

Lotty's Bench

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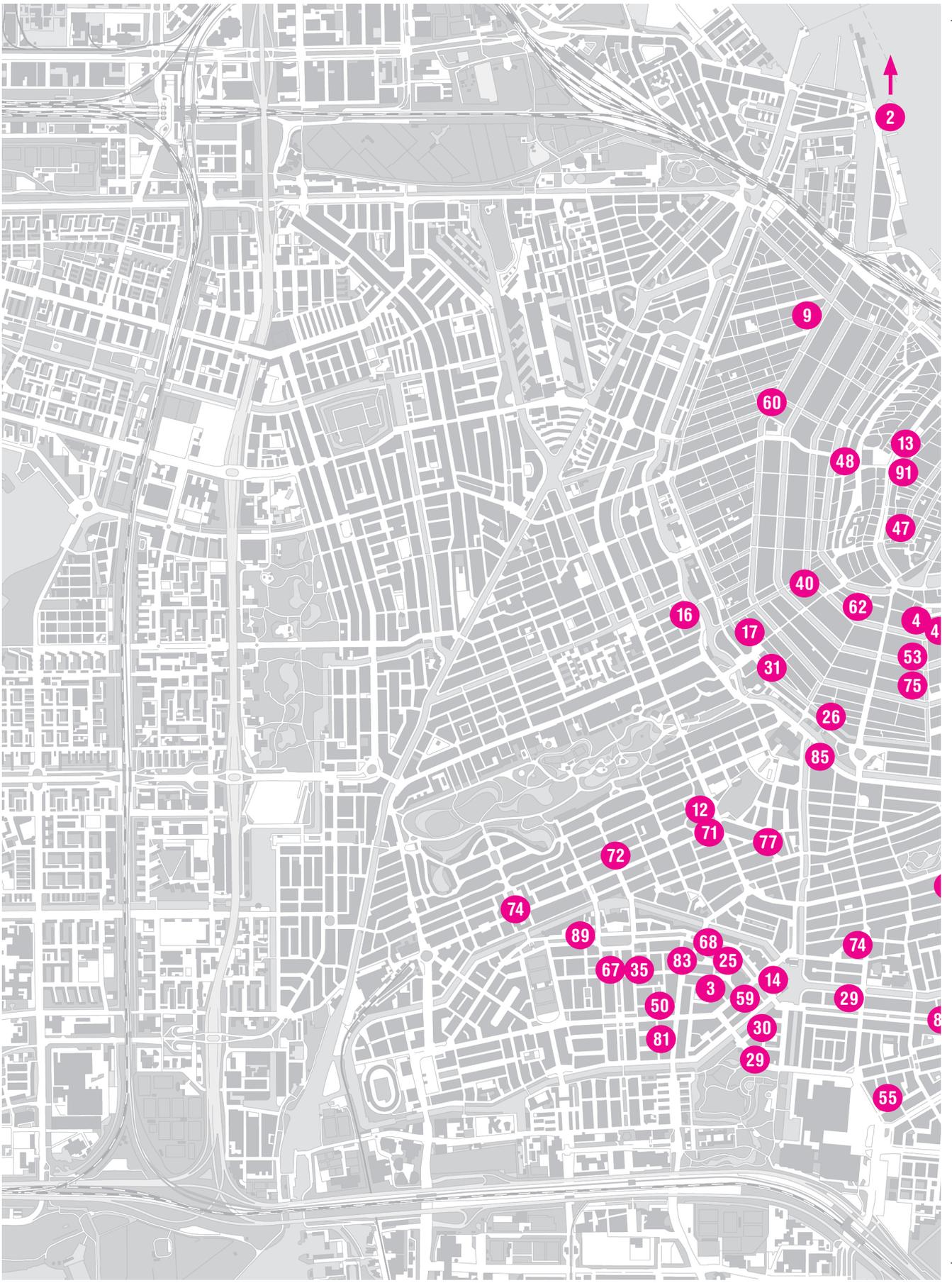
