**Recha Freier (née** **Schweitzer)**

Recha Freier was born on October 29, 1892, in Norden (East Frisia) Germany, into an Orthodox Jewish family. Her brothers, Willi and Arthur, were also born in Norden, while her sister, Eddie, was born in in Glogau (Glogow) Poland. Recha’s mother, Bertha Schweitzer (bornLevy in 1862), and her father, Menasse Schweitzer (born in 1855),Torah and , 16 years before his wife Bertha died in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt (now Terezin in the Czech Republic) in 1945.

It was as a very young child in Norden that Recha’s first encountered antisemitism. This painful event was to profoundly affect her for the rest of her life. In fact, many years later, she wrote a poem about that early incident.

Earthquake The city park. The golden shining fence. Closed. ?? A big white notice. A frame made of black paper. “No entry for dogs and Jews.”

Recha’s family left Norden in 1897, moving to Glogau in Lower Silesia, Poland, where Recha attended the Glogau grammar school. Again encountering antisemitism, this time from antisemitic taunting from her classmates, she left that school and attended a private school in Breslau (Wroclow). After passing her final exams, she studied modern languages in Breslau and, apparently in Munich.

In 1919, she married Rabbi Dr. Moritz Freier (1889–1969). Three years later, in 1922, the couple moved to Sofia, Bulgaria, where Moritz worked as a rabbi and Recha founded a Zionist youth group for girls, affiliated with the Young Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO). In 1929, the couple moved to Berlin, where Moritz Freier had been appointed rabbi for three synagogues. In Berlin, Recha conducted folklore research and, as a writer, published several articles and delivered speeches. She was also a talented translator, translating the book *Stories Told by Female Workers: Struggle and life in Eretz Yisrael* from Hebrew into German in 1935.

**Recha Freier and the Youth Aliyah**

In 1932, realizing that Jews had no future in Germany, Recha Freier organized the first emigration of a group of Jewish youth to Palestine, thereby essentially founding the Youth Aliyah movement. (Aliyah, the Hebrew word for “going up,” is used to refer to immigration to Israel.) In January 1933, she officially founded the *Jüdische Jugendhilfe e.V.* (Committee for the Assistance of Jewish Youth, later renamed Youth Aliyah), its aim to encourage and facilitate the emigration of Jewish children and youth to Palestine. In September 1933, the Youth Aliyah was incorporated into a new organisation called *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* (Representation of the German Jews in the German Reich).

Recha Freier became the director of the board of the *Jüdische Jugendhilfe* (Jewish Youth Welfare) department, which was responsible for choosing applicants for training in agricultural centres and Youth Aliyah schools, and preparing them for life in Palestine. She also arranged the necessary immigration certificates and travel expenses.

Photo

Youth saying goodbye to their families at a Berlin station, 1936, Jüdisches Museum Berlin. Photo: Herbert Sonnenfeld

Between 1937 and 1936, Recha Freier’s three sons and her husband Moritz all made their way to Britain, leaving her behind in Germany with her very young daughter. She refused to emigrate as long as she could find a way to help Jews flee from the Nazis.

Without any official approval, she provided exit papers for Polish prisoners in 1939, which freed them from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Because of this unauthorized behaviour, she came into conflict with the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Organisation of the Jews in the German Reich) and was removed from all her official positions.

**Escape from Germany**

Ultimately, in 1940, the Germans confiscated Recha Freier’s passport. Lacking any travel documents, she and her daughter Mayaan fled to Zagreb, Croatia via Vienna. From there, she again succeeded in saving Jewish children from Nazi Germany. Eventually, her escape brought her to Jerusalem in 1941. However, there, was not able to continue her work for the Youth Aliyah there, due to personal differences with Henrietta Szold, the director of the Jerusalem office of the organization.

Photo passport

Recha’s passport stamped with the letter J for Jew (*Jude*), and declared “*ungültig,*” or invalid.

**Recha Freier in Israel**

In 1943, Recha Freier founded the Agricultural Training Center where children and youth from socially disadvantaged families could be cared for and educated. Multi-talented and tirelessly active, she became involved with modern music, played the piano, and wrote poems in German and in Hebrew. In 1958, she established a fund to support Israeli composers. She also organized the Testimonium (Witness) Festival for setting to music central events in the lives of Jews, holding six major concerts between 1968 and 1983. Two books of her poetry were published in Germany: *Auf der Treppe* (*On the Stairs*) (1976)and *Fensterläden* (*Shutters*)(1979).

On April 2, 1984, Recha Freier died in Jerusalem.

