerke, a holiday home near Ostende. After the occupation of Belgium by the Germans, Jewish immigrants were requested to gather with provisions for fourteen days at an assembly point from where they were deported to concentration camps.

On 13 December, a Kindertransport arrived in the Netherlands. The children were allocated to various families. When the Germans occupied the Netherlands, many Jewish children were able to go into hiding thanks to helpful peasants in various villages. Among these children was Frieda Schwarz who reported the following on her time hiding:

“When the Jews from Amsterdam were deported, I went into hiding at a peasant’s house in the south of the country. The peasant had volunteered. [...] At the beginning, I was allowed to leave the house. But later the people in the village told the peasant: ‘Listen, you have a Jewish child in your house. That is dangerous. [...]’ Then, I went from farm to farm and asked to work as a housemaid. I only wanted to get food and a place to sleep. [...] People always rumoured ‘That is a Jewish girl’ and became scared. [...] Yet then I told myself: ‘No, rather than turning yourself in, you better go back to the peasant at night and ask him. [...] And he said: “That is out of question, you stay at ours. Yet you are not allowed to leave the house. You stay inside and no one should see you!” I stayed with him for one and a half years and stayed there in hiding. [...] Whenever soldiers came, I quickly had to crawl into a hole and push the bed in front of it.”⁴¹

Frieda Laub later emigrated illegally to Palestine, which was still British at that time, and intended to study there.⁴²

Swiss asylum

Further twelfth children from Mainz left their home town with direction to Switzerland on 4 January 1939. With a Kindertransport-special train, Jews travelled from Frankfurt to Basel. Many of the children who had found refuge in Switzerland immigrated to Palestine with the support of Zionist organisations after the end of the war. Then fourteen-year-old Ruth Metzger reported on her emigration with this Kindertransport:

⁴¹ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp.343f.

⁴² Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 339-344.

“Firstly, we drove to Frankfurt with an autobus in the evening. Then we arrived in Frankfurt, we were accommodated in the Jewish orphanage. [...] We then entered the train in the early morning; we had got up very early and had walked through Frankfurt to the train station. [...] We then arrived in Basel and were welcomed by the committee, by the Swiss, and Swiss scouts lifted down our suitcases. And then, tents were pitched [...]. I came to Heiden, which is in Appenzell, to a children’s home. [...] From Basel, you had to go to Rorschach and St. Gallen-Rorschach; that was very far. [...] In the children’s home, we had to do a housekeeping apprenticeship. They expected that all girls would become housekeepers and the boys would become carpenters; that was enough!”⁴³

The children were sometimes able to phone their parents until the “Reichspostministerium” (Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications) enacted on 16 July 1940 that Jews were forbidden to use telephones.

Youth Aliyah prepared the children for their emigration to Palestine and, after the end of the war, they brought a group of adolescents safely to the British Mandate of Palestine which was to become Israel.⁴⁴

The journey, arrival and accommodation of the children in England

There were only a few transports which were run with overseas ships directly from German harbours to England. The routeing often ran via the Netherlands, where the children could ferry from Hoek van Holland to Harwich, England. Children who were transported in trains were received at the Dutch border by the Dutch refugee committee and were taken care of on the transit way to the ferry harbour. The German escort had to remain at the Dutch border.

On 2 December 1938, the first transport with 207 German children arrived in England. About a hundred of these children came from a Jewish orphanage in Berlin which had been set on fire on 9 November. On 13 December, a further five hundred Jewish children from Vienna reached England and in the following time, bigger and smaller groups arrived in Harwich over and over again.

The Jewish “B’nai B’rith” took care of the accommodation of children from religious families and also accommodated four hundred children in own homes. Children, whose parents were not part of a Jewish community, were placed by the Quakers in their own housings or in organised quarters. “Guaranteed” children were distinguished from “not guaranteed” children. The former already had a sponsor on their arrival in England; the aid organisations endeavoured to find sponsors for “not guaranteed” children as quickly as possible so that further “not guaranteed” children from Germany could follow.

⁴³ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 344-346.

⁴⁴ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 344-346.

After their arrival in Harwich, refugee children were accommodated in Dovercourt Bay Holiday Camp, which was only a few kilometres away from the harbour. The children were allocated to families from there. Reporting extensively on the refugee camp Dovercourt, British media dedicated a lot of attention to it and to the children who were accommodated there. The population became aware of the situation and a wave of helpfulness was sparked. The press did not report on problems occurring in Dovercourt though, for example the fact that Dovercourt was usually a holiday colony for the summer and did not have any heating.

During their stay in the camp, the children were taught. First and foremost, they were to be prepared for life in England and were to learn the English language. Anna Essinger, honorary chairman of the “Council for German Jews”, assumed control over this “school”. Having offered a place of refuge to German Jews and having established a school camp (“Bunce Court”) in Kent for this purpose, she was already experienced in dealing with Jewish refugees. She assembled a team of English and German teachers and pedagogues. The biggest problem posed the overcrowding of the camp. The holiday camp had originally been designed for 500 guests; more than twice as many children had to be looked after and taught. New refugees could not enter the camp until other children had left it.

