

Honored guests,

Today, we are standing here in front of the house “Düstere Straße 1”, a place full of history. A place that once was a shop and, first and foremost, a home for a family that is closely linked to the Göttingen history: The Meininger family. The fading letters “Gebr. Meininger” at the front still bear witness to this.

The Meiningers were a long-established and respected family in Göttingen. They ran a livestock trade with the name of “Gebrüder Meininger”. But the house was not just a place of business; it was a place of gathering, family life and cohesion.

Harry Meininger, born in 1875, and his wife Thekla, born in 1890, run the family business together with Harry's brother Oskar and his cousin Eugen. Harry, a veteran of the First World War, has to experience how society increasingly turns against him and his family after the seizure of control by the National Socialists.

Today we want to commemorate them within the scope of the laying of these Stolpersteine.

As early as in the 1920s and 1930s, the university city of Göttingen is a place where Nazi ideas gain a foothold early on. The NSDAP already has a strong basis here in 1922 and anti-Semitic ideologies quickly spread in academic and middle-class circles, too. The first association of the Göttingen Hitler Youth takes already place in 1924. Also, the SA, the paramilitary fighting organization of the NSDAP, quickly finds supporters in the city and at the university.

The Meininger brothers' livestock trade closes in 1926, after Oskar's death in 1920 and as a result of the period of inflation in the early 1920s. Harry Meininger continues to run a breeding and fat cattle trade on the premises which also stumbles into financial troubles at the beginning of 1930 due to the depression. Through the strengthening of the NSDAP the company is subject to additional pressure.

With the seizure of control by the Nazi party on 30 January 1933, the life of the Göttingen population should change drastically.

On 28 March 1933, an organized SA march takes place through the Göttingen city center with hate posters against Jewish businessmen mentioned by name. After the official break-up of the protest march, the SA men remain on the streets and smash the windows of Jewish shops. Numerous windows get broken in 30 shops and 2 private homes. Here, too, in Düstere Straße 1, a large area of the front is smeared with tar inscriptions in the night of 28 March 1933. Despite the extent of the anti-Semitic excesses, nobody feels called to organize public protest. The so-called “Göttinger Scherbennacht” (Göttingen Night of Broken Glass) makes it visible to the eye how divided the Göttingen community already is.

Despite these circumstances, Harry Meininger manages to stabilize his economic situation although the income together with the necessity-driven partial sale of family assets is just enough to survive.

His son Ludwig, shaken by the increasingly anti-Semitic atmosphere combined with enormous pressure at school, takes his own life in 1934 at the age of fourteen.

This loss and the permanent repressive measures by the Nazi regime worry Harry to such an extent that he dies from the consequences of this emotional distress in 1935. Harry and his cousin Eugen die within half a year, the family business finally falls apart and the name of Meininger ceases to exist in the Göttingen livestock trade.

Thekla Meininger, a strong and resolute woman, fights on. She tries to create a normal life for her remaining child Ilse but the circumstances make this increasingly difficult: During the Pogrom Night of 9/10 November 1938, Jewish shops are destroyed once again and the Göttingen synagogue is completely burnt to the ground. Of the original population of almost 500 Jewish citizens, only 220 are still living in Göttingen in October 1938. Almost without exception, they fall victim to the assaults by SS and SA who trespass apartments and business premises, devastate and burglarize the furnishings and arrest Jewish men, women and children without distinction.

On 10 November, the apartment of the Meininger family is also stormed by party supporters who dash the apartment – which is still furnished better-than-average – to pieces until they are eventually stopped by a resident.

This is followed by the enforced closure of Thekla's agency for laundry and detergent which she has run in the apartment of the family home since Harry's death. After this incident, Thekla flees to Aschersleben.

Her sisters-in-law Käthe Meininger, wife of Oscar Meininger, and Else Katz (née Meininger) move into the flat; they were also affected by the Pogrom Night on 9 November 1938 when SS men stormed and burglarized their apartment in today's Theaterstraße.

Since 1925, Käthe Meininger (née Weil) has run a coffee and chocolate shop popular with the townspeople that is also located in this building (DS 1) until 1934.

Subsequently, she moves into the apartment in the Theaterstraße and continues her business there until the expropriation at the end of 1938.

As of March 1939, she lives again in the apartment in Düstere Straße 1 together with her sister-in-law Else Katz. In the years that followed, Kurt Meininger and his wife Lucie moved in, too.

In September 1941, a few days after her sixty-second birthday, Else Katz also takes her own life in the wake of the administrative order on yellow star badges (which Jews were forced to wear) due to which she is afraid of even greater discrimination.

The wave of deportations now has also reached Göttingen and in 1942, subsequent to the discrimination and exclusion, the systematic expulsion and physical extermination of the Göttingen Jews is now started as well.

In March 1942, Käthe, Kurt and Lucie Meininger are deported to the Warsaw ghetto together with more than a hundred other Göttingen Jews and are later pronounced dead.

Thekla Meininger is deported from Aschersleben to the Warsaw ghetto in 1942 where she disappears and is later pronounced dead.

Thekla's daughter, Ilse Meininger, a young woman with dreams and ambitions, manages to emigrate in 1938 despite the difficult conditions, just as a total of around 280,000 German Jews. At the age of 24, she finds refuge in Colombia where she calls herself Ilse de Stern from then on.

Despite the distance, the fate of her family won't let her go. Until her death in 1961, she stands up for the memory and the care of the graves of her parents and her brother.

The Meiningers' story is just one of many that happened here in Göttingen and is not only a part of the past but a warning for the present and the future.

This part of the German history, the exclusion and the Holocaust, is deeply rooted in our collective memory and requests us to preserve memories.

However, the culture of remembrance does not only serve the preservation of the past but, in particular, the sensitization of contemporary and future generations to the importance of humanity and tolerance. In this sense, remembering the Holocaust is not only a dutiful remembrance for our present society but also a conscious process of dealing with, and reflecting, our shared history.

The Stolpersteine, as they are laid in many cities in Germany today, are a part thereof. The small brass plates that are embedded in front of the former homes of the victims, tell the stories of the people who once lived in these houses. People who were part of our society before they fell victim to the terror of the National Socialism.

The idea behind the Stolpersteine is that today we “stumble” over this memory, literally and symbolically, and become aware of the fate of the people who once lived here. They should make us pause and give us food for thought. Especially today, our awareness for similar developments must be raised. Any attempted exclusion or violence against religious, ethnic, political or sexual minorities must be prevented by all means.

Since 2008, numerous Stolpersteine have been laid in the city which commemorate the fate of the murdered Göttingen Jews – people who once were neighbors, friends or colleagues, whose stories are inextricably linked with the streets and houses of this city. Today, six additional Stolpersteine are being laid here for Else Katz, for Käthe Meininger, for Harry Meininger, for Thekla Meininger, for Ilse Meininger, and for Ludwig Meininger. They should show how strongly Jewish fellow citizens once left their mark on the city life.

May these Stolpersteine make us pause and think about the importance of freedom, equality and humanity. They should remind us again and again that we must preserve and defend these values so that the horrors of the past never become reality again.

Thank you for your attention.