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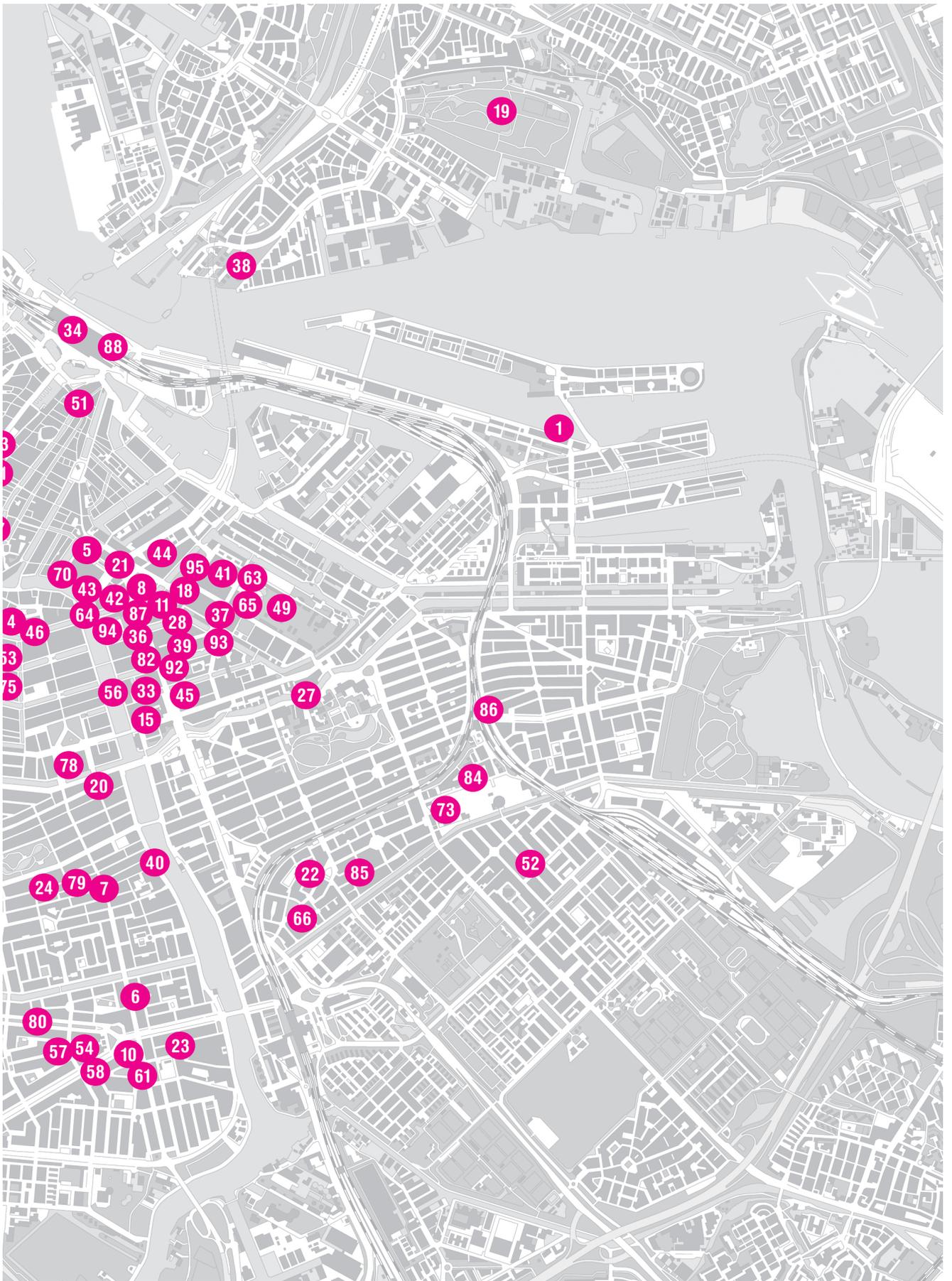
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Lotty's Bench

