

# THE GERMAN SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA

The Protestant German School in Alexandria, Egypt was founded in March 1884 by Pastor Klingemann, a protestant minister. According to to Albrecht Fueß, author of the book *Die Deutsche Gemeinde in Ägypten von 1919 – 1939* it was the successor to the first German speaking school of Alexandria, established in 1861. A second German School, the Catholic German School of the Borromäerinnen was also founded in the 1880s.

The German speaking community was fairly small in the time when both schools were founded, its numbers estimated between 1'100 and 1'847 persons. They were represented by the German Association founded in 1853 when Germans, Swiss and Austrians joined ranks to seek protection and assistance from the Prussian Consulate General in Alexandria.

The first 40 students (23 boys, 17 girls) of the Protestant German School began their school education in November 1884 in rented rooms at the St. Catherine's Square. By 1893, after moving three times, the number of students had grown so much, that the German School decided to build their own school house in the former Rue Allemagne, renamed the Rue Belgique after 1914 and known as the Rue Sultan Hussan in the 1930s. The building was inaugurated in 1895.

In 1906 the school, run by protestant ministers until then, was now headed by a professional school principal, Dr. Wroblewski. Only 8 years later, after the outbreak of WWI, it was shut down by the British Military Administration of Alexandria.

In the following 18 years, German speaking nationals attended French, Italian or British Schools. In 1932 15 families reestablished the School, which was inaugurated in Sporting. The aim was to provide a German school education from Kindergarten to the Realschullevel (10th Grade).

On October 17th, 1932 the school reopened with 29 inscribed students on the Kindergarten level and first and second grade.

Over the next 4 years the number of students grew to 87. The number of grades also expanded and in 1935/1936 the classes ranged between Kindergarten and 6th grade. Two years later, in 1937/1938 the number of boys and girls attending the school had risen to 120 and the school had achieved its aim to offer an education reaching from Kindergarten to 10th grade.

The German School in Alexandria also offered German courses for non-native speakers, mostly Egyptian, Italian, British, Swiss, Greek or Syrian nationals.

According to Jens Waibel, author of *Die deutschen Auslandsschulen – Materialien zur Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches*, German schools abroad came under the influence of the German Foreign Office after the Nazi take over in

1933, even though most were private like the German School of Alexandria,. "With the takeover of power, National Socialist club members were deliberately elected to the boards of the school associations. This happened in most places with the consent of the school club membership," Waibel writes. This went so far, that founding members of the school with Jewish backgrounds such as Mr. Stern were removed from their duties.

Mr. Stern and Mr. Hobbahn were the driving forces of the reestablishment of the school in 1932 after it was shut down during WWI. Due to the political shift in Germany and the increasing influence of the Foreign Office, Stern was forced to resign from his offices. According to Waibel, Stern was placed on a «black list» by the «NS- Ortsgruppenleiter» (the regional NS group leader) Ottinger, an employee of Hess & Co., a company run by the family of Rudolph Hess, who was born in Alexandria. «Ottinger also decreed that Stern had to leave the school board» Waibel writes.

Ottinger increased the pressure on Stern, accusing him of violating party standards, one case concerning the German School. It is not recorded if and when Stern succumbed to the pressure. In the yearbook 1935/1936 however, Stern is no longer listed as a member of the school club nor are Jewish names found in the class role of 1937/1938 with a few exceptions. It seems the Nazi ideology was successfully implemented in the school, which, according to Waibel, was one of the goals of the Foreign Office's interference with German schools abroad.

## **Students**

My grandfather Otto Wechsler (\*1900) was a student of the Protestant German School until it was shut down in 1914 . His brother Bruno (\*1896) and sister Gisella (\*1904) probably also attended the school. They were Austrian subjects at the time.

After the school reopened in 1932, it was co-ed and open to all religions and nationalities. Most of its students were of German or German-speaking origin. After 1933 it became increasingly difficult for students with Jewish backgrounds to remain in the school.

My father Hermann Wechsler, his brother Roland Wechsler, as well as my father's cousins Hedi Hintermann and Jeannette Borg attended the school in 1936/1937. It is a mystery until this very day, how my father and his brother, even Hedi could remain students until the school closed in 1938/1939, as they would have been considered "Jüdische Mischlinge 2. Grades" (citizens of mixed descent, in this case with one jewish grandparent) by the NS regime.

## Organization

The school was run by the board of *the Deutscher Schulverein Alexandrien D.S.V.A.* (German School Association of Alexandria). The board consisted of six members: director, deputy director, treasurer, secretary and two advisory members. The members of the Association were classified as honorary, ordinary or extraordinary members.

The staff consisted of the head master, subject and nursery school teachers. The language teachers were native speakers.

The school was financed through school fees, donations and foundations and fund-raising events.

In the 1930s the school year began in October and ended in June of the following year. The school observed Catholic, Protestant and Muslim holidays, as well as Egyptian and German National holidays. The Christmas break lasted about 2 weeks, Easter break 1 week and the Summer break went from the end of June to the beginning of October.

## Yearbooks

The German School of Alexandria published a yearbook every year. The year books contained lists of the board members of the school, the teachers and students.

The annual report of the school board covered finances, investments and organisational news from the past year. The headmaster contributed to the year book with a resumé of the past school year.

Special events, like the Summer Celebration or accounts of educational measures were featured in in-depth articles accompanied by photographs. Readers were also given an overview of the subjects, such as German, French, English, Arabic, Maths, Geography, History, Music, Art and Sports and when or where they taught at the school.

Obituaries commemorating students, teachers and affiliates who passed away during the school year were also published.

Unfortunately only two yearbooks survived my father's travels, one missing the class roll pages.

## Sources

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