However, there were also problems when Jewish children were accommodated in foster families. Their host parents were often childless couples who wanted to have children but did not have any experience in dealing with young people. At times, it also happened that children were adopted in order to be used as a domestic help. Despite the great helpfulness, there were not only successes but also many disappointments and conflicts.

Hans Josef Meyer from Mainz immigrated to England in 1934 and worked in the school camp “Bunce Court” as a Physical Education and Handicraft teacher. He talked about the winter of 1938/1939 when the Jewish children arrived in the school camp:

“Anna Essinger took care of the children and organised class. And first and foremost: On Sundays, the children were ‘sold’, i.e. people who were interested in adopting a child for whatever reasons, came and chose a child.”⁴⁵

In March 1939, Camp Dovercourt was closed. By the time, most children had found accommodation; the sixty remaining children went with Anna Essinger to her school camp. Moreover, Hans Josef Meyer reported on the difficulties the pedagogues had helping the children in their sorrow about the separation from their parents:

“Then the parents were arrested and for a time, messages could still be delivered by the Red Cross. But then, one day, they suddenly stopped or the parents said: ‘You will not hear from us in the next years because we will go on a journey.’ And then

⁴⁵ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 337.

*was silence! [...] We had to replace their parents. And that certainly created a strong bond between teachers and children. Now again this September, there will be a meeting with the old 'children'. And that is not like meeting pupils; that is like meeting family.*⁴⁶

Only one child from Mainz took part in the first Kindertransport to England. Yet already on 5 December, a Kindertransport with at least ten further Jews from Mainz reached England. Many parents had tried to send their children abroad directly after 10 November 1938.

A wealthy Jewish family in London provided a home for thirty Jewish refugees. Shortly after the beginning of the war, people were afraid of an attack on London and all pupils were evacuated to the north of England. They were brought to the Isle of Wight but the island was also shelled by the Germans. This time, the children were brought to High Wycombe. The children lived there in working-class families and had to work hard. Amongst others, they were required to cook, clean and work in the garden.

Some children were lucky and were able to be reunited with their parents after the war. However, the children, who had meanwhile grown up, sometimes found it hard to give up their gained independence and the parents also had problems not to treat their children the way they had treated them before the separation.

There are no details on Kindertransports taking place between 5 January and 1 September; no records are existent. It is certain though that at least 11 further Jews from Mainz escaped to England with a Kindertransport, among these were Lotte Kramer (then Wertheimer, 15), Eva Maria Metzger (15) and Hilde Lebrecht (15). According to a report of Susanne Vogel (15), these transports started from Mainz central station. These were the last Kindertransports. In not quite a year, from November 1938 until September 1939, about 10,000 children succeeded in finding refuge in another country.⁴⁷

Shortly afterwards, Sussex was made a "protected area" which meant that foreigners were not allowed to live in this area. Children, who had been accommodated there, had to leave Sussex and went to London. These children later lived in a hostel for young girls.

⁴⁶ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 338.

⁴⁷ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 335-338; pp. 346-351.



Children on departure (left and right)

www1.uni-hamburg.de/rz3a035//kind 1
[accessed on 12 January 2009].

www.qexweb.com/Holocaust/inside/images/kinder.jpg
[accessed on 12 January 2009].



Children in Dovercourt Bay Holiday Camp

[http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/photo/lc/im 1](http://www.ushmm.org/lcmedia/photo/lc/im%201) [accessed on 12 January 2009].

Research Paper for the History Competition of the President of Germany

“Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten”

III. Sophie Cahn - an (extra)ordinary woman

1. Her life and work

by

Isabelle Mewes, Jessica Jin & Leon Kohl

Mainz, February 2009

Translated from German into English
by Leon Kohl

Sophie Cahn – an (extra)ordinary woman

1. Her life and work

Childhood, youth and education

Sophie Cahn was born in Mainz, Germany on 18 November 1883.⁴⁸ She grew up happily in her family's house in *Rheinallee* 17.⁴⁹ There is not much known about her parents apart from the fact that her father died at an early age.⁵⁰ From autumn 1889 to Easter 1899, she attended "*Höhere Mädchenschule*" (Higher girls' school) in Mainz and started her education as a teacher at her former school until she transferred to "*Großherzogliche Lehrerinnen-Seminar*" (grand ducal female teachers' seminar) in Darmstadt in 1900. On 25 November 1889, she performed the "Jubel Overture" by German composer Carl Maria von Weber together with Marie Mann at a celebration of her school "in honour of the highest birthday of his Royal Highness the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess [of Hesse]". She graduated from the grand ducal teachers' seminar in Darmstadt in 1902⁵¹ and sat in on classes at her former school for two further years. In order to improve and apply her English language skills, she spent half a year in England. Sophie Cahn never got married.⁵²

Teacher at "*Höhere Mädchenschule*" (Higher girls' school) (1903-1933)

When arriving back in Germany, she assumed employment as a teacher at "*Höhere Mädchenschule*" in Mainz on 28 March 1903. During World War I, she was in charge of the collection of gold for the "increase of the gold holding of the Reichsbank (German Empire's central bank)" together with a colleague from 1914 until 1917. She taught German, French, Mathematics, Jewish religious studies, Gymnastics⁵³ and Geography as a secondary-school teacher. Sophie Cahn was a good and respectable teacher. On the occasion of a contemporary witness interview on 21 January 2009, Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen, a former pupil of Sophie Cahn at the "*Höhere Mädchenschule*", explained that she remembered Sophie Cahn as an excellent and competent teacher. Every pupil who had ever met her, held her in high esteem.