The Persecution of
the Jews of Amsterdam
Remembered

Gerben Post





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Introduction

August 26, 1945: Lotty Veffers arrived in Amsterdam. She was the only member of her family to have survived the war. Her parents and younger sister Carla had been gassed in Sobibor. There was no heartfelt welcome for her, and eventually she was forced to spend her first night back “home” in Amsterdam on a park bench on the Apollolaan. In September 2017, the then 96-year-old Lotty was honored with her own monument, a bench on the exact same spot where she had spent that first night. This is only one of the many locations in the city that continues to remind us of the persecution of the Jews.

When the German army invaded the Netherlands in the night of May 9 to 10, 1940, the country changed for good. The Dutch army held on for four days, but after the bombardment of Rotterdam on the 14th of May, it had to capitulate. The Netherlands was forced to acknowledge the superiority of the mighty German army and was occupied by their neighboring country. A new era began, an era of National Socialist domination and suppression that would last for five years.

Needless to say, the Jews who lived in the Netherlands entered a state of panic when the country was occupied. Through the press, the German anti-Semitic policies of Adolf Hitler's National Socialism had become a well-known fact. Furthermore, large groups of German Jews had already sought refuge from Germany on the other side of the border in the Netherlands. The 140,000 Jews who lived in the Netherlands therefore knew their lives were going to be very difficult as long as they had to live under the yoke of the German rulers.¹ Many of them looked to the future with great fear, witness the large number of escape attempts and suicides. Jewish cemeteries are the silent witnesses of these suicides. There many tombstones are to be found, with May 15 and 16, 1940, as dates of death engraved on them, along with large cemetery monuments holding the names of entire families

¹ Herzberg, A., *Kroniek der Jodenvervolging, 1940-1945* (Amsterdam, 1950), 17.

who took their lives at the same moment.²

The fear the Jews in the Netherlands felt was far from unfounded. Already within a few months after the country was occupied, the Nazis began their policies of excluding the Jews from Dutch society. The first anti-Jewish measures the Nazis implemented were still relatively innocent, but, as of the fall of 1940, it gradually became clear they were not inclined to leave the Jews alone. Jewish civil servants were fired from their jobs; Jews were not allowed to own businesses anymore; and brawls with Jews as the main target occurred more frequently. In the year 1941, Jews were no longer allowed to enter public spaces like cinemas, restaurants, markets, or parks. Later Jews had to hand over their bicycles and telephones, and they were no longer allowed to use public transport. In their identity cards a **J** for Jew was stamped in bold. The most famous, or rather most notorious, anti-Jewish measure was implemented in May 1942. At the beginning of that month, every Jew six years of age and older was forced to wear a bright yellow star on their clothes.³ The stigmatization was complete.

However, no one could ever have suspected that all this would be an omen for the deportation to, and annihilation of the Jews in Poland. Camps like Auschwitz and Sobibor that were in part or in their entirety designed to murder the Jews of Europe were beyond people's imagination. Of the 140,000 Jews who lived in the Netherlands in 1940, only some 38,000 would still be alive after liberation in May 1945. Around 102,000 Jews were deported to Eastern Europe from the Netherlands and would never return.⁴

The great majority of Jews living in the Netherlands resided in Amsterdam. Approximately 80,000 people, making up some ten percent of the Amsterdam population. In January 1940, Dutch Jews were forced to register themselves as Jewish. Compliance was huge.

² Presser, J., *Ondergang. De vervolging & verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom. 1940-1945*, part I (Den Haag, 1965), 10, 14.

³ Website Kamp Westerbork: www.kampwesterbork.nl.

⁴ Presser, J., *Ondergang*, part II, 509.



Almost all the Jews in the Netherlands registered, because what would happen to them if they didn't? This meticulous registration of the Jews made it much easier for the occupying forces to implement the anti-Jewish measures. After registration, Amsterdam civil servants were commissioned to map where in Amsterdam the Jews lived. The result was a map of the city measuring one by one meter. On this map, dots were applied, one for every ten Jews. This dotted map clearly shows how large the Jewish community of Amsterdam was and also in which parts of the city they mainly lived: the old Jewish quarter in the center, the Rivierenbuurt (River Quarter) in Amsterdam South, and in the Transvaalbuurt (Transvaal Quarter) in Amsterdam East.⁵ Of the 80,000 Amsterdam Jews, more than 75 percent would be murdered during the war. More than 60,000 people would never return from the Nazi camps.

It is not surprising that today there are still many places to be found all around the city that still remind us of the persecution, deportation, and annihilation of the Jews. In Amsterdam alone, there are more than eighty monuments that have something to do with this persecution. Often they are plaques to commemorate murdered pupils of schools or employees of companies or services, plaques to commemorate occurrences or to honor individuals, whether victims or saviors; in total, over eighty monuments, if what are known as "stumbling stones" (in Amsterdam over five hundred of these exist) are considered as just one single monument.

