



JÜDISCHES KULTURMUSEUM
AUGSBURG SCHWABEN

Press Release

The Augsburg Synagogue Turns 100

Anniversary Program of the Jewish Culture Museum Augsburg-Swabia

April 4 – June 29, 2017

The hundredth anniversary of a synagogue is a rare occasion in Germany! From April to June 2017, the Jewish Culture Museum Augsburg-Swabia is hosting a number of events to commemorate the dedication of the Great Synagogue in Augsburg one hundred years ago.

Two **concerts** in the synagogue will frame the celebration. The Wolfgang Lackerschmid Connection will kick things off in March with a jazz concert featuring guest Stefanie Schlesinger. And the Friedberg Chamber Orchestra and the Augsburg Vocal Ensemble will conclude the anniversary program at the beginning of July with a performance of *Elijah*, the oratorio by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.

Appearing as **guest speakers** in April, May and July, respectively, will be Rabbi Prof. Dr. Andreas Nachama of Berlin, Prof. Dr. Michael Brenner of Munich and Washington, D.C., and Cilly Kugelmann of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Their lectures will address three different aspects of the Augsburg Synagogue: its history, its architecture and its distinction as the site of the first Jewish museum in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Meanwhile numerous **public tours** will familiarize visitors with this jewel of synagogue architecture. Offered on Wednesdays and Sundays, the tours will be an open invitation to discover or rediscover the synagogue and museum.

The anniversary program also includes three **exhibitions** offering diverse insights into Jewish history and culture in Augsburg, the region and beyond. The series begins in April with an exhibition project by students of the University of Augsburg. This exhibition, to be housed in the former Kriegshaber Synagogue, a branch location of the museum since 2014, will present the life and work of the writer **Paula Buber**, bringing her out of the shadow of her famous husband, Martin Buber.

From June to September, likewise in the Kriegshaber museum branch, Dachau artist Esther Glück will be showing her installation ***Erinnerungsräume (Spaces of Remembrance)***. Inspired by the carefully preserved traces of Jewish life in the former Kriegshaber Synagogue, Glück will let her impressions take shape as a wild and yet fragile garden.

The third exhibition is a collaboration with the State Textile and Industry Museum Augsburg (TIM). There, beginning in late June, visitors will be able to view **Kahn & Arnold – The Rise, Persecution and Emigration of Two Augsburg Entrepreneurial Families in the Twentieth Century**. This exhibition commemorates two families of entrepreneurs who exerted a formative influence on the textile-production center Augsburg beginning in the late nineteenth century, but who were forced to emigrate, or were deported and killed, upon the Nazis' rise to power.

Finally, the Jewish Culture Museum will mark the anniversary of the synagogue by hosting a **reunion** of descendants of the Augsburg Jewish families who had to flee from the Nazis. Numerous guests will travel from Israel, the United States, South Africa and Great Britain in order to retrace, in Augsburg and its environs, the lives of their ancestors who left the city under threat of violence. A varied program will provide many opportunities for the guests to get to know both each other and the present-day citizens of Augsburg.

The official **anniversary ceremony**, hosted by the **Jewish Community of Swabia-Augsburg**, will be held in the synagogue on June 28, 2017, with admittance by invitation only. Musical accompaniment will be provided by the Augsburg Philharmonic Orchestra. For more information, please call the Jewish Community office at 0821-509930 or visit its website at <http://ikg-augsburg.com/>.

Background: The Augsburg Synagogue and Its Two Communities, 1917–2017

“An Ornament to the City and a Pride of the Community”

The Augsburg Synagogue was dedicated on April 4, 1917. Then Community Rabbi Richard Grünfeld praised it as “an ornament to the city and a pride of the community.” Today the imposing monumental structure bears witness to a hundred years of history, including beginnings and upheavals, expulsion and flight, and the repeated resurgence of hope.

The architects, Dr. Heinrich Lömpel (1877–1951) and Fritz Landauer (1883–1968), designed the majestic building over one hundred years ago in the context of the Jewish Renaissance, a movement that combined a return to the roots of Judaism with a reimagining of the tradition. The synagogue's architecture unites ideas from classical antiquity, Art Nouveau and New Objectivity with Byzantine and Orientalizing elements.

The complex includes two community buildings, which stand in front of the synagogue, facing the street. When the synagogue was completed in 1917, it was celebrated far beyond Augsburg as the epitome of a modern Jewish house of worship. Today the synagogue, with its 95-foot dome, is considered one of the most beautiful in Europe.

It is clearly the synagogue of a Reform community, as evinced by the inclusion of three-dimensional sculpture and the presence of an organ gallery (the instrument itself is notably absent, having been sold by the community in 1940, out of necessity, to the Catholic parish of Weßling/Ammersee). Before the Shoah, the community numbered around 1,000 members, and today the synagogue it built for itself stands as a remarkable document of German-Jewish history and an impressive testament to Liberal Judaism. The Liberal

movement predominated among German Jewry until it, like the Jewish émigrés themselves, was forced to leave Hitler's Germany.

Desecration in 1938

The Augsburg Synagogue is the only urban synagogue in Bavaria and one of the few in Germany to have survived the Nazi period. The interior was desecrated, but the building escaped destruction. National Socialists did set fire to it on the early morning of November 10, 1938, but the presence of a filling station across the street led the *Gauleiter* – the local Nazi Party leader – to have the fire put out. He was concerned the flames might spread to surrounding buildings, where non-Jews lived.

Throughout the war the desecrated synagogue was used as a “ghetto house”: the National Socialists forced Swabian Jews to live there before deporting them to concentration and extermination camps in the east. The synagogue is an authentic site of Augsburg history and a place of remembrance for the city's destroyed Jewish community. It is also, today, once again the center of a Jewish congregation.

New Beginning

After the Shoah, Jews of primarily Polish origin, having survived the concentration camps but unable to return to their home countries, began using some rooms within the synagogue complex. They became the founding members of the third Jewish Community of Augsburg – after the first, medieval community and the second community that arose during the nineteenth century.

The sanctuary of the Great Synagogue remained in desolate condition until the mid-1970s, when public funds were finally allocated for its restoration. These efforts culminated in its rededication on September 1, 1985. At the same time, in the building's west wing, the Jewish Culture Museum Augsburg-Swabia was established as the first independent Jewish museum in the Federal Republic of Germany. Even today the Augsburg museum remains one of the few Jewish museums in Germany to be housed in a synagogue that is still in active use, and one of the few to share its facilities with a Jewish community.

Jewish Immigration in the 1990s

The Jewish Community of Augsburg underwent fundamental change once again in the 1990s, as approximately 1,200 Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants arrived in Augsburg from former territories of the Soviet Union. The community now numbers around 1,500 members in Augsburg and across the administrative district of Bavarian Swabia, a revitalization that as recently as the 1980s no one dared to expect.

For more details on the anniversary program and downloadable photographs please visit the **press section** of our museum homepage: www.jkmas.de/presse.

Press Contacts

We are grateful for any mention of the anniversary program in your publications, and we look forward to reading your reportage of the events. Museum Director Dr. Benigna Schönhagen and I are happy to answer any questions you may have (tel. +49 821-513658).

Sincerely,

Dr. Torsten Lattki
on behalf of Dr. Benigna Schönhagen

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