⁴⁸ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p. 118.

⁴⁹ StA Mainz, Familienregister.

⁵⁰ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁵¹ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, pp. 134ff.

⁵² Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁵³ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, pp. 136.

“She was a woman with class”⁵⁴

“Class” was the word Ms Meyer-Jørgensen used the most to present Sophie Cahn’s character. Furthermore, Sophie Cahn is described as a proud personality, who was always up to date on current topics. Ms Meyer-Jørgensen enthusiastically talked about Sophie Cahn’s talent to motivate and assist her pupils and to organize her lessons in an informative and demanding manner.

“I was taught by her [Ms Cahn] in Geography and I was a really bad student in Geography. (...) I had always had a four [comparable to a “D”] in Geography because I had not been interested at all in the subject matter and I had never paid attention. When Ms Cahn became our teacher, Geography was fantastic. I know until the very day that we dealt with Russia. And I, the one who had usually never done her homework, improved to a 2 [comparable to a “B”]. I was very unhappy when we did not have Ms Cahn as our teacher anymore.”⁵⁵

Moreover, Sophie Cahn is remembered as a patient, understanding yet strict pedagogue.⁵⁶

Suspension and dismissal from “*Höhere Mädchenschule*”

With regard to Sophie Cahn’s reputation as a teacher, the events of 1933 appear even more incomprehensible: Only a few days after the self-disempowerment of the German Reichstag by means of the “*Ermächtigungsgesetz*” (Enabling Act of 1933), the Hessian minister of education revoked the right to teach of all “Jewish, international, pacifistic and atheistic teaching staff” on 30 March. Sophie Cahn was affected by this prohibition as well as two of her colleagues, Dr Moritz Lorge and Johanna Sichel. Mr Lorge and Sophie Cahn were both Jewish.⁵⁷ Although having converted to Catholicism in 1919, Jewish-born Johanna Sichel was dismissed.⁵⁸ Before the beginning of the new school year on 2 May, the three teachers were suspended with immediate effect. On 1 July 1933, they were finally dismissed from the Hessian civil service on behalf of the Reich by *Reichsstatthalter* (imperial lieutenant) in Hesse Sprenger. Section 4 of the “*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*” (Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service) enacted the following:

⁵⁴ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁵⁵ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁵⁶ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p.118.

⁵⁷ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p. 114.

⁵⁸ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 135.

*“Civil servants whose previous political activities afford no assurance that they will at all times give their fullest support to the national state, can be dismissed from the service. [...]”*⁵⁹

Section 3 of the same law had obviously been ignored by the Hessian authorities: In fact, paragraph 1 states that *“civil servants of non-Aryan descent are to be retired [...]”*⁶⁰, but paragraph 2 determines that *“Section 1 does not apply to civil servants in office from 1 August 1914, or who fought at the front for the German Reich or its allies in the [First] World War [...]”*.⁶¹ The three teachers had been employed at the

Lotte Karoline Kramer, née

Wertheimer, was born in Mainz on 22 October 1923, as daughter of Ernst and Sofie Wertheimer. She lived together with her parents in *Walpodenstraße*, in 1934 they moved to a house in *Hindenburgstraße*. She attended primary school (*“Volksschule”*) in *Schulstraße*, where she had both Christian and Jewish friends. From 1934 onwards, she attended the Jewish district school (*“Jüdische Bezirksschule”*) in *Hindenburgstraße*. She came to England with a “Kindertransport” and lived there in a house together with her teacher Sophie Cahn, who also organised the flight. Her parents were deported to Piaski in Poland in 1942 and murdered probably in Belzec or Sobibor. She married her calf love Fritz Kramer in 1943. She studied history of art and is a lyric poet. Her poems treat of her childhood in Mainz and the fate of several people, especially of her parents. Today she lives in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, and stands up for the reconciliation between Christians and Jews.

school since 1902, 1903 and 1908. Neither their experience, nor their personality, nor their period of service were attributed any importance; the only factor of assessment was the employees’ assumed race. Furthermore, Sophie Cahn’s case shows that the National Socialist authorities violated their own laws. On 5 February 1934, her dismissal was transformed into a retirement.⁶²

**Teacher at “Jüdische Bezirksschule”
(Jewish district school) (1934-1939)**

However, Sophie Cahn’s unemployment did not last long since she and Dr Lorge started to work at the *Jüdische Bezirksschule Mainz* (Jewish district school), which had been approved on 28 February 1934. She worked as member of the teaching staff at the school, which was situated in an annex of the synagogue in *Hindenburgstraße 44*, until her emigration to England.⁶³

⁵⁹ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p. 114.