Besides monuments, there are still many locations in the city that tell us part of the story of the persecution of the Jews: buildings, streets, and squares that were once the silent witnesses of the darkest page in the history of Amsterdam. Many of the locations and monuments that have something to do with this persecution have blended into their environment. They do not immediately tell us their story. One can easily walk past *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) or

⁵ "Stippenkaart met de verspreiding van Joden in Amsterdam omstreeks 1941," at www.niod.nl.

the Memorial located at the Amstel River without noticing them. The same applies to plaques, facade bricks, or, for example, the former headquarters of the Jewish Council. Once one discovers them, though, it is virtually impossible not to see them anymore. In this book, the stories that belong to more than ninety of these locations and monuments will be told. Maybe, after reading this book, the reader will stop when passing one of these monuments or locations, stop for just a minute or so, and for just a brief moment commemorate what happened there.

The thirteen chapters in this book each have their own theme. The chapters have been placed in chronological order, as far as that was feasible, starting with the large streams of German Jewish refugees in the thirties and ending with the return of survivors from the camps or their hiding places, and finally the way the victims were commemorated. The chapters themselves all begin with a historical introduction to their theme, followed by anecdotes involving the background of the locations and monuments. Some of the locations will show up twice in different chapters. Central Station, for example, is important as part of the theme of the first deportations and as one for the return of the few survivors of the camps. The Jewish Lyceum (high school), both in the segregation within education as well as in the story of Anne Frank, and the headquarters of the Jewish Council at the Nieuwe Keizersgracht, which is both important in the chapter about the first deportations and in the one about the final roundups.

There is a story behind each location or monument: an emotional story, a story about a heroic person or event, but sometimes also a story that might bring a smile to one's face. All of them are worth the time and energy of being told. These stories are brought together in this book. On the basis of different locations and monuments, different aspects of the persecution come to light. The reader will likely come across gaps in the story of the persecution. A large number of locations that in principle would have been worth talking about no longer exist in

the physical form they once had: A large part of the old Jewish quarter, for example, is now the *Stopera*, the building complex housing the city hall and the music theater. Buildings that were demolished after the war are not included in this book; only locations and monuments still visible or that one can touch right to this day are mentioned. Therefore, the reader, or possibly the city hiker, can still “feel” this part of history, which is still present everywhere. This book, therefore, does not provide a complete history of the persecution of the Jews during the war. However, it does give the reader a clear idea of what the Jews had to endure right before, during, and after the Occupation. It shows how inseparable the city of Amsterdam still is from the history of the Second World War and the persecution of its Jews.

After the war, Lotty committed herself to making sure we will never forget what happened to the Jews during World War Two. Until a very old age, she kept telling her story and that of her family. On Friday July 27, 2018, Lotty passed away, aged 97. She can no longer tell her own story.

Lotty's story and those of many others have been recorded in this book, to keep alive the memory of the persecution of the Jews.

W.H. Vliegenbos

On July 2, 1942, the weather was beautiful. That morning, sports teacher and physiotherapist Abraham Prins decided to ride his bicycle through the W.H. Vliegenbos in Amsterdam North, instead of around it. Shortly before his decision, Prins had taken the ferry from Central Station towards North-Amsterdam to see one of his clients in Nieuwendam. The W.H. Vliegenbos was situated right between the quaym where he had left the ferry, and his destination for this morning.

The decision to ignore the "Forbidden for Jews" sign would be a deadly mistake for a Jew who was wearing the yellow star on his chest. At that exact moment a battalion of the Amsterdam police was on duty in the park. Prins was detained, made to get off his bicycle at quarter



past ten, and an official report was filed about this “crime.” Prins’s statement that he had not seen the “Forbidden for Jews” sign was not going to save him.

A few days later Prins was summoned to report to the Amsterdam police headquarters in the Marnixstraat. He refused his neighbor’s offer to help him find a hiding place: “I’m strong and athletic. I’ll survive a labor camp.”

On Saturday July 11, Prins and his non-Jewish wife reported to the Department of Jewish Affairs at the police headquarters. He was arrested immediately, and moments later his wife was outside again on the street. Two days later, Prins was taken to the headquarters of the German *Sicherheitspolizei* – the security police – at the Euterpestraat and from there, again two days later, he was placed on the first transport from Amsterdam to Westerbork, from where he was deported to Auschwitz upon arrival. In the train he wrote a short note to say goodbye to his wife and two young children, which he ends with “Be strong and kind to each other.”

