

## The Hadamar “Mixed-Race Ward” (*Mischlingsabteilung*) in Nazi Germany: Persecution, Fate, and Memory of Jewish *Mischlinge* and Their Parents

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In pursuing research on Jewish children who had become victims of Nazi medical crimes in the so-called “euthanasia” program I came across the “Jewish mixed-race ward” (*Jüdische Mischlingsabteilung*) for minors at Hadamar. Having been a mental asylum since the early 1900s, Hadamar became one of the six “T4” gassing centers in 1941. The victims were mostly institutionalized German adults with mental illnesses. The killing of mentally ill, sick, and disabled patients, physically ill forced laborers, and concentration camp inmates continued there after the end of “T4” in August 1941. In 1943 the facility took on a new role by hosting minors considered half Jewish (Jewish *Mischlinge* of the first degree, i.e., with two Jewish grandparents) soon to be murdered. In principle, Nazi policy toward the offspring of couples of which one partner was Jewish was not without ambivalence, for the Nuremberg laws of 1935 did not address this issue directly and left different factions to discuss whether it might be possible that the “Aryan component” in such a child might enable it contribute positively to the “body of the people,” despite its Jewish “racial” component. By 1943, public policies toward *Mischlinge* had become much harsher and tilted toward murder. As part of the change in policy the Reich Ministry of the Interior set up a *Mischlingsabteilung* at Hadamar under the semantic disguise of “Erziehungsheim” (educational facility). The *Mischlingsabteilung* was to house Jewish minors of the first degree who were also wards of the state. Unlike the usual patients at Hadamar, they typically did not have a recognized disability or psychiatric illness prior to their admission. My research interest lies in the fate of the 47 admitted children (this number is reduced to 46 if one wishes to exclude from the victims a child who died in February 1943, likely before the ward had been established), and of their Jewish parents, and what commemoration of the victims, if any, has existed historically or exists now.

It was not difficult to identify the children through searches in existing public databases such as Yad Vashem’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names and the Memorial Book of the Federal Archives for the Victims of the Persecution of Jews in Germany (1933-1945), as well as in the Archive of Hadamar (which is a well-visited memorial today) and the Federal Archive at Berlin-Lichterfelde. Only five of the minors survived. Three of them were siblings whose other three siblings had already died at the Hadamar mixed-race ward, and whose uncle had instigated a legal review that, remarkably, resulted in the release of the siblings still alive. Their further history is not known to me at the present time. The other two children were deemed not to have been wards of the state prior to their admission, and released. One of them, Alfred Voelkel, was drafted into the German army toward the end of WWII and ended up moving to the United States, where after pursuing graduate studies he became a director of service institutions for the elderly and was a highly regarded member of his community in Cincinnati until his death in 2002. For almost all of the other children, of whom one held Belgian citizenship, there is no recognition of their life (and death) outside their entries in the databases. For nine of them “stumbling blocks” (*Stolpersteine*) exist, a now common form of commemoration of victims of Nazi crimes in many European countries in the form of a small cobble-stone shaped,

brass-covered cement block installed flush with the pavement at a victim’s last place of residence or other living arrangement. The inscription on the stumbling block reveals a victim’s date of birth and date and place of death, and that he or she was murdered, but little else. For the Hadamar *Mischlinge*, a group of stumbling blocks goes back to 2004, of which the rest were installed in 2012 or later, indicating how recent the phenomenon of publically recognizing this group of victims is. Often the placement of a stumbling block is accompanied by a short story about the victim in a local newspaper. The story typically makes its way onto the Internet, is preserved there (at least for a short while), and can be found rather easily from afar. I found newspaper reports and Internet pages about a few more of the victims, but almost three fourths of the total has remained unmentioned anywhere outside the above-mentioned databases. To date, not a single victim (or survivor) has an extensive commemorative account to his or her name.

Compared to the *Mischlinge*, the fate of their Jewish parents proved much harder to establish, and there were a few surprising findings. Among the 34 parents (some had multiple children perish at Hadamar), there were twelve for whom the children’s records did not reveal the identity of the parent, or whose fate could not be established in the databases accessible to me (either because no entry existed, or because their name was a common one or only partially identified). Twelve parents died during the Nazi period. Locations of their deaths include the expected, i.e., concentration/death camps or locations of deportation: Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Majdanek, Mauthausen, and Raasiku (Estonia). Moreover, one of them was likely murdered in 1940 at Grafeneck, Hadamar’s predecessor as a “T4” facility, and two parents were murdered at Bernburg, another “T4” facility, in the so-called “14f13” action, in which sick or unable-to-work concentration camp prisoners were gassed there. One Jewish parent was murdered already in 1933. He was among 11 communists shot by members of the SS, a crime known as the “Rieseberg murders.” Two other parents died for unknown reasons in 1937 and 1940. Most of the rest of the Jewish parents survived, either while staying in Germany or occupied countries (France and the Netherlands), or by emigrating (to Palestine, the United States, the USSR, or Shanghai). After WWII quite a number of them stayed in or returned to Germany and appear to have resided there until their deaths. Among them was the former emigrant to Shanghai, who had returned to Germany in 1950.

With few exceptions, publically accessible information about the Jewish parents consists only of their names but does not pertain to their lives or existence. In one case, that of a former emigrant to the USSR (and from there to Great Britain and Canada) who had returned and made a political career for himself in East Germany, his biography in the *Handbook of German Communists* mentions neither that he was Jewish nor that his son was murdered at Hadamar’s “mixed-race ward.” Overall, there is little if any public recognition of the Jewish parents’ fate and their relation to their children murdered at Hadamar. Apart from a few cases, the finding of an absence of public memory also still applies to the murdered minors.