⁶⁰ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p. 114.

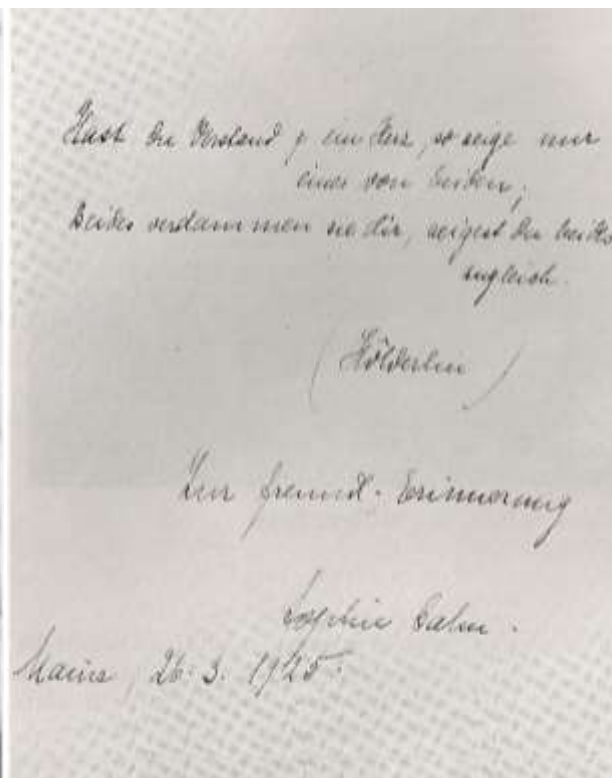
⁶¹ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p. 114.

⁶² Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt, Regierungsblatt 1934, Beilage 8, p. 53.

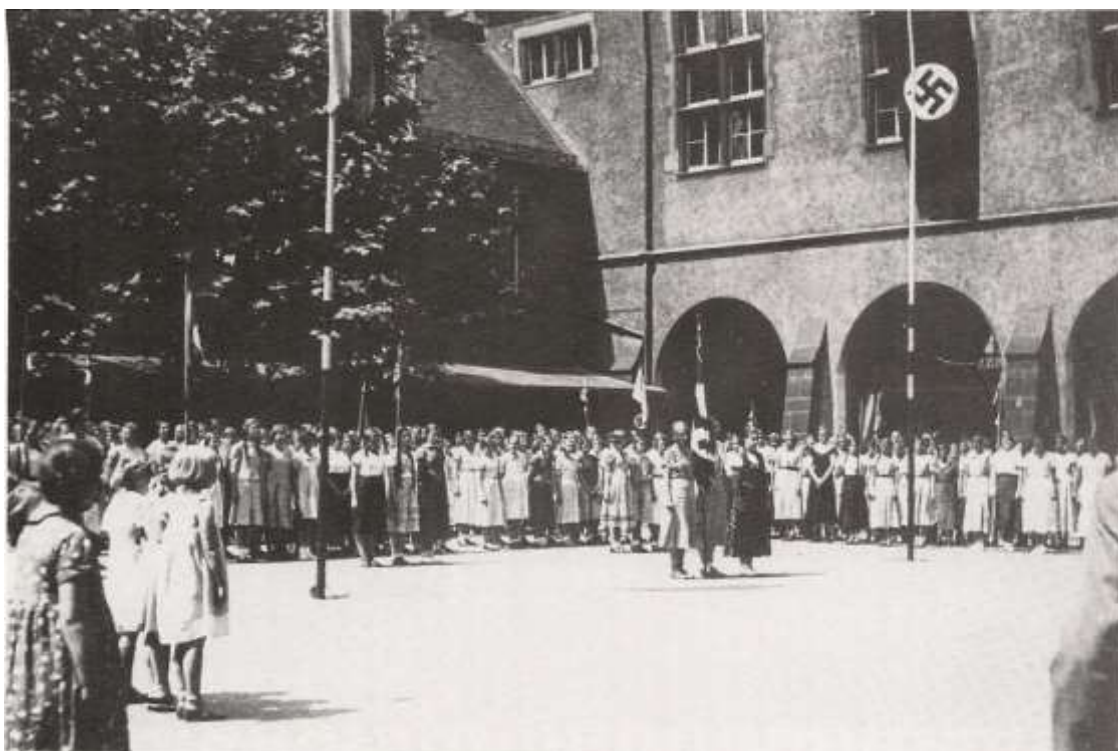
⁶³ Mainz, Vierteljahresheft für Kultur - Politik - Wirtschaft - Geschichte, 10. Jahrgang, Heft 1, 1990, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert und Reinhard Frenzel, Wider das Vergessen (I), Jüdische Lehrer und jüdische Schülerinnen des Mainzer Frauenlob-Gymnasiums, p. 114.



Sophie Cahn (around 1955)⁶⁴



Entry of Sophie Cahn in a
"Poesiealbum" (poetry / autograph book)
(1925)⁶⁵



„Morgenappell“ (morning roll call) in *Höheren Mädchenschule* (1934)⁶⁶

⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 136.