On September 30, 1942, at the age of 37, Abraham Prins was murdered in Auschwitz.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Prins, M., “Het misdrijf van Abraham Prins,” 2004, on the website of VPRO, www.vpro.nl. www.joodsmonument.nl.

Wilhelmina Catharina School

The only school that did not expel their Jewish pupils was the Wilhelmina Catharina School for primary education. There were many Jewish children in this school. Of the 175 children who attended the school in May 1940, 71 were Jewish. Should the school have been forced to expel that high a percentage, the school would have had to close its doors, since it would have fallen under the official student population minimum. A solution had to be found for this problem. The Germans were not inclined to let Jewish and gentile children continue to remain in the same classrooms, by way of exception. So, when the children came back to the school after summer break, they were confronted with a wall that split the school in two parts. From now on, the part of the school on the front side of the wall was only accessible for gentile children and teachers, while the backside was intended for Jewish children and teachers only. All this made a deep impression on the children, who could not understand why they weren't allowed to go to school together anymore. One day, the "backsiders" had finished their day a little earlier than the children on the front side of the wall. Shortly after, the "frontsiders" heard shouting on the other side of the wall. A number of NSB children appeared to be harassing the Jewish children, but their non-Jewish classmates were not going to let that happen. Some of them stormed around the corner to the back of the building where they got into heavy fighting with the NSB children: "Keep your hands off of our backsiders!" After a while, the wall was taken down. In the months prior to this, it had become quieter and quieter on the other side of the wall. The children on the frontside were overjoyed to see the horrible wall finally gone, only to find out their Jewish friends were no longer there. Most of the "backsiders" would not survive the war. A plaque commemorates them.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Elias, >, *Het verlaten hotel* (Baarn, 2003), 44, 102-103. Overgaww, C., "de muur in de school," *Brandpunt profiel*, broadcast on May 4, 2011, viewed at www.npo.nl. www.joodsmonument.nl.

Hiding place of Max Vogel

Little Max had fallen ill. He had TB, and because of that he was very weak. To recuperate, he had to lie as much as possible next to an open window at the address where he was hiding.

On September 7, 1943, Max turned two, but his parents couldn't come and see him. His mother was hidden somewhere else, and his father Samuel had already been taken away and murdered in Sobibor on March 13, 1943. The only person who could come and visit was Max's grandmother Vogeltje. The Van der Meulen family, where Max was hidden, had agreed that Vogeltje could stay over for the night. With this, they all had taken a great risk, and everything went wrong. The next morning, two men appeared on the doorstep to arrest Vogeltje. Then Vogeltje started to panic. She started to cry and begged the men not to take her grandson as well. With this, she has just made a tragic mistake. Max had not been discovered yet, and, if his grandmother had not mentioned him, the men probably would have left him alone.

Vogeltje was immediately taken to the Hollandse Schouwburg. Max was allowed to be brought in some time later and immediately went to the children's daycare on the opposite side of the street. From there, a friend of Max's mother was able to smuggle him to safety where he survived the war. Vogeltje Emmerik, however, met a different end. On September 24, 1943, aged 48, she was murdered in Auschwitz.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Van Liempt, A., *Kopgeld*, 65-66. www.joodsmonument.nl.

National Institute for War Documentation

A few days after the Liberation, in this building the National Institute for War Documentation was established. One of the departments of the building was the department for the Detection of Jewish Persons of the Red Cross, and it was this building Janny Brandes-Brilleslijper entered in July 1945 to look at the lists of survivors of the camps and of those who had perished.



Together with her sister Lientje, Janny had survived the horrors of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. In both camps, the two sisters had been together with Anne and Margot. It was Janny who put a cross after the names of Anne and Margot in the building of the National Institute. She was certain the two girls had not survived the war.

Sometime later, Miep and Otto were at work in the office at the Prinsengracht, opening the mail. Miep heard Otto open an envelope, and then the room became very quiet. "Miep," Otto said in a broken, toneless voice, "Miep, Margot and Anne will not be returning."

