**Recha Freier (born Schweitzer)**

Recha Freier was born on October 29, 1892, in Norden ( East Frisia) into a Jewish Orthodox family. Her brothers Willi and Arthur were born in Norden, too, her sister, Eddie, in Glogau (Glogow, Poland). Her parents were Bertha Schweitzer ( born Levy ) and Menasse Schweitzer. Bertha, born in 1862, died in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt (now Terezin /Czech Republic) in 1945. Menasse, born in 1855, died in Munich in 1929. Recha’s mother taught English and French, her father taught at a Jewish primary school and was the reader / cantor of the local congregation.

In Norden, Recha was confronted with antisemitism for the first time in her life. It was a painful event that had a deep impact on her for the rest of her life. Many years later she wrote a poem about that 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.”

In 1897, the Schweitzers moved to Glogau in Lower Silesia. Recha attended the Glogau grammar school. On account of antisemitic remarks by 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, presumably, in Munich.

In 1919, she married Rabbi Dr. Moritz Freier (1889 - 1969 in Jerusalem). Three years later, in 1922, the couple moved to Sofia /Bulgaria where Moritz Freier worked as a rabbi. Recha Freier founded a Zionist girl group, Young WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organization). In 1929, they moved to Berlin where Moritz Freier had been appointed rabbi for three synagogues. Recha Freier did some research on folklore, delivered speeches and published several articles. Between 1920 and 1929 she gave birth to three sons and a daughter. Later she translated the book “Stories told by female workers. Struggle and life in Erez Jisrael” from Hebrew into German.

**Recha Freier and the Youth Aliyah**

In 1932, Recha Freier organized the first emigration of a group of youths to Palestine and, thus, founded the Youth Aliyah (Aliyah = Hebrew for rise, the immigration to Israel). In 1933, the Youth Aliyah was officially accepted as a member of the *Jüdische Jugendhilfe e.V.* (Committee for the Assistance of Jewish Youths or Youth Aliyah) with its aim to continue organizing the emigration of children and youths to Palestine. Then, in September 1933, the Youth Aliyah was incorporated into a new organization called: *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden (*Representation of the German Jews in the German Reich).

Recha Freier became the director of the board of the department *Jüdische Jugendhilfe*, which was responsible for the selection of applicants being prepared and trained in agricultural centres and Youth Aliyah schools for life in Palestine. She also organized the necessary immigration certificates and the travel expenses.

Photo

Youths saying good bye to their families at a Berlin station, 1936, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Photo: Herbert Sonnenfeld

Recha Freier’s sons and her husband Moritz emigrated to Britain in 1937, 1938 and 1939. She herself refused to emigrate as long as she was able to help Jews flee from the Nazis.

Without any authorization she provided exit papers for Polish prisoners in 1939, and, thus, freed them from the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. Because of this unauthorized behaviour she came into conflict with the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* and was removed from all her offices. The above mentioned organization *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* had been renamed and was now called Organization of the Jews in the German Reich.

**Escape from Germany**

In 1940, Recha Freier’s passport was confiscated. She fled, without any papers and together with her daughter Mayaan, to Zagreb / Croatia via Vienna. From there, she, once again, succeeded in saving Jewish children from Germany. Her escape ended with her arrival in Jerusalem. There she was denied any further work for the Youth Aliyah by the then director of the Jerusalem Office because of personal differences.

Photo passport

Recha’s passport stamped with a the letter J for Jew ( *Jude*) , declared “*ungültig*”, meaning to be invalid.

**Recha Freier in Israel**

In 1943, Recha Freier founded a centre for children and youths from socially disadvantaged families to be looked after and trained there. She occupied herself with modern music, played the piano and wrote poems in German and in Hebrew. In 1958, she established a fund to support Israeli composers. Under the name of “Testimonium” she managed to organize six big concerts between 1968 and 1983. Two books of poetry were published in Germany: *Auf der Treppe (1976)* and *Fensterläden* (1979*).* On April 2, 1984, Recha Freier died in Jerusalem.

**Jewish Life in Norden**

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

In the 1933 election the National Socialists gained the majority of votes in Norden. Soon after that Jewish shops were closed and the Jewish population was banned from their jobs, from schools and from clubs. Many Jews had already emigrated before 1938 – they had to sell their houses and their properties for less than their true value.