⁶⁶ Mainzer Geschichtsblätter, Frauenleben, Heft 6, 1998; Eva Schmalenbach, Zwischen den Stühlen, p. 86.

The incidents of 9 November 1938 and their consequences

With the “Night of Broken Glass” on 9 and 10 November 1938, the suppression of the Jewish population reached a new dimension: The synagogues in Mainz were pillaged, devastated and set on fire. On the following morning, Jewish shops and apartments were assaulted. From that time on, there was no regular class anymore for Jewish pupils because the Jewish district school had burnt down. Sophie Cahn thus lost her job. The discrimination and suppression of the Jewish population was followed by extermination. Many Jews saw no point in leaving their native country because they still felt German:

“I was Jewish just like others were Catholic and Protestant!”⁶⁷, Ms Meyer-Jorgensen described her feelings at that time.

Eva-Maria Metzger was born in Mainz on 9 February 1924, as daughter of Jakob (born in 1898) and Lotti Marta Metzger, née Stern, (born in 1899). She lived in *Heiliggrabgasse 5* in Mainz together with her parents and her younger brother Rolf (born on 21st August, 1928). She attended the Jewish district school (*“Jüdische Bezirksschule”*) and was a pupil of Sophie Cahn. She came to England with a “Kindertransport” along with four other girls and lived in Fendley House with Ms Cahn, who took care of them and continued to teach them.

Hilde Lina Lebrecht was born in Mainz on 5 March 1923. She lived in *Rheinallee 9* along with her family. She also attended the Jewish district school (*“Jüdische Bezirksschule”*) in Mainz. She was saved by means of one of the last “Kindertransports” in June 1939 and lived in England together with four other girls and her teacher Sophie Cahn. Sophie Cahn had organized the rescue and took care of the girls and taught them.

The flight to England

However, with the incidents of 9 November, many Jewish families realised the peril which the National Socialist persecution posed and hence tried to seek shelter for their children. The only possibility to safeguard their sons and daughters was a “Kindertransport”. Sophie Cahn proposed the organisation of a “Kindertransport” to England to the parents of three pupils. She would accompany the girls to England, take care of them and teach them abroad. The parents of her pupils Lotte Karoline Wertheimer, Eva-Maria Metzger and Hildegard Lina Lebrecht (all of them also had the name “Sara” as enacted through the *“Namensänderungsverordnung”* on 17 August 1938) agreed to Ms Cahn’s plan since she was esteemed as a respectable and reliable woman.⁶⁸

“If she [Sophie Cahn] had not been able to do it, the parents would not have been able to do it either”⁶⁹, Ms Meyer-Jorgensen evaluates the girls’ parents’ attitude in retrospect.

⁶⁷ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁶⁸ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁶⁹ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

Lore Wittner, née Loebmann, was born in Mannheim on 16 November 1923, as daughter of the merchant Sigmund Loebmann and his wife Irma Loebmann, née Wertheimer. She lived in L11, 24 together with her parents and her brother Hans Jakob, from 1934 onwards in *Heinrich-Lanz-Straße*. Her father was deported to Auschwitz and declared dead on 21 December 1944. Her mother was deported to Gurs but survived and returned to Strasbourg in 1951. Like her brother, she was able to flee with a “Kindertransport”, which had been organised by her cousin Lotte Wertheimer’s teacher Sophie Cahn. She lived in England together with Sophie Cahn and the other girls and was taught by Ms Cahn. She emigrated to the USA at a later date and lived in New York City in 1972.

Irma Margarethe Tybus, née Moser, was born in Wiesbaden on 1 November 1922, as daughter of Paul Moser and Ida Henriette Moser, née Hirsch. She lived in *Tennelbergstraße* 21 in Wiesbaden together with her parents and her sister Ilse Charlotte. Her parents were deported to Theresienstadt in 1941 because of their Jewish faith and were murdered there. She came to England with a “Kindertransport” in 1939 and lived in Fendley House together with Sophie Cahn and was taught by her.

Lotte Wertheimer, Eva-Maria Metzger and Hildegard Lebrecht thus emigrated with one of the last “Kindertransports” to England probably on 20 June 1939⁷⁰ along with Lotte Wertheimer’s cousin Lore Loebmann from Mannheim and a Jewish girl from Wiesbaden called Irma Margarethe Moser.⁷¹ Sources stating their date of emigration are contradictory. The emigration list of the estate Oppenheim 51/21 of the municipal archives of Mainz states that Hilde Lebrecht already emigrated on 1 June 1939. The “Registration Certificate” of Irma Margarethe Moser, which is kept in Hessian state’s archives in Darmstadt, says that she arrived in England on 21 June 1939. Lore Loebmann left the country on 20 June 1939 according to her registration card. Hedwig Brüchert wrote in her article “For Thirty Years I Locked Your Nameless Graves” that the girls left for England in July 1939. The “Kindertransport” probably left from Mainz central station. At that time, nobody knew that the flight to England meant a parting for good from their families for most emigrating children since relatives staying in Germany were mostly deported and murdered in the National Socialists’ concentration camps. Lotte Wertheimer’s parents, Ernst and Sofie Wertheimer, also met that cruel fate: They were deported to Piaski in Poland with the first mass transport from Mainz on 20 March 1942, and were probably murdered in Belzec or Sobibor shortly after.⁷² Lore Loebmann’s father Sigmund was deported to Gurs in southern France, to Les Milles and finally to Auschwitz in 1942, where he

