

AmiLiving

OCTOBER 22, 2025 30 TISHREI 5786 ISSUE 739

AMI LIVING supplement to
AMI MAGAZINE
OCTOBER 22, 2025
ISSUE # 739

"THE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T FORGET"

by SHIRA LEIBOWITZ SCHMIDT

LEIBOWITZ.SHIRA@GMAIL.COM
+972-544-676979

on SYBILLE KRAFFT. FOUNDER OF THE
BADEHAUS MUSEUM IN THE FORMER JEWISH
DISPLACED PERSONS CAMP FOHRENWALD,
GERMANY

INSIDE



The Woman Who Wouldn't Forget

SYBILLE KRAFFT,
A NON-JEWISH
GERMAN WOMAN,
MADE IT HER
LIFE'S MISSION
TO PRESERVE
THE MEMORY
OF JEWISH
HOLOCAUST
SURVIVORS





The Woman Who Wouldn't Forget

Sybille Krafft, a Munich-born Catholic historian's relentless mission to give voice to the Jews of Fohrenwald, the last DP camp in Europe.

BY SHIRA LEIBOWITZ SCHMIDT

*Entrance to the
Badehaus museum*



Credit: BADEHAUS Place of Remembrance, Justine Bittner

met Sybille in 2018, at the opening of the Badehaus, a museum she spearheaded memorializing Jewish Holocaust survivors who were housed from 1945 to 1957 in the Fohrenwald DP camp outside Munich. Sybille, who was raised Catholic in Munich by her mother and widowed grandmother and did not meet a Jew until she was in her forties, has dedicated years of thorough research, persistent advocacy, and meticulous organization in pursuit of her self-appointed mission, often facing bitter opposition and formidable obstacles.

“A popular phrase was,
‘If you do this or that,
you will go to Dachau.’
But they didn’t know
that millions of Jews
were being murdered.”

Sybille, who was raised Catholic in Munich by her mother and widowed grandmother and did not meet a Jew until she was in her forties, is the driving force behind a museum memorializing Jewish Holocaust survivors who were housed from 1945 to 1957 in the Fohrenwald DP camp outside Munich. I met Sybille, in 2018 at the opening of the Museum She has dedicated years of painstaking research, persistent advocacy, and meticulous organization in pursuit of her self-appointed mission, often facing bitter opposition and formidable obstacles. Why did she begin this work, and what keeps her going?”

“I have always had a powerful desire to learn about the past,” Sybille explained. “My enthusiasm for historical inquiry has been with me since childhood, when I caught the ‘history bug’ from my grandmother. My grandmother would not read us children’s stories and fairy tales. Rather, she would describe real kingdoms, royalty, wars, and historical events.” The fact that these stories were true made them even more powerful and memorable.

Her grandmother’s focus—at least as far as the children were concerned—was on the country’s past history more than on contemporary events. Sybille doesn’t remember the adults speaking much about the Holocaust. “I grew up in the 1960s in ‘female surroundings,’ as my father was absent from my life. My grandfather was too old to be drafted and passed away after the war, so I never had a chance to discuss the Nazi period

with him,” she recalls. “My widowed grandmother and my mother were left-of-center social democrats, and were not Nazi sympathizers. They were aware of current events, but were not active in the resistance.

“My grandmother said she knew that Jews were being deported from Munich. For example, in her building there was a non-Jewish man married to a Jewish woman. The husband hid his wife for a while, and one day she was deported. Grandma knew Dachau existed northwest of Munich, but had no idea of the enormous scale of magnitude and brutality towards Jews. A popular phrase at the time was, ‘If you do this or that, you will go to Dachau.’ However, they did not know that millions of Jews were being murdered.”

A Lifelong Interest

Her interest in history proved to be more than just a childish fancy. “When I was in high school, I had a history teacher, Dr. Manfred Gross, who taught in an exciting and infectious way, encouraging us to reflect on what we studied, to analyze it, to ask questions. Consequently, I decided to major in history in university.” In 1989 Sybille received her doctorate in modern history.

“After getting my degrees, I worked for the Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation in Munich, as a television journalist and documentary filmmaker.” Then came the turning point.