After a long pause, Miep opened her desk drawer and took out the papers she had kept there for Anne for the past eleven months, and gave everything to Otto with the words: "This is the inheritance from your daughter Anne..."¹²²

¹²² Gies, M., *Herinneringen aan*, 224-225. Lindwer, W., *De laatste zeven maanden*, 109. Stigter, B., *De bezette stad*, 112.

10. The Resistance

In a way, going into hiding can be seen as an act of resistance, since those who went into hiding did not follow the instructions of the occupiers and resisted their deportation.¹²³ Providing aid to people in hiding, on the other hand, can most definitely be seen as a form of resistance, but obviously there were many more ways to go against the hated Nazi regime and to thwart it as much as possible. This resistance appeared in many different shapes and sizes. In the first year of the Occupation, Jews had organized fighting teams to protect Jewish groups from attacks by the men of the NSB and WA. On top of that, the illegal press started printing and distributing forbidden newspapers and pamphlets fairly soon after the war had broken out. The longer the war lasted, the more acts of sabotage were carried out, collaborators and traitors liquidated, and Resistance movements kept busy falsifying identity cards.¹²⁴

Hero of the Resistance Gerrit Jan van der Veen has become one of the most famous Resistance fighters due to this latter form of resistance. His group has become known as the "*Persoonsbewijzencentrale*" – the identity card exchange. In the summer of 1942, Van der Veen's group had already started falsifying identity cards, and many of the fake documents were used to give Jews in hiding a – temporary – new identity.¹²⁵ The Van der Veen group also engaged in attacks, and, in the spring of 1944, they tried to break into the prison at the Weteringschans to free some fellow Resistance fighters who had been imprisoned there. This went wrong, and Van der Veen was hit by two bullets, with one of them resulting in both legs being paralyzed. Two weeks later, he would be arrested in at the address where he was hiding. On June 10, 1944 he was executed in the

¹²³ Braber, B., *Zelfs als wij*, 18.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁵ De Jong, L., *Het koninkrijk*, part 7, 691. Braber, B., *Zelfs als wij*, 123.

dunes of Overveen, near Amsterdam.¹²⁶

Until long after the war, the general idea was that the Jews had put up little resistance to the measures the Germans implemented during the war and that they had been taken to the slaughterhouses in Poland like sheep. However, this idea has come in for a bit of adjustment over the past few years. It is true that many Jews went to Poland "voluntarily," without putting up a fight. During the first period of the war, the anti-Jewish regulations seemed to be something one could live with; they could have been worse. This resulted in little resistance against the German measures. In a way, this was the case for the deportations as well. The Germans had created the illusion that the Jews would be sent to work camps.¹²⁷ Not showing up after having been summoned to report for duty would probably have resulted in a more horrible fate in the form of the concentration camp of Mauthausen. For Dutch Jews, this camp came to be known as an extermination camp, a synonym for death.

However, many Jews did resist, or at least tried to. There was never an organized Jewish resistance in the Netherlands, but there was a relatively large number of Jews who were active in the Resistance, often associated with Resistance groups that did not consist of Jews alone. It is therefore probably better not to refer to Jewish resistance but to Resistance by Jews.¹²⁸ Whatever the term, resistance was indeed offered in many different forms.

¹²⁶ De Jong, L., *Het koninkrijk*, part 7, 700-701.

¹²⁷ Braber, B., *Zelfs als wij*, 7, 11-12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 17.

Residence of Lodewijk Johan Strak

The Amsterdam physician Lodewijk Johan Strak was a committed member of the NSB and a supporter of National Socialist racial doctrine. Therefore, the Germans found him the perfect choice to succeed the commissioner for public health who had just died. Strak lived in the Beethovenstraat, and in his neighborhood he was known for his strong anti-Jewish sentiments. He kept a close eye on the Jews in the neighborhood and threatened to turn suppliers into the police whenever he saw them delivering goods to Jewish shops.

The most infamous case Strak was involved in was the case of the identification of the Jewish foundling Remi van Duinwijck, who was born on January 29, 1942. When the deportations had begun, some desperate Jewish parents tried to protect their newborn children by abandoning them in the hope their foster parents would "Aryanize" them. The baby was to be left in a place agreed upon with the new



parents, at which point they would come after the baby. This also happened to Remi, who was named after the main character of Hector Mallot's book *Sans Famille (Nobody's Boy)*. Remi got his last name, Van Duinwijck, from the place where he was found, the Duinwijckweg in the village of Bloemendaal.