was murdered presumably in 1944.⁷³ Margarethe Moser’s parents, Paul and Ida Henriette, who were deported to Theresienstadt in 1941 and were murdered there, also never got to see their daughters again.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ StA Mannheim, Auswanderungsliste

⁷¹ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 351.

⁷² Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 351.

⁷³ StA Mannheim.

Kennort:	Mainz
Kennnummer:	A00461
Gültig bis:	10. Januar 1939
Name:	Cahn
Vornamen:	Sophie Sara
Geburtsort:	Mainz
Geburtsort:	Mainz
Beruf:	Wohnungsbesitzerin u. d. S.
Unveränderliche Kennzeichen:	18. November 1883
Veränderliche Kennzeichen:	18. November 1883
Bemerkungen:	Keine

A 104 (u. 38) ©

Sophie Sara Cahn
(Unterschrift des Kennkarteninhabers)

Mainz, den 10. Jan. 1939

Der Polizeipräsident
(Unterschrift des ausfertigenden Beamten)

Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland, Heidelberg
Bestand. B. 5/1. Abt. IV, Nr. 235, Kennkarte Sophie Cahn, 1939.



Lotte Wertheimer (centre) with friends in England 1939; second from the right: her teacher Sophie Cahn. (Mainzer Geschichtsblätter, Frauenleben, Heft 6, 1998; Hedwig Brüchert-Schunk, „For Thirty Years I Locked your Nameless Graves“ – Die Dichterin Lotte Kramer und die unaussprechlichen Erinnerungen, p.128).

⁷⁴ Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv.

On 21 July 1939, the girls arrived in London. They shortly lived in London until Ms Cahn came to England by airplane several weeks later misleadingly pretending to leave the country for a linguistic educational leave.⁷⁵ She brought the girls to Hertfordshire and they were accommodated in a cottage in Fendley House in Tring. The owner of the private house with garden, yard and stable let a storey. The necessary guaranty was assumed by the Quakers, who also paid the living expenses. Since the payments of the Quakers were not sufficient, the girls and Ms Cahn generated money to pay for part of the expenses by working in the garden and the stables and by keeping the household. Since the girls had not graduated yet, Sophie Cahn continued to teach them. She succeeded not only in offering accommodation but also in offering some kind of family life to the then 16-year-old girls.⁷⁶ In doing so, Ms Cahn adopted the role of a “second mother”.⁷⁷

Life in England

At first, Sophie Cahn and the five girls were welcomed quite friendly by the English inhabitants but when World War II broke out the atmosphere towards them changed dramatically. Being “enemy aliens” in England, they had to bear restrictions which were imposed on German Jews in England.⁷⁸ They were not allowed to leave for places more than five miles away from their place of residence⁷⁹ and they were only allowed to practise a few professions. Since the financial support of the Quakers also ended, the girls had to find work. Due to the restrictions, the practice of only a few professions like working as a nurse, nanny, domestic help, factory worker (war work) or laundress was permitted. Despite their hard work, Ms Cahn and the Jewish girls lived in poor circumstances.⁸⁰ Sophie Cahn also gave German lessons later on.

Regarding that time, Lotte Kramer, née Wertheimer, one of the girls, who became a lyric poet, wrote:

⁷⁵ Als die letzten Hoffnungen verbrannten, 9./10. November 1938, Mainzer Juden zwischen Integration und Vernichtung; Hedwig Brüchert-Schunk, In alle Winde zerstreut, Mainzer Juden in der Emigration, p.91.

⁷⁶ Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 351.

⁷⁷ Mainzer Geschichtsblätter, Frauenleben, Heft 6, 1998; Hedwig Brüchert-Schunk, „For Thirty Years I Locked your Nameless Graves“ – Die Dichterin Lotte Kramer und die unaussprechlichen Erinnerungen, p.130.

⁷⁸ Mainzer Geschichtsblätter, Frauenleben, Heft 6, 1998; Hedwig Brüchert-Schunk, „For Thirty Years I Locked your Nameless Graves“ – Die Dichterin Lotte Kramer und die unaussprechlichen Erinnerungen, p.130.

⁷⁹ „We were enemy aliens in England and had restrictions. Travel only 5 miles, etc.”; letter, Lotte Kramer, Peterborough, 2008.

⁸⁰ „ (...) the Quakers helped at first but after war broke out we had to find work, only a few jobs were permitted for us, war work, factory, nursing, I worked in a laundry. Hard work. ”; letter, Lotte Kramer, Peterborough, 2008.