“I was a young mother with two chil-



Wall scenes in the museum depicting the children and life in Fohrenwald



Credit- BADEHAUS Place of Remembrance, Juris Mardwig

dren, and my husband, a newly-minted physician, got his first position in the hospital in a town a half-hour drive from Munich called Wolfratshausen. When I am in a place, I want to know its history. I wanted to establish roots in Wolfratshausen, and to do that I had to know what's in the soil, metaphorically speaking. So I started digging up the history of Wolfratshausen."

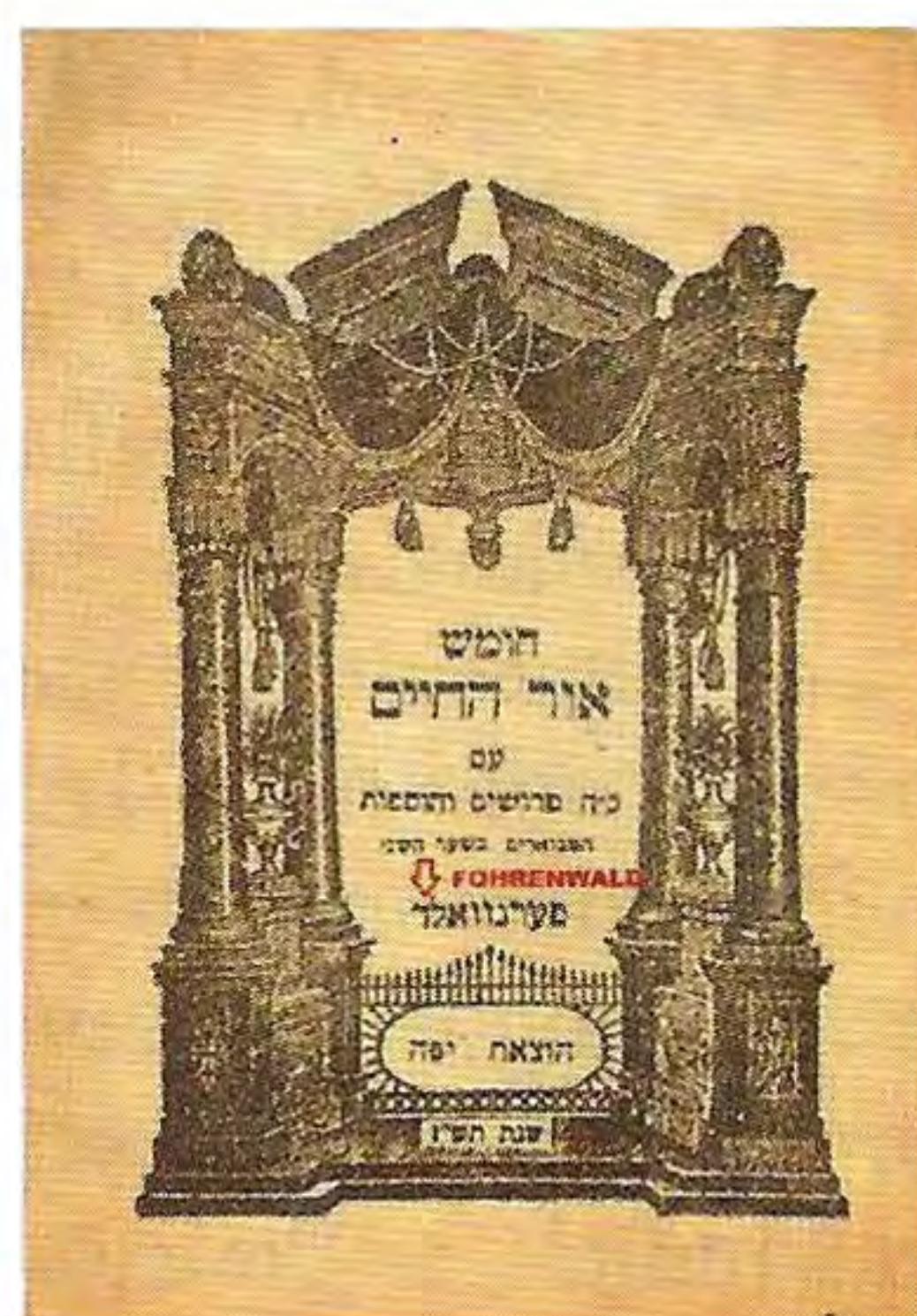
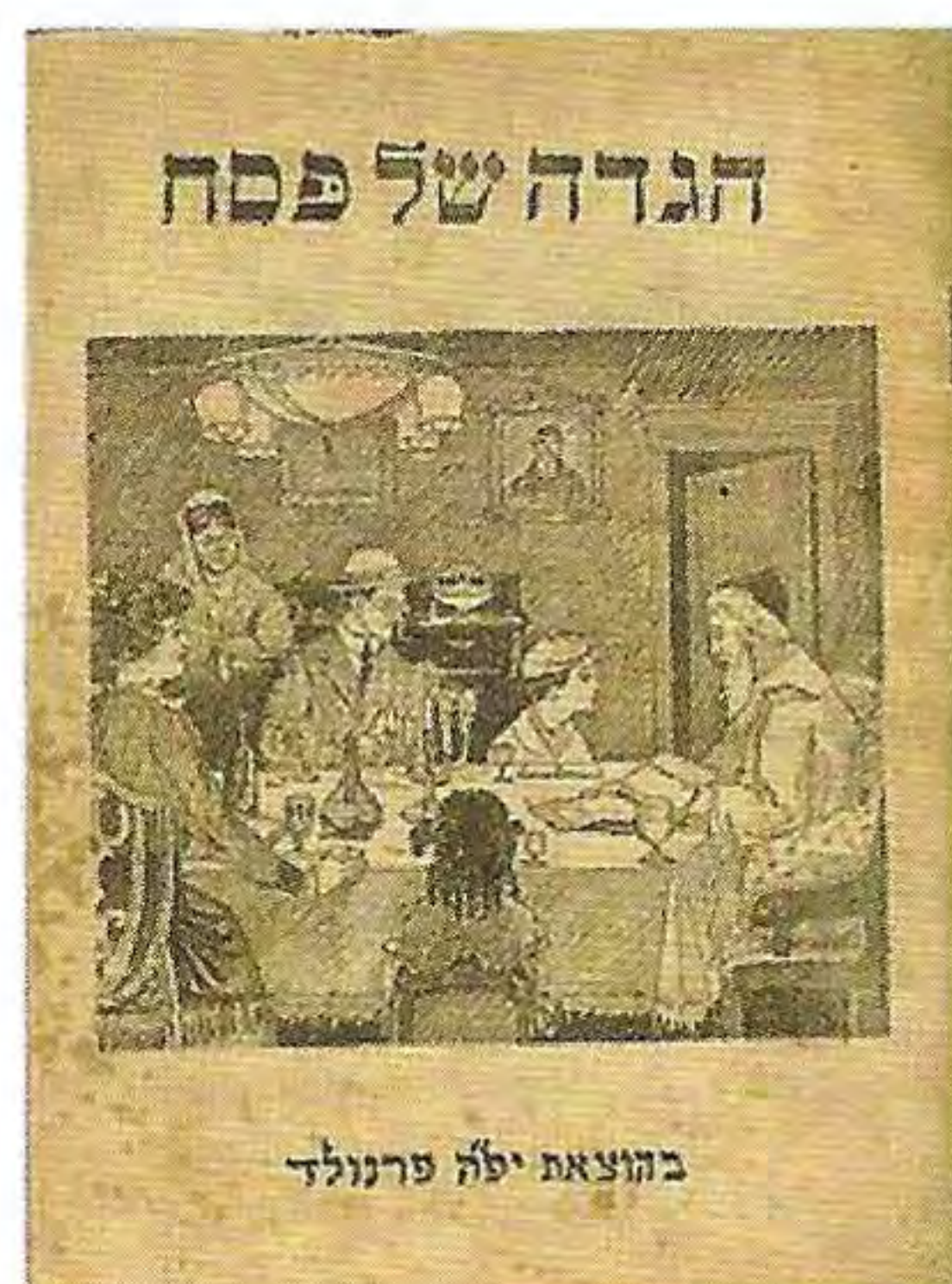
Being a historian, Sybille joined the local Historical Society, and two years later, in 2001, became its chairperson. "The first mention of Wolfratshausen is in a document dated 1003. In the year 2003, the city planned to celebrate 1,000 years since that first document, and I was in the thick of research on the city's history. A friend of mine, the late Kirsten Jörgensen, a female Protestant