At the end of 1942, children who were foundlings were not declared Jewish automatically. This changed, however, in January 1943, when the Germans had assessed that the number of foundlings had increased substantially. Remi was arrested on October 30, 1942, and a physician had to determine whether he was a Jewish boy or not. Strak was given the "honor" of this task. Remi had not been circumcised, but Strak decided he had Jewish ears and therefore should be taken to the children's daycare center opposite the theater where Jews arrested were assembled before being deported to Westerbork.

Remi became the darling of the daycare center, not only for the nurses there but also for one of the German guards. But it was impossible to smuggle him to a safe hiding place. That would have drawn attention to the rescue work the daycare nurses performed. On April 14, 1943, Remi was deported to Westerbork together with other orphans and two nurses. Soon after, he was sent to the death camp of Sobibor, where he was murdered in the gas chamber on May 21, immediately on arrival.

Only in 2002 was Remi's real name discovered: Koen Gezang. His father Maurits and brother Edward had managed to survive the war. Koen's mother Florence had not. Like her son, she had been murdered in Sobibor as well, only a month and a half earlier.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Van Kolfschoten, F., *De Beethovenstraat*, 150-152, 154.

12. The final round-ups

As of May 14, 1943, Jews were officially no longer allowed to reside in Amsterdam, with those holding a *Sperr*-stamp in their identity cards excepted. These stamps were handed out by the *Zentralstelle* and served as proof that the holder of the stamp was deemed indispensable for the Jewish community. Jews who did not have this particular stamp would have to report in the barracks of the military police at the Polderweg in Amsterdam East on May 20, between six in the morning and four in the afternoon. After that, they were to be sent to Westerbork.¹⁵¹ The result, in the eyes of the Germans, was rather disappointing. So, the next day, on Friday, May 21, the two chairmen of the Jewish Council were summoned to Aus der Fünten who informed them that 7000 Jews in possession of a stamp had to be expunged from the list of the Jewish Council. Four days later, they would have to report to the Polderweg. If they chose to disobey this order, extremely harsh measures could be expected.¹⁵²

Once again, the results were disappointing. That Tuesday, May 25, only about five hundred people showed up. The result was a massive round-up on May 26, which entailed closing off part of the city center. Approximately 3300 Jews were arrested and taken to the Muiderpoort Station, and, from there, to Westerbork. But Lages and Aus der Fünten were still not satisfied. Afraid too many Jews had been alarmed by the 7000 call-ups and therefore had gone into hiding at the last moment, they decided to prepare the next round-up in secret, without informing the two chairmen of the Jewish Council.¹⁵³

On Sunday, July 20, 1943, the biggest round-up took place in Amsterdam South and the Transvaal Quarter, one of the Jewish neighborhoods in the eastern part of the city. Early in the morning at around half past three, cars with bullhorns began driving through the

¹⁵¹ Herzberg, A., *Kroniek*, 150.

¹⁵² De Jong, L., *Het koninkrijk*, part 7, 286-287.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 288, 291, 293.

neighborhoods blaring out the message that non-Jews should stay in their homes, and that Jews should leave their houses and go to one of the gathering points – four in South, one in East. From these gathering points, the Jews rounded up were to be taken to the Polderweg, and then they had to walk to the Muiderpoort Station, from where they would be deported to Westerbork. This round-up lasted through the middle of the night. A total of 5700 Jews were arrested and deported during this round-up.¹⁵⁴

The final round-up would take place on September 28 and 29, 1943. This time, the remaining Jews were roused from their beds in the middle of the night and taken to the theater. At this point, the last remaining people with stamps in their identity cards could no longer escape their fate. The stamps had now lost all value. The lists Asscher and Cohen had handed over to the Germans, mainly with the names of their own family members, were no longer of any use. The two chairmen were now in turn sent to Westerbork.¹⁵⁵ “I have,” Cohen declared after the war, “never been on a train feeling so much joy as I did that day. My horrendous task was finished.”¹⁵⁶ That night, another 3000 people were dragged from their homes.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 293-295.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 297-298, 300.

¹⁵⁶ Cohen quoted from De Jong, L., *Het koninkrijk*, part 7, 300.

¹⁵⁷ Herzberg, A., *Kroniek*, 155.