*Equation
As a child I began
To fear the word 'Jew'.
Ears were too sensitive.
That heritage was
Almost a burden.
Then broke the years of war
In a strange country.
This time they sneered at me
'German' as a blemish,
And sealed a balance.⁸¹*

After World War II, the girls left Sophie Cahn deeply gratefully. Lotte Kramer, née Wertheimer, had already married her calf love Fritz Kramer in 1943.⁸² Lore Loebmann emigrated to the USA.⁸³ *"I can only say that my life was saved by her, Sophie Cahn, and that it was indefinitely enriched and advanced"*⁸⁴, wrote Lotte Kramer.

Sophie Cahn continued to live in Fendley House and was entitled to a pension.⁸⁵ She stayed in touch with former pupils and received them in England. Moreover, she arranged student exchanges.

Although always having been grateful for the asylum she had been granted, Sophie Cahn never assumed English citizenship. She always viewed German culture and literature as something pivotal. Living alone far away from her home town was a very hard time for her. She suffered a lot from her exile and often talked about her time as teacher at "*Höhere Mädchenschule*".⁸⁶ Furthermore, she suffered a depression, maybe also because of her high age, but did not want to admit her disease. She finally went into psychic treatment.⁸⁷ On 10 August 1964, Sophie Cahn



Margret Moser (links) und Lotte Wertheimer (rechts), Fendley House, 1939;*

⁸¹ Lotte Kramer, *A Lifelong House*. Sutton, Surrey (Hippopotamus Press) 1983.

⁸² Hedwig Brüchert: *Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938*, in: *Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz*, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, *Mainzer Zeitschrift*, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), pp. 351f.

⁸³ StA Mannheim.

Letter, Lotte Kramer, Peterborough, 2008.

⁸⁴ *Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen*, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 145.

⁸⁵ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁸⁶ *Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen*, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 145.

⁸⁷ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

* *Mainzer Geschichtsblätter, Frauenleben*, Heft 6, 1998; Hedwig Brüchert-Schunk, „For Thirty Years I Locked your Nameless Graves“ – Die Dichterin Lotte Kramer und die unaussprechlichen Erinnerungen, p.128.

died in Fendley House “full of affection to her Germany”.⁸⁸

Sophie-Cahn-Street

Today there are still tracks which testify to Sophie Cahn’s merits. After the district council Hartenberg-Münchfeld approved a motion by Dr Hedwig Brüchert of the Social Democrat faction to name three streets on 16 July 1997, and the main committee of the city council of Mainz affirmed that decision on 21 August 1997, a street parallel to *Dr.-Martin-Luther-King-Weg* was named *Sophie-Cahn-Straße* (Sophie-Cahn-Street).⁸⁹ *Sophie-Cahn-Straße* ends in *John-F.-Kennedy-Straße* and *Franz-Bockius-Straße*. It is situated in the vicinity of the *Bruchweg* stadium directly next to the *Martin-Luther-King-Park*.



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⁸⁸ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 145.

⁸⁹ Vorlage für die Sitzung des Ortsbeirats Ha-Mü am 16.07.1997, Stadtverwaltung Stadt Mainz; Auszug aus der Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Hauptausschusses (Ferienparlament) am 21.08.1997, Öffentlicher Teil; Stadtverwaltung Stadt Mainz.

⁹⁰ Sophie-Cahn-Str., Photo: Leon Kohl, 15 February 2009.

Research Paper for the History Competition of the
President of Germany

“Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten”

III. Sophie Cahn - an (extra)ordinary woman

2. The “heroine” Sophie Cahn

by

Isabelle Mewes, Jessica Jin & Leon Kohl

Mainz, February 2009

Translated from German into English
by Leon Kohl

2. The “heroine” Sophie Cahn

“Sophie Cahn – an (extra)ordinary woman” is the title of our research paper for the history competition of the Federal President of Germany with the topic “Heroes worshipped – misjudged – forgotten”. Sophie Cahn surely was an impressive personality but were her doings heroic? Is her character really outstanding? And can one expect from everyone to act similarly or in the same way like Sophie Cahn?

“Sophie Cahn – an extraordinary woman”

Although she often (rightly) did not want to admit it, Sophie Cahn was different from the rest of the population. A difference, which was attributed much importance was her assumed “race” because she was Jewish. The National Socialists divided society in their racial fanaticism and made it impossible for people with a different background to live a normal life in National Socialist Germany. The Jewish population was suppressed and discriminated against and the European Jews were finally murdered in concentration and death camps. Due to her religious (“racial”) background, she was different from the majority of the German population.