During the *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 the Synagogue was set on fire by members of the SA and the SS from Norden, all Jewish families were driven to the slaughterhouse and maltreated there. With the deportation of the last Jews in 1940, the nearly 400-year old 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) intending to make the significance of historically important women public. The initiative also wants to contribute to women’s history and to women’s culture being focused on in matters with both a cultural and a tourist aspect.

Since 2008, 42 such *frauenORTE* have come into existence in Lower Saxony. In East Frisia there are, up to now, six *frauenORTE.* The initiative is supported by the Lower Saxony Ministry for Social and Health Affairs. From the autumn of 2021 there will be seven, including Sara Oppenheimer from Esens.

**Credits**

**Editor:** Stadt Norden, Gleichstellungsbeauftragte (equal opportunities officer) Elke Kirsten, Am Markt 15, 26506 Norden, Tel.: 04931 923-246, elke. [kirsten@norden.de](mailto:kirsten@norden.de) **Text: :** Astrid and Roswitha Homann and Elke Kirsten, assisted by Almut Holler, Maayan Landau (t) and Gesine Janssen **Cover picture:** private property of the Freier and Landau families **Photo credits:** private property of the Freier and Landau families, Kaja Schierl, Roswitha Homann, Yad Vashem Archives, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis Synagogenweg Norden e.V. **Design:** Kaja E. Schierl GrafikDesign, Norden **Special thanks** go to Maayan Landau (t )born Freier and Serem Freier for the important information on the text and Serem Freier for the photos made available **Printing:** Druckerei Bley, Rechtsupweg **First edition:** December 2015**; Revised edition**: December 2020 **Translation:** Gaby Gausmann, Norden, assisted by Serem Freier

**Recha Freier**

In 1931, Recha Freier founded the Youth Aliyah which organized the immigration of children and youths 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 youths from Norden also succeeded in emigrating with the help of the Youth Aliyah: Zvi (Erich) Weinberg, Ruth Zadek, born Netheim, and Rudy Wolff in Haifa /Israel, 1985

Foto: Lina Gödeken, Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Synagogenweg Norden

**A tour of Norden**

1. **Neuer Weg 110 -** Oldest part of the Jewish community centre situated in Synagogenweg. Bought in 1679 by the Jewish community, it was used as a synagogue (a room for prayer), a school and a residential building. In 1903, it was newly erected with a teacher’s flat on the upper floor.
2. **Synagogenweg** - (formerly known as Jews’ Lane)The Jewish community centre was situated between Neuer Weg, Norden’s main shopping street, and Uffenstraße connecting the market place with the old harbour. As an ensemble of buildings it is unique in the region. **Memorial -** In 1804, a new synagogue was built. In November 1938, the synagogue was burnt down. In 1987, a memorial was erected on its site. **Synagogenweg 2 –** the house where the beadle of the community lived. It was also used as an office, a conference room and a place to store the timber for the coffins and the biers. Also the mikvah, the bath where the cleaning ritual was performed, was situated here. Next to the entrance the names of the committee members are to be found. **Synagogenweg 3 -** house where Recha Freier was born, built in 1891 as a teacher’s house. Next to the entrance, you can see stones in which the names of the board, of committee members as well as the year of building are carved. In addition, the inscription of Recha Freier’s father “*Kantor M. Schweitzer*” is to be found. **Synagogenweg 4 –**Jewish 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 P.E. lessons.
3. **Recha-Freier-Platz –** In the centre of Norden the Recha-Freier-Platz reminds the citizens of Recha Freier. In 2013, a Memorial Plaque was put up in commemoration of Recha Freier’s lifework.
4. **Am Zingel -** The oldest Jewish cemetery in East Frisia since 1569. About 330 gravestones still exist, the oldest one dates back to 1659. The last burial was in 1940. In 2005, a Memorial was erected to commemorate all the Jews who were either born in Norden or who lived here and who were murdered during the Holocaust.
5. **Remembrance Stones –** Up to now 98 remembrance stones have been laid in the pavement throughout the city centre to commemorate the former Jewish inhabitants. The remembrance stones are, above all, to be found in Neuer Weg and in Sielstraße.
6. **Am Markt –** In the belltower of the Ludgeri-Church a memorial to those killed in World War I is to be found. Among their names the names of Jewish soldiers are also listed.