

A Third Round of Memory Stones Set in Salzburg

By Stan Nadel

June 23, 2009

On Monday and Tuesday, the 22nd and 23rd of June 2009, there was a third round of placing small memorials called “Stolpersteine” [stumbling blocks] in front of the last Salzburg residences of individuals murdered by the Nazis. Twenty-nine new memorial stones were added to the 38 already set in place since August 2007, and three old stones that had been damaged were replaced. This was part of a larger memorial project initiated by the German artist Gunter Demnig to preserve the memory of those killed. Demnig says he began this because “a person is first forgotten when his name is forgotten.”



Cologne Artist Gunter Demnig setting a memorial stone in Salzburg

Over 170 Salzburgers are involved in the project and it has the support of the City of Salzburg as well. Each stone has a sponsor, sometimes individuals and sometimes organizations or institutions.

On Monday the first memorial stones were placed in front of number 17 at the end of the Judengasse, only a few yards away from the site of Salzburg’s first medieval

synagogue (which had been taken over by the government in 1404 after nearly all of the city's Jews were burned to death for allegedly conspiring to steal and desecrate communion wafers). These memorialized two Jewish women, Regina Grindlinger and her daughter Dorothea, who had lived here before their deportation, first to Vienna and then to a place in Russia near Minsk called Maly Trostinec.



The Salzburg researcher Gert Kerschbaumer who is working on a book about all of the Nazi's victims from Salzburg gave a short talk about the Grindlingers and about the other members of their families who had escaped to the US. The American historian Stan Nadel, who sponsored the two stones, thanked the Salzburger Stolpersteine Committee for their efforts and talked about why these two Grindlingers were unable to enter the US along with the other members of their family. According to the National Origins act the older pair who had been born in part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that later became part of Poland were subjected to the extremely low Polish quota while the younger Grindlingers who had been born in Austria after WWI were able to enter the US under the less restrictive quotas set for Austria and Germany. Intended to be "racially" restrictive, these quotas turned out to be matters of life and death in the late 1930s.



Gert Kerschbaumer (right) speaking at Judengasse 17,
with Hannah Feingold of the Salzburg Jewish Community Organization (center)
and Stan Nadel (left)

Next on the day's agenda was a visit to the site of the former concentration camp for some 260 Gypsies on the city's outskirts in Maxglan. Students from four local schools were waiting by a new memorial sculpture marking the site and the memorial stones that had been placed there in 2008 and where some workers from the city street department prepared the ground.





The new sight and sound memorial sculpture

Six new memorial stones were added to those already in place, all of them commemorating children who had been born in the Gypsy Camp after it was set up in 1940 and who had then been deported to Auschwitz where they were murdered in 1943 and 1944.



The grand-daughter of one of the few survivors from this concentration camp spoke about the importance of remembering what happened here and about the fears of today's Gypsies as they see the return of anti-Gypsy violence in Europe today.



The representative of the Gypsy community in Linz and grand-daughter of one of the few survivors from Salzburg's Gypsy Concentration Camp speaks to the crowd.

The next stop was a house where a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses had lived before their arrests in 1940, either for refusing to serve in the German Army or just for refusing to use the Hitler salute. Both had been sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp where one of them was murdered soon after his arrival. Josef Göls survived five years in various concentration camps before being murdered in Dachau shortly before the arrival of the US Army in 1945. Several local Jehovah's Witnesses took part in the setting of these stones.



After a lunch break in a restaurant near the Salzburg RR Station another stone was set in front of the restaurant. A young Communist RR worker named Franz Pöttinger had been living in this house when he was denounced and arrested in 1941. He was charged with supporting treason, one family story says it was for using his access to the railroad's radio receiver to listen to a speech by Winston Churchill while another says he had hidden a typewriter used to produce an anti-Nazi newsletter. He was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment, but he was executed in the Munich prison shortly after the German defeat at Stalingrad, presumably in revenge for the defeat.



Pöttinger's grand-niece told some of the family stories she had heard about "uncle Franz,"



Franz Pöttinger's grand-niece

After this the group moved on to the neighborhood where most of Salzburg's Jewish families were living in the late 1930s. First stop was in front of the theater at Franz-Josefstrasse 4. Another anti-Nazi resister had been arrested while living there in 1941. He too was killed after having been sentenced to imprisonment for 7 years, possibly for having donated to the Communist Workers' Aid fund for the families of imprisoned anti-Nazis. Before his arrest, another resident of the building had been hospitalized in 1940 for schizophrenia. She was then caught up in the Nazi "eugenics" campaign and deported to Hartheim Castle outside of Linz where she was determined to be "unworthy of life" and killed—either in one of the first Nazi gas chambers or with an injection of petroleum into her heart.



Anti-Nazi and Euthanasia victims remembered.

Gert Kerschenbaum was joined in speaking about the victims this time by Stolpersteine Committee activist and Green Party District Council member Ingeborg Haller.



Kerschbaumer and Haller speaking

Thereafter memorial stones were set in quick succession in front of four nearby buildings for ten mostly elderly Jewish victims. Kerschbaumer explained that many of the Jewish victims from Salzburg were elderly because it was easier for younger, more employable Jews to get visas to the US and other countries, but visas were almost impossible to obtain for anyone over 60 even when there were quota places available for them. That wasn't the case with the Singer family, a couple in their 40s and their teenage son who were deported to Theresienstadt and later murdered at the Majdenek death camp in Poland. An American survivor named Ernest Boneyhadi who had lived around the corner and been a childhood friend of Egon Singer sponsored his memorial.



By then it had begun to rain, but the group moved around the corner to where a memorial stone had been set in memory of another “Euthenasia” campaign victim named Anna Maria Wahl. The stone had been badly damaged by a vandal and had to be replaced.

The hardest of the group braved a downpour to end the day across the street from the Salzburg City offices in the Mirabelle Palace. Gert Kerschbaumer explained that Rudolf Eric Müller was a convert to Catholicism whose marriage to a Catholic with no Jewish background had failed to protect him. He was arrested during the Reichskristallnacht Pogrom in November 1938 and then sent to Vienna and not allowed to return. In 1942 he was deported to Theresienstadt, where he was murdered the next year.

Remembering Ernest Bonyhadi's sponsorship of a memorial stone, I stopped by his former residence on my way back to my home. There I found memorial stones for some of his relatives who didn't make it to America.



Having come down with a cold from Monday's expedition your reporter decided to stay out of the rain today and write this report. One more Jehovah's Witness is on the schedule for today's memorial stone setting, along with four more for Jewish victims. One of the Jewish victims on today's schedule was Salzburg's long term cantor Hermann Cohen. Cohen reportedly had a beautiful voice, but he had to supplement his small salary by running a Kosher restaurant with his wife Berta. After being expelled to Vienna after the Reichskristallnacht they managed to escape to Czechoslovakia, but they were caught there when Czechoslovakia fell to the Third Reich. Berta's fate is unknown, so she doesn't have a memorial stone, but Hermann was deported to Theresienstadt and then to Majdenek where he was killed.