Moreover, her character was outstanding. She was misleadingly considered as a strict personality but was actually very proud and brave and knew how to enthuse her pupils for the subject matter. She was highly esteemed for her respectful and educated nature.⁹¹ Furthermore, her courage and unselfishness, which she proved by saving the five girls, is really remarkable. Someone who organises the rescue of five innocent girls, who would have probably been deported and murdered, and who provides accommodation, food and a feeling of security,⁹² really deserves to be called a “heroine”. Moreover, she offered a perspective to the girls for the time after the end of World War II and the National Socialist despotism by continuing to teach the girls, who had not graduated at that time. Sophie Cahn could have saved herself a lot of trouble by fleeing Germany by herself, but she took the risk and sought shelter with the young Jewish girls. Her unselfishness is really striking and Sophie Cahn should be a role model for all of us. We think that most people would not have acted similarly in her situation, which shows once more how extraordinary her actions were. Despite the cruel crimes the National Socialists committed, Sophie Cahn died “full with affection to her Germany” although she was not able to return to her loved native country. It is very notable that she was obviously able to forgive Germany and the German population at least to a certain extent in the light of the ferocious discrimination and mass murder in contrast to the great majority of surviving victims of persecution of the National Socialist regime. She stayed in touch with former pupils

⁹¹ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

⁹² Hedwig Brüchert: Kindertransport. Die Rettung von Mainzer jüdischen Kindern nach dem 9./10. November 1938, in: Festschrift für Friedrich Schütz, hrsg. v. Wolfgang Dobras, Franz Dumont, Helmut Mathy u. Ferdinand Scherf, Mainzer Zeitschrift, Jg. 96/97 (2001/2002), p. 351.

and, by arranging student exchanges;⁹³ she contributed to a better and peaceful international understanding.

During her time in England, she was once again different from the majority of the local population. With her Jewish faith she was part of a minority in Anglican England. Besides, she was regarded as an “enemy alien”⁹⁴ due to her German origin because Britain waged war against Germany until 1945. After having been discriminated against and persecuted in Germany because of her religion, she was then disadvantaged in England due to her nationality.

Ms. Cahn’s actions were doubtlessly outstanding but is it asked too much to act in a similar way Sophie Cahn did? We think we should expect from people to act similarly, but most people were not and are not willing enough to make sacrifices. Today it is possible to take care for children in developing countries with only little money so that they get enough to eat and a proper education. However, there are still few such godparenthoods.

Helping Jews during the National Socialist dictatorship was of course a hazardous endeavour. But how could people remain deedless while their neighbours, colleagues or fellow students disappear forever? At the latest at that point, it should have been people’s duty to save the Jewish population. Those who watch inactive, take part in it!

With due respect for Sophie Cahn, it is necessary to mention that she had nothing to lose by saving the girls. Unfortunately, there have only been very few people who have had the courage to save people despite the danger arising from that rescue. Sophie Cahn’s actions are nothing to be taken for granted. There should have been more people like her.

“Sophie Cahn – an ordinary woman”

However, her behaviour was not always different from her fellow citizens’. She was born on 18 November 1883 in Mainz.⁹⁵ She felt and was German like anyone else. She was a normal citizen and taught at a public school (“*Höhere Mädchenschule*”). She was indeed Jewish but she was never very pious and no one who often attended service in the synagogue.⁹⁶ In her opinion (like in many Jews’ opinion), her faith was not a major difference from the rest of the population. She was Jewish like others were Catholic or Protestant. She never wanted to be someone extraordinary, she simply wanted to live her life with all the customs as was her wont, no matter whether these habits differed from the majority’s conventions. She loved her native country and hometown like most people did and even kept that patriotism despite the cruel

⁹³ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 145.

⁹⁴ “We were enemy aliens in England and had restrictions. Travel only 5 miles, etc.”; Letter, Lotte Kramer, Peterborough, 2008.

⁹⁵ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p. 135.

⁹⁶ Interview with Gertrude Meyer-Jørgensen (Contemporary witness), Wiesbaden, 21 January 2009.

crimes against the Jewish population. She never assumed English citizenship, although being very grateful for the asylum which she had been granted by England, and regarded German culture and literature as something of paramount importance.⁹⁷

Conclusion

Due to her self-sacrifice, her courage, benevolence and down-to-earthiness, Sophie Cahn absolutely deserves to be called a heroine. She surely ought to be a role model for everyone. Everyone showing similar commitment to the life of others should be considered a hero or heroine. The attributes “misjudged” and “forgotten” of the history competition’s topic “Heroes: worshipped – misjudged – forgotten” fit best to Sophie Cahn. “Misjudged”, because she was despised and discriminated against because of her religion and, if she had not fled to England along with the five girls, she probably would have been murdered. “Forgotten” is a suitable attribute for her because only very few people know about her today. According to a survey we conducted among 50 people in Mainz, only one person has ever heard about Sophie Cahn and that only because he knew the street named after her. She is more likely a “silent heroine”. However, the first attribute “worshipped” somehow also fits to Sophie Cahn, since the five girls who were saved by her, were very grateful and showed their appreciation for Sophie Cahn’s doings.

We hope that we are able to contribute to making Sophie Cahn known better so that she posthumously receives the appreciation she deserves. After all, all our interviewees considered her a heroine after being told about her doings.

⁹⁷ Frauenlob-Gymnasium 1889-1989, Festschrift zum 100-jährigen Bestehen, Wider das Vergessen – Jüdische Lehrer und Schülerinnen, Barbara Prinsen-Eggert & Reinhard Frenzel, p.145.

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