pastor, asked me to look up the history of Jews in the city. I was intrigued. *Here I was over 40 years old, and I had never met a Jew!* In those days there were not many Jews in Germany. So together Kirsten and I went exploring the history of Jews in our city."

The startling revelation of the significant Jewish presence in their city did not come suddenly, though. "It took a while and came in two stages," Sybille recounts.

First Discovery: Jewish Girls' School

Bavaria is a predominantly Catholic region. Sybille learned that for centuries, Jews were not permitted to live in the city. Then in the 19th century, Jewish cattle traders began trickling into Wolfratshausen to do business. Soon thereafter, Jews living in Munich



*A haggadah and chumash published in Fohrenwald.
A chumash published by the Klausenberger Rebbe in Fohrenwald.*



began to build vacation homes south of that city. Wolfratshausen, close to the Austrian alps, was a perfect location for a country home.

“Our first serendipitous find,” Sybille relates, “was the discovery that an Orthodox Jewish Girls’ School had been founded in Wolfratshausen in 1926 by the Jewish women’s club of Munich. It was one of the best and most well known of those schools, developing a reputation as a place where girls could study home economics and learn to be competent Orthodox Jewish homemakers. This was the first Jewish institution of its kind in Germany. It was a groundbreaking ‘Jewish self-help’ project. In Wolfratshausen, the girls completed their ‘women’s apprenticeship year,’ a two-semester course that familiarized them with agricultural work and their future responsibilities as housewives and mothers. Above all, however, their final examination provided them with the foundation for further economic, social, and educational careers.”

Sybille and her colleague found so much material that they were able to publish a 143-page book with photos, newspaper articles, records of curriculum, report cards, and diary entries, under the title, *“We Lived In an Oasis of Peace: The story of a Jewish girls’ school 1926-1938.”*

They took the title from a phrase used fondly by the students to describe their stay in the school. As Nazism rose to power, families would send their girls to this relatively safe retreat, while the families would try to arrange migration out of Germany. Then the school was shut down, on Kristallnacht.

“*Wolfratshausen became free of Jews!*” This was the headline of an article we found in the *Wolfratshauser Tagblatt* (the local daily paper) on November 12, 1938. Thus ended the story of a Jewish women’s school that had begun so hopefully,” Sybille related. “We wondered whether we could find any of the students or teachers. We put notices in the Jewish press in Germany, the US, and Israel, to try to locate former students and staff who had survived the Holocaust. It was a problem because the names we had found in our research were the girls’ maiden names. Then one day—I remember it clearly—we were contacted by the first girl, by then a grandmother. Understand that this was the first Jew I ever actually met, after years of reading and collecting information about Jews! We were so excited. I remember the excitement of that discovery of a living witness to history. I will never forget that moment. The first human trace... the first living human trace of this moment of Jewish history that we had been researching!

“This first then-schoolgirl was Hanna Lehmann (nee Neugeborenen) from Kleve, Germany. After studying in that Jewish girls’ school, she immigrated with her younger sister to pre-State Israel and



Children in the Föhrenwald DP camp

The Klausenberger Rebbe being mesader keddushin at a wedding



Credit: BADEHAUS Place of Remembrance, Justine Bittner

lived with family near Tel Aviv. Her parents were murdered in the Holocaust.

"This lady had a friend, and the friend had a sister who had been in the Wolfratshausen school. She knew of other former students, in Germany and elsewhere. It snowballed. We went to Israel and interviewed some of the former residents of the school. We located over 100 women who as girls had studied at this school in our city."

Second Discovery: Fohrenwald DP Camp

Sybille calls it "inevitable" that, in the course of their research, "we would discover that in Wolfratshausen there had been a Jewish DP camp after WWII. Located in a neighborhood called

Fohrenwald, it had been the largest DP camp in the American zone. The population fluctuated, but in the early years, in any given month there were an average of 4,000 to 6,000 DPs. It had opened in 1945 and closed in 1957 as the last Jewish DP camp in Europe."

Making inquiries around Wolfratshausen, Sybille found that "many residents of the city either did not know that there had been a DP camp in a corner of the city enclave, or they preferred to forget about that aspect of their city's history, since it brought up subject of the Nazi persecutions that led to the creation of thousands of Displaced Persons. This discovery did not make me popular," she admits ruefully.

When asked how the camp came into being, Sybille shifts into full historian mode. "Let me explain the history by referring to the names of the streets," she begins. "Take one main street; it had three names in the course of history: Adolf Hitler Platz in 1939, Roosevelt Square in 1945, and Seminarplatz in 1957.

"Many residents either did not know or preferred to forget about that aspect of their city's history. This discovery did not make me popular."

