

## **A short history of the Jews in Hanover**

Jews have lived in Hanover for over 700 years. As late as the 19th century the city's Jewish community was one of the ten largest communities in Germany. After the Shoa, Jewish life here was almost destroyed. Today there are four Jewish communities in the city.

A Jewish minority is mentioned for the first time in a document from 1303 with the admonition that 'no one should insult the Jews by word or deed'. In this period, the Hanoverian pledge register mentions Jewish inhabitants as moneylenders. Around 1550, they acquired a sand hill outside the town as a burial ground, the Old Jewish Cemetery in the city district Nordstadt, which still exists today. Its oldest preserved gravestone dates back to 1654, but after the Reformation, the Old Town Council banned all Jews. For the city of Hanover, this meant that from 1588 until the 19th century. Jewish life now took place mainly in the princely new town, especially after Hanover's elevation to the electoral residence city of the Guelphs in 1636 led to new fields of business, many of which were assigned to Jews. Leffmann Behrens became known as the court and chamber agent of the princes, but also as the builder of a synagogue in 1704 on a privately purchased property in the city district Neustadt.

Jews in the Kingdom of Hanover only gained full civil rights and freedom of trade after the annexation to Prussia in 1866. The community of Hanover now grew by leaps and bounds to become one of the ten major one of the ten largest communities in Germany, and Jewish bankers, entrepreneurs and inventors made a decisive contribution to Hanover's development into one of the largest industrial centres in Germany. But success creates enemies. The rise of the National Socialists led to the revocation of legal equality from 1933 onwards. In the pogrom night of November 1938, the anti-Semitic measures also radicalised into an orgy of violence in Hanover too: the New Synagogue was burned, Jewish shops and homes destroyed and robbed, around 70 men transported to the Buchenwald concentration camp. In 1939, the Jewish population of the town had halved to around 2,300, mostly elderly people. By 1941, their numbers had dwindled to around 1600 Jews due to further flight. Beginning in December 1941, seven deportations led to the extermination extermination camps in Eastern Europe.

When Allied troops moved in on 10 April 1945, there were barely 100 Jews living in Hanover outside the camps, mostly in mixed marriages with Christians. But soon after the liberation, two new communities emerged. The Jewish DP community in Hanover was the largest in the British zone after Bergen-Belsen, with over 1200 members at times. It organised itself as a 'Jewish Committee' separately from the newly founded Jewish community, and after the emigration of its mostly Eastern European It merged with it in 1955. The newly built synagogue was occupied in 1963.

### **People and places**

An absolute must-see is the Ahlem memorial in a building of the former Ahlem Jewish Horticultural School - founded towards the end of the 19th century by the banker Moritz Simon to train Jewish children and young people in gardening and crafts. Its graduates had a decisive influence on public parks and gardens in Palestine and Israel. An audio guide is available in German, English and

soon also Ivrit through the exhibitions. Also worth seeing is the Holocaust memorial designed by the Italian artist Pistoletto, which was financed by donations and whose location directly next to the central opera house had to be fought for against resistance. The stone pyramid is engraved with the names of the victims of the Shoa from Hanover.

A memorial plaque at the house where Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) was born commemorates the political philosopher who left Germany in 1933 and fled from her exile in France to the USA in 1941 to escape German troops. In the historic centre of Hanover, an information board marks the former birthplace of Herschel Feibel Grynszpan (1921-?), who, in protest against the expulsion of his eastern Jewish family in 1938, shot an employee of the German embassy in Paris. This gave the Nazis the pretext for the excesses of the nationwide pogrom night. At the site of the destroyed historic New Synagogue, a memorial commemorates the atrocities.

The 'Villa Simon' on Königsworther Platz has been preserved as the home of Joseph Berliner (1858-1938) from the Hanoverian Berliner family of inventors and entrepreneurs. His brother Emil developed a microphone (Berliner's microphone) for the American telephone company Bell Telephone Company and in 1887 invented the gramophone record and the first gramophone in 1887. Also preserved is the former home of the Jewish CEO of the global company Continental AG Siegmund Seligmann (1853-1925) - today a research and meeting centre as well as the headquarters of the European Centre for Jewish Music, which is linked to the Hanover University of Music. Hanover has important art collections that are well worth seeing. The Sprengel Museum Hanover on the Maschsee is home to the reconstruction of the 'Cabinet of the Abstract' by the Russian-Jewish artist El Lissitzky (1890-1941), which was destroyed by the Nazis. The collection displays numerous works by artists ostracised by the Nazis ('degenerate art'). In the neighbouring Lower Saxony State Museum in Hanover exhibits many works by the Max Liebermann (1852-1935), the main Jewish representative of German Impressionism. A few steps away, in the domed hall of the New Town Hall, four city models document the history of the city of Hanover as a royal seat through the destruction of the Second World War to the modern metropolis of today. Opposite, the city's ZeitZentrum Zivilcourage is examining the scope for individual behaviour during the Nazi dictatorship under the heading 'Resist or stand firm?'

### **Today: Four communities**

Today, Hanover has four Jewish communities. In addition to the Jewish (traditional) community, the Liberal Jewish Community was founded in 1995 and opened its synagogue 'Etz Chaim' in January 2009 in the former Gustav Adolf Church. Since around 1997 there have been Sephardic-Bucharian Jews in the capital of Lower Saxony. 2013 the community moved into its own blue synagogue - also a converted Protestant church. The Hasidic-Orthodox Chabad Lubavitch movement has an even shorter history in Hanover, but has also had its own synagogue since 2021 – integrated into a historic railway station building.

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<https://zukunft-heisst-erinnern.de/stadtrundgaenge/tour-1-juedisches-leben-in-hannover/?lang=e>  
<https://jewishheritage.org/jewish-life-in-central-lower-saxony>