**Jewish Life in Norden**

Jews first settled in Norden around 1550, and the earliest gravestones in the Jewish cemetery of Norden date back to 1569. By the end of the 19th century, the Jewish community of Norden numbered approximately 300 members. Norden at that time was a seaport noted for trade, shipping, and agriculture. Many of its Jews worked as livestock dealers, butchers, grain merchants, or traders.

In the infamous 1933 elections, the National Socialists won the majority of votes in Norden, soon after which Jewish shops were closed and the Jewish population was banned from their jobs, from schools, and from clubs and associations. Many Jew who emigrated before 1938 were forced to sell their houses and properties for less than their true value.

During *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, the Norden synagogue was set on fire by Norden members of the Nazi SA and SS (paramilitary wings). All the Jewish families were driven into the town’s slaughterhouse, where they were tortured and abused. With the deportation of the last Jews in 1940, the nearly 400-year history of the Jewish community in Norden came to an end.

Photo

Synagogenweg 3, Norden – the house where Recha Freier was born.

***frauenORTE Niedersachsen***

*frauenORTE* is an initiative of the *Landesfrauenrat Niedersachsen* *e.V*. (Women’s Council of Lower Saxony) and supported by the Lower Saxony Ministry for Social and Health Affairs. Its goals include publicizing and promoting the work of historically important women who came from the region. The initiative focuses on women’s history and culture in the context of subjects that are of interest in terms of both cultural studies and tourism.

There have been 42 *frauenORTE* initiatives in Lower Saxony since 2008. In East Frisia, there are currently six *frauenORTEs.* From the autumn of 2021, there will be seven additional initiatives, including one on the German opera singer, Sara Oppenheimer, originally from Esens.

**Credits**

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**Recha Freier**

In 1931, Recha Freier founded the Youth Aliyah for helping children and youth immigrate to Palestine. She played a decisive role in saving thousands of Jewish children and youths from the Nazis.

Further information can be found in the booklet on Recha Freier, available on request from the Equal Opportunities Officer, Elke Kirsten.

Photo

Three youth from Norden who succeeded in emigrating with the help of the Youth Aliyah: Zvi (Erich) Weinberg, Ruth Zadek, née Netheim, and Rudy Wolff in Haifa, Israel, 1985.

Photo: Lina Gödeken, Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Synagogenweg Norden.

**A Tour of Norden**

1. **Neuer Weg 110 –** This is the oldest part of the Jewish community centre, located in Synagogenweg. Purchased by the Jewish community in 1679, it was used as a synagogue (house of prayer), school and residential building. In 1903, a teacher’s flat was built on the upper floor.
2. **Synagogenweg** (formerly known as Jews’ Lane) **–** The Jewish community center was situated between Neuer Weg, Norden’s main shopping street, and Uffenstraße, which connected the market place with the old harbour. As an ensemble of buildings, it is unique in the region.
3. **Memorial –** In 1804, a new synagogue was built, but it was burned down in November 1938. In 1987, a memorial was erected on its site.
4. **Synagogenweg 2 –** This is the house where the beadle of the community lived. It was also used as an office, a conference room and a place to store timber for coffins and biers. The mikvah (ritual bath), was located here. The names of the committee members are engraved next to the entrance.
5. **Synagogenweg 3 –** Thehouse where Recha Freier was born was built in 1891 as a teacher’s house. The names of the board and committee members and the year the building was erected are carved on the stones next to the entrance. Notably, the inscription of Recha Freier’s father “*Kantor M. Schweitzer*” can be seen here.
6. **Synagogenweg 4 –** AJewish school from 1871; extension of the building in Neuer Weg 110 with a little garden belonging to the school. The gym of a nearby sports club (*Norder Turnverein*) was used for physical education lessons.
7. **Recha-Freier-Platz –** This memorial was erected in the centre of Norden, with a memorial plaque in commemoration of Recha Freier’s life work dedicated in 2013.
8. **Am Zingel –** This is the oldest Jewish cemetery in East Frisia, established in 1569. About 330 gravestones still exist, the oldest one dating back to 1659. The last burial was in 1940. In 2005, a memorial was erected to commemorate all the Jews who were born or lived in Norden and who were murdered during the Holocaust.
9. **Remembrance Stones –** Thus far, 98 remembrance stones, also known as *Stolpersteine*, or stumbling stones, like those that have been laid across Europe, have been embedded in the pavement throughout the city centre to commemorate the former Jewish inhabitants. The remembrance stones are mainly to be found in Neuer Weg and in Sielstraße.
10. **Am Markt –** In the bell tower of the Ludgeri-Church is a memorial to those killed in World War I. The names of Jewish soldiers are also listed here

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