“The events of history are reflected in these street names and mark a unique convergence in history. In 1939, Fohrenwald was built in an enclave in Wolfratshausen as a model Nazi housing project for German workers and forced non-Jewish laborers from other countries, employed by the arms industry in the area. The Nazi regime gave street names related to the Third Reich. In our example: Adolf Hitler Platz.

“The homes in this workers’ village lacked baths and kitchens, because the workers were supposed to eat in a communal dining hall and use the public bathhouses. In 1945, the US Army liberated southern Germany, and the Americans, under General Eisenhower, decided to turn Fohrenwald into a DP camp exclusively for Jewish survivors

and refugees. Thus, Adolf Hitler Platz morphed into Roosevelt Square. Other streets were given the names of US states, e.g., Illinois St., New Jersey St., Florida St. In the 12 years from 1945 to 1957 the population varied, and Fohrenwald was home to over 10,000 DPs, some staying for days, some for months, some for years.

“In 1957, that plot of land was bought by the Catholic settlement and housing works to house Catholic expellees, and the name of the enclave in Wolfratshausen was changed from Fohrenwald to Waldram, which is why you won’t find ‘Fohrenwald’ on maps today. The streets were renamed after Catholic institutions and dignitaries, so that Roosevelt Square became Seminarplatz, named after a Catholic seminary for priests that was

there for many years. Those are the street names that remain today.”

Making a Memorial

After this research on the Jewish Girls’ School, Sybille became more interested in Jewish history, which she had known only superficially until then. She set out to learn more about Fohrenwald alias Waldram.

To look for Jews who had been DPs, Sybille repeated the same process she and Kirsten had used in searching for Jews who had been in the Girls’ School. “We advertised in Jewish publications and asked around. One of the first to respond was a Jewish couple, Benjamin



The BADEHAUS was renovated mainly with the help of local German volunteers. Credit: Justine Bittner.



Artifacts left over
in Fohrenwald

understanding a resident's experience in the DP camp."

This year Sybille and the Badehaus team organized an 80th Anniversary of Fohrenwald program held Oct. 17-20, including this past Shabbos Bereshis. Over 100 Jews from Israel, the US and Europe, who had been born in the DP camp or had lived there for months or years, attended, many with their families and friends. Several hundred German citizens, both Jews and non-Jews, came to one or more of the public events where the history was conveyed through media and live testimony of survivors who told of how Jews recuperated and eventually flourished after the devastation and trauma of the Holocaust. (My husband and I also attended. Although there are no Jews living in that neighborhood or in any of the surrounding villages, Sybille and her army of volunteers made every effort to provide kosher food and a place to *daven*.)

One question she often receives relates to the name of the memorial museum. "People often ask, isn't 'The Bath House' kind of a strange name for a Holocaust museum? Back when I toured the area with the Brauns, we saw that very few of the buildings, other than the Badehaus, were still in their original state. In 2012 I learned that the Catholic Church was about to sell the Badehaus to land developers in order to finance a school building. I felt the bath house had historic value as one of only remaining landmarks of what had been a DP camp. It was an uphill struggle to salvage the Badehaus. Opposition came from the Catholic Church which had purchased the whole enclave. Then there were some adversarial voices from those in Wolfratshausen and Waldram who did not want to be reminded of the terrible years of the Holocaust. In addition,

and Chana Braun. I was again excited to meet some 'living witnesses.' They had been the last couple to be married in the DP camp. They showed me around what had been home for them back in the 1950s. When we got to the bath house—in German, Badehaus—they took me down the stairs and showed me where there had once been a ritual pool, and they explained to me what is a *mikvah* and its crucial role in Jewish life. By then, I had learned a little about Judaism, but had never heard about this. Subsequently, we found records of Rabbi Yekutiel Halberstam, the Sanz-Klausenburg Rebbe, who insisted on building the *mikvah* for the DP camp because one his highest priorities was to officiate at weddings and build new Jewish families. For this, I learned, a *mikvah* was a prerequisite. At that point my penchant for history kicked in and I researched the history of *mikvaos* in Europe and in the Land of Israel. I made a short documentary about it, and now visitors to the museum can go down to the room where the *mikvah* was, and in place of a pool of water, they can watch my documen-

tary, which includes examples of dozens of *mikvaos*, some centuries old. For example, the one in Worms, Germany dates from 1186 and the one in Speyer from 1128. Some *mikvaos* in Jerusalem go back more than 2000 years.

