

Dietmar Schütz speech presented on the 24th of September, 2024 at Oldenburg's city hall.

This year, the Oldenburg Civic Foundation will have erected 90 commemorative signs at 37 different locations throughout Oldenburg. With our specific remembrance culture in regard to former Jewish residents we distinguish ourselves from other German communities. Most cities in Germany and throughout Europe are engaged in Gunter Demnig's project of commemorating expelled and murdered Jewish citizens with so-called stumbling stones on the ground in front of the former homes of the persecuted families.

Many of you assembled here today are aware of the fact, that Oldenburg's Jewish community once chaired by Sara Ruth Schumann and Munich's Jewish community chaired by Charlotte Knobloch rejected this particular remembrance. They refused to have the names of the victims exposed to dirt and treaded on. This approach stays controversial. I personally consider Demnig's idea of establishing a Europe-wide individualized remembrance culture as a success. Nevertheless we have taken the concerns of our Jewish community into consideration. As a civic foundation in consultation with our city administration we have attached our memorial signs at eye level in order to establish an individualized remembrance of all murdered Jews during the holocaust. The already existing memorial on Peterstraße consisting of the names of all expelled and murdered Jewish citizens does not fulfill the requirement of individualized commemoration since some of the mentioned addresses are not the true residential addresses, but rather the deportation addresses which mark the embarkation to the extermination camps.

Therefore we have decided to erect memorial signs on eye level in front of those buildings in which our fellow Jewish citizens actually resided. As a civic foundation we operate under the financial support from Oldenburg's citizens rather than from the municipal budget. Above all we are engaged in this project here in Oldenburg due to our historic responsibility as the former State of Oldenburg was the first state within the German Reich to establish a state parliament with an absolute majority of NSDAP-Nazi party seats in 1932.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are gathered here to return personal family items once belonging the Insel family living in Roggemannstraße and to attach memorial plates to the house with the former apartment of the Insel family. Thus let me briefly introduce you to the tragic fate of the Insel family from Roggemannstraße 25.

Siegfried and Henny Insel lived at Roggemannstraße 25 for 25 years from April 1911 to August 1936. This location was the center of their lives for a comparatively long time meaning they were in contact with friends and neighbours in the beautiful surroundings of historic Cäcilienplatz, Schloßgarten and Eversten Holz. They were acquainted to local merchants and their children attended local schools. Siegfried Insel was born in the Wesermarsch town of Berne on March 29th, 1859. As a trained merchant he moved to Oldenburg on the 19th of June 1903. At that time he was already married to his wife Henny formerly Rosenberg who was born in Hameln in 1873. Their daughter Grete had already been born in Berne on January 19, 1903. The Insel's first apartment was at Langestraße 57, today the location of the Bültmann and Gerriets bookstore. In this building Siegfried Insel opened a clothing shop and his son Hermann was born there on the 24th of June, 1910. Only one year later the Insels moved to Roggemannstraße 25. Eventually Hermann Insel gave up his clothing store at the beginning of the First World War in 1914 and engaged in the insurance business. He set up his own agency representing the Rhein-Mosel-Versicherung (insurance) as their main agent from 1924 to 1933. In 1934 he lost this position but was still listed as a merchant in Oldenburg's commercial register until 1935.

The increasing discrimination of Jewish citizens accompanied by economic hardship forced the family to take a smaller apartment at Hertzstraße 5 in Hanover in September 1936 whereas their children Grete and Hermann had already moved out earlier. Hermann had moved to Hamburg in 1929 and then moved on to Amsterdam in September 1933 while Grete having learned the profession of a stenotypist moved to Lüneburg, but later reunited with her parents in Hanover in 1936. Shortly before the war in 1939 the whole family had emigrated to Amsterdam Holland with the parents living at Marnixstraat 74. The invasion of German troops to the Netherlands in 1940 made life in Amsterdam dangerous and precarious for its Jewish citizens. The two Insel children were arrested in July 1942 and deported from the Dutch camp Westerbork to Auschwitz. Grete was already part of the first transport on the 15th of July, 1942 from Westerbork to Auschwitz and was murdered there on the 18th of August in 1942. Hermann being on the second transport arrived in Auschwitz on the 17th of July in 1942 and was murdered there on the 21st of August, 1942. Their parents, Siegfried and Henny, were deported to Sobibor only a year later via Westerbork camp on the 25th of May, 1943. They both were murdered in Sobibor on the 28th of May, 1943.

It is rather difficult for me to present these bare and shocking facts revealing the unconditional and brutal will of the Nazi henchmen to extinguish all Jewish life in Europe. Many Jews of Oldenburg had experienced a similar fate. Their initially successful escape to the Netherlands ended with imprisonment at Westerbork camp eventually leading to the extermination camps of Eastern Europe such as Sobibor or Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Westerbork transit camp was the tragic bond for all Oldenburg Jews who fled to the Netherlands. Before the war in December 1938 the Dutch government had closed its borders to refugees ostensibly to preserve and prove its friendship with Germany. Refugees were marked as unwanted foreigners and brought to central camps such as Westerbork.

After the invasion of the German Wehrmacht, the Dutch internment camp became the "Westerbork Police Transit Camp for Jews" now under German administration, eventually leading on to the German extermination camps. A railway connected to the Meppel-Groningen line to where a train from Westerbork left every Tuesday with vast numbers of prisoners passed through Assen, Groningen and the border town of Nieuwschans. These transports organized by the German Reichsbahn were passing through our wider neighbourhoods moving eastwards for three days to the above mentioned concentration camps.

Between 1942 and 1944 more than 107.000 Jews were deported from Westerbork by train, among them Anne Frank. Only 5000 victims of the Holocaust survived the tragic events The four members of the Insel family Siegfried, Henny, Hermann and Grete Insel were not among them.