

GERMAN DEAF HISTORY

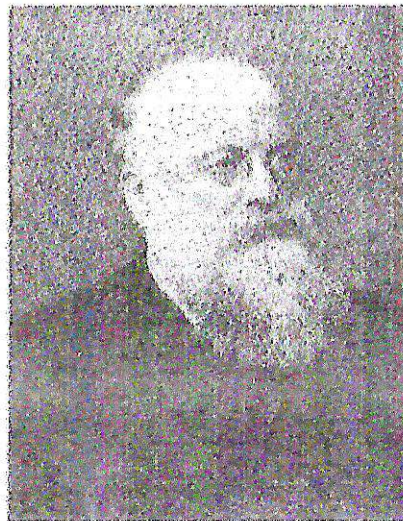
Open Your Hand for the Dumb

The History of the Jewish School for the Deaf and Dumb in Berlin-Weissensee 1873-1942

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Markus Reich, a Jewish teacher from Bohemia, was the founder of the only Jewish school for the Deaf which ever existed in Germany. It was a chance meeting with a deaf man, who was able to speak loudly and clearly, that made a lasting impression on him. In 1865, Markus Reich, who was then 21 years old, had an idea of establishing a school for Jewish deaf-mute children, where they would receive an education, Jewish religious instruction and speech lessons, thus releasing them from isolation and loneliness. Older children would be taught a profession which would enable them to support themselves and become part of the hearing society.



*Markus Reich
(1844 - 1911)*

Markus Reich was a person far ahead of his time with his ideas and ideals. This is shown by the fact that compulsory schooling for the deaf was not introduced until 1911, the year of Reich's death. Supported by his wife Emma, his sister Anna and a small group of friends and sponsors, Markus Reich opened his Jewish school for the Deaf on 15th. July 1873, with four pupils. He strove "to be the father and mother to them as far as possible." Not only did the deaf children enjoy a family atmosphere, Reich's children Elisabeth, Hedwig and Felix, who later continued their father's work, were introduced to the world of the deaf by growing up alongside with deaf children in the new school.

In 1884, after 24 pupils had already completed their education and half of them integrated into working life, Markus Reich and his sponsors established the "Society of Friends of the Deaf and Dumb", or in Hebrew, *Jedide Ilmim*. For 55 years until its

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compulsory liquidation by the Nazis in 1939, the society paid virtually all the school's running costs. Teachers and other staff members were hired by the society, who also paid for the poor pupils' school fees. In 1889, the society acquired a plot of land in 22 Park Street, Berlin-Weissensee, and built the school, which was until then in a small house rented by Markus Reich outside Berlin. The school was built to satisfy future demands and its main building still stands today. When the Reich family moved in 1890, they had 10 pupils and later up to 58 children lived there. Some of them came from abroad.



Jewish School for Deaf and Dumb in Berlin

The sponsors' commitment was enormous and the society was represented in almost every town throughout Germany. In 1919, *Jedide Ilmim* had 7000 members. Among these were famous personalities such as the publisher Leopold Ullstein, the president of Berlin Chamber of Commerce William Herz, the banker Jacob Nachod and the medical privy councillor Samuel Kristeller, alongside with numerous unknown small donors - Jews whose tradition made helping others as a matter of course. The society's expectations were met over and over again, and sometimes even surpassed.

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Many former pupils found work and some established their own business. In 1924, when radio was in its infancy, Wladislaw Zeitlin, a student at Berlin Polytechnic and a former pupil of Felix Reich, was working on the invention of television. Zeitlin, who was murdered by the Gestapo in Paris in 1944, was highly gifted and Felix Reich, who gave a strong support for higher education for the deaf, encouraged him especially.

In 1934, the Israelite School for the Deaf and Dumb (Israelitische Taubstumm-Anstalt) celebrated its 60th anniversary and the Society its 50th anniversary. It was to be the last celebration of its kind. In 1942, the teaching of Jewish children was forbidden by the Nazis, who shut down the school and deported the last remaining staff members and children to the extermination camps. Most of the deaf and additionally handicapped Jews were unable to emigrate, as no one would accept them. The only exception was England. A group of ten children accompanied by Felix Reich was allowed into England in July 1939. Some of the staff members and pupils managed to emigrate to Israel in the early 1930s and very few pupils who were hidden by friends and relatives in Europe survived.

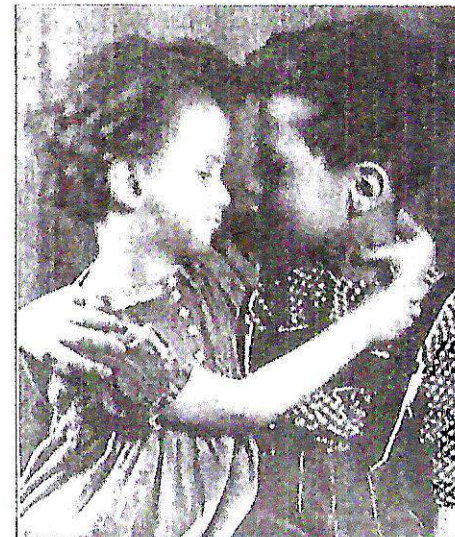


Felix Reich

This article was translated and written concisely on behalf of Mrs. Ruth Fallman from the paper 'Öffne deine Hand für die Stummen', which was submitted by Nicola Galliner at the 2nd Deaf History International Conference held in Hamburg between 1 and 4 October 1994. In the Jewish Chronicle of 7th. May 1993, there was a report of a forthcoming exhibition of the Jewish school for the Deaf that would be held during November 1993 at the Jewish Museum in the Gropius-Bau in Berlin, next to where the Berlin Wall once stood. This exhibition took place and it featured the heroic efforts of Felix Reich. London-born Nicola Galliner, the head of the adult education branch of the Jewish community centre in Berlin, had gathered material on the history of the school and obtained documents, information and photographs from former pupils for her book.

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Mrs. Ruth Fallman, nee Danziger, a member of the BDHS, has expressed great interest in this paper. It was Felix Reich who escorted ten children into England and one of them was Ruth herself. Dr. Felix Reich eventually settled in Oldham in Lancashire, where he died in 1964.



Ruth Danziger (later Fallman) with her brother Kurt in 1937

References

Öffne deine Hand für die Stummen by Vera Bendt and Nicola Galliner. Pub. Transit Buchverlag, 1993.