"When I went on a research trip to Kiryat Sanz, Netanya, to learn more about Rabbi Halberstam, I photographed the *mikvah* he built there and included that in my documentary.

"Benjamin Braun came to Fohrenwald after escaping Poland to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Chana was born near Lublin and had come from a very religious family. In 1939 she was taken to Tashkent with her parents and brother, and ultimately placed in a Siberian labor camp. Chana reached Fohrenwald where she completed an apprenticeship as a seamstress and married Benjamin. Some time after their wedding in Fohrenwald, they moved to the US, then back to Germany and finally to Israel. They became staunch supporters of the effort to preserve Fohrenwald.

"After meeting these first 'live witnesses,' I began to meet others. Each one added a different dimension to

Credit-BADEHAUS Place of Remembrance, Juris Mardwig

there were other worthy preservation projects that were competing for financial help from municipal, state, and federal budgets for public works.

“Overcoming these obstacles demanded energy, political strategies, and persuasion,” Sybille shares. “It especially required networking. I had been head of the Historical Society of Wolfratshausen. Then some colleagues and supporters formed with me an organization, ‘the Association for the Preservation of the Badehaus, Waldram-Fohrenwald.’ I was able to convince others to work together to save the Badehaus and to build a worthy memorial to all those who had lived, even temporarily, in the Fohrenwald-Waldram enclave.

“I have to thank all the supporters who worked as a team. In the end, we saved the Badehaus from the wreckers’ ball, and decided to make it into a museum and headquarters for activities, and we named it ‘Erinnerungsort Badehaus—A Place of Remembrance.’”

Personal Involvement

Learning of the many opponents and hurdles Sybille faced in her struggle to preserve the Badehaus, the next question seemed obvious: Did she ever consider just letting it go?

She responds quickly and confidently. “Really, no, I never thought of giving up! I don’t like to lose.” And besides, she says, she wasn’t in this on her own. “What helped was that I wasn’t alone. I built up a group that continues until today. The Association for the Preservation of the Badehaus is a team, a community with older people, youngsters, workers, academics, tradesmen... Together, we worked to clean up, paint,



Dr. Baruch Schmidt points to the posters in the **BADEHAUS Museum** about Rabbi Yekusiel Halberstam, the Sanz-Klausenburg Rebbe, who was active in the Fohrenwald DP camp, founding a yeshiva & girls’ seminary there. The Rabbi, who lost his wife and 11 children in the Holocaust, later went to Israel and built the Sanz Medical Center, Laniado Hospital, in Netanya, where Jewish & Arab staff and patients cooperate. The Rabbi recruited Dr. Schmidt to start the Dept. of Surgery.

Photo Credit—BADEHAUS Place of Remembrance, Justine Bittner.

The suitcases left from the survivors from Fohrenwald



Credit- BADEHAUS Place of Remembrance, Juris Mardwig

renovate, design, and rebuild the dilapidated structure into the sparkling, colorful, functional building you see here. We have interactive exhibits and an array of weekly and monthly concerts, events, lectures, and exhibits.

"We have many members and supporters from all walks of life. While I am the overall director, I have a very capable staff. Early on a young woman named Stephani came to volunteer. After working with us for a while, I discovered that she was the daughter of my favorite history teacher, Dr. Manfred Gross, who launched me on my career in history-related activities. Her son, Jonathan Coenen, is my Vice-President. So this is a kind of closing of the circle. Jonathan runs all aspects of the Badehaus with wisdom, patience, and boundless energy. He has become more knowledgeable about Jewish history than many Jews!"

One point of which Sybille is especially proud is how this project has resonated with younger generations. "Almost all German cities have historical societies, usually of older citizens. We also have cadres of youth join us in everything from painting the building to organizing symposia," she says. "We have involved teenagers and college students in difficult discussions about the Holocaust. We don't flinch from difficult issues. We have arranged meetings between German youth and

Jewish Israeli youngsters."

While it is personally and professionally satisfying that the Badehaus is up and running, it wasn't an easy journey, for Sybille herself or for her family. "My family had to suffer, in a way. Engagement in projects like this have a price: they demand time and energy, and consequently sometimes you don't have time and energy for other things, such as your own family. There are times I regretted the burden my work put on my family. It's a conflict that people engaged in, or even consumed by, such projects will always have."

The Badehaus

Sybille gives me a short introductory "tour" of the Badehaus.

"Let me take you through the streets and the museum. As we walk through the streets the American names such as Roosevelt, Indiana, and Wisconsin, have been replaced, as I explained. What we can see from the original DP camp includes the entrance building, the façade of one of the synagogues, and the many homes that have the quaint architecture, with the triangular roofs that you see in photos of the camp.

"Step inside the Badehaus. There are sections representing the three phases of the neighborhood: the period

1939-1945 when it housed the munitions workers; the DP camp period 1945-1957, and the period from 1957 until now. The greatest amount of space is devoted to memorializing the DP camp experience.

"Remember that as a DP camp holding thousands of Jews at a time, there was a vibrancy that belied the tragic suffering that many had experienced. The birth rate was rapid in the camp, and within 15 months of its opening, approximately 200 women in Fohrenwald were expecting."

Another common question is, why didn't Jews simply return to their hometowns? Why stay in a DP camp? Sybille explains: "For the Jews who survived the Holocaust, the end of World War II brought new challenges. Many could not or would not return to their former homelands, and options for legal immigration to the US or Mandate Palestine were limited. In spite of these difficulties, these Jewish survivors sought to rebuild their shattered lives by creating a flourishing community in Displaced Persons camps. European Jewish life was reborn in camps such as Fohrenwald.

"Fohrenwald was changed to a strictly Jewish DP camp on October 3, 1945, after Eisenhower's Yom Kippur visit to the Feldafing DP camp, when he declared the latter overcrowded with poor living conditions.

“Many religious and political Jewish organizations were represented including *kibbutzim*, groups preparing to go to Israel, from Kadima, Dror, Bnei Akiva, Poel Hadati, Ohel Sarah, Poale Agudath Yisrael, Tel Yitzchak, Betar, and other youth groups. Sports were also very popular activities, with organized competitions sponsored. Newspapers were written and distributed, the most prominent named *Bamidbar*. In addition to a range of educational institutions there were clubs for drama, music, and clandestine Haganah paramilitary practice preparing to go to pre-State Israel. There were trade workshops, *yeshivas*, a *beis din*, a court, concerts, Purim and Chanukah parties, scout groups... you name it. In the museum we have displayed examples of these activities including posters, photos, films, and newspapers. Books, including religious books, were published. We have artifacts like cans with kosher food labels, and ritual objects like Chanukah menorahs.”

The Badehaus has become a point of pride for the city of Wolfratshausen. Although there are many visitor centers and memorials in concentration camps, the Badehaus is almost the only museum actively presenting the DP camp experience.

The Answer

After our interview, part of my question still stood: Why does she continue? Sybille has had to overcome adversaries, obstacles, and indifference. She has had to fight for budgets and to attract volunteers. Perhaps, I ventured to suggest, she and her team are trying to do a *tikkun*, to rectify the actions of the generation that perpetrated the Holocaust.

After a long pause, Sybille responded.

“My mother and grandmother emphasized to me that you have to fight in your life for yourself, for your beliefs, and for your values. You don’t get things for free. As you say in America, there’s no free lunch. If I think something is right, I have to do it. And if I have to go with my head through a wall, I will persevere.” ●

If you can’t actually travel to Germany, it’s possible to visit the Badehaus virtually, through their website, Badehaus Fohrenwald (or Erinnerungsort Badehaus). There you can see visiting hours, special events, guided tours, their contact information, and directions by driving or public transportation from Munich and from other cities. It’s best to phone or email to arrange your visit.



THE BADEHAUS MUSEUM

**CAN BE VISITED BY ARRANGEMENT
IT IS 40 MINUTES FROM MUNICH**

Jonathan Coenen (left) & André Mitschke.

Credit: Justine Bittner

You can visit the Badehaus website
(German and English)

<https://erinnerungsort-badehaus.de/en/>

OR GOOGLE “FOHRENWALD MUSEUM BADEHAUS”

During October 17-20, 2025 events took place marking 80 years since the opening of the Fohrenwald DP camp in 1945. It was called: “Return of the Fohrenwalders”
Over 1000 visitors took part, including dozens of former residents of the Fohrenwald DP Camp.

See The Return of the Föhrenwalder - Erinnerungsort BADEHAUS:

CONTACT:

Jonathan Coenen
Deputy Chair
+49 8171 2572502

jonathan.coenen@erinnerungsort-badehaus.de

