

Dutch Mennonites and German Jewish Refugee Children, 1938-1945

ALLE G. HOEKEMA*

Abstract: Before and during the Second World War a number of Dutch Mennonites both individually and in groups tried to hide or otherwise help Jewish people. This article describes the assistance that several Dutch Mennonites (*doopsgezinden*) provided to some forty Jewish-Christian children from Germany and Austria. Beginning in March 1939, these children first stayed in Fredeshiem, a Mennonite retreat center, then in a children's home called Johanneshof, and, finally, secretly with families after the Nazis closed down the home in August 1940. The article offers an overview of the fate of these children—some of whom perished in Nazi concentration camps—and the role of the Dutch Mennonites in assisting them. Archival material and interviews with several survivors of this experience serve as the main sources in the article.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Europeans were unprepared to face the terrible challenges of the Nazi regime. Most governments assumed that war could be avoided. Few recognized the potential consequences of widespread social prejudices against Jews, gypsies (Roma), communists, and homosexuals. And even though the so-called *Bekennende Kirche* (Confessing Church) in Germany—led by theologians like Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Niemöller and rooted in the theological foundation of the *Barmer Thesen*—opened the eyes of many Europeans, in many respects the churches also seemed to be unaware of the situation, fearful, or at a loss about how to respond.

Even in the Netherlands both the government and churches took a very tentative position vis-à-vis the National Socialists in Germany, partly because many people expected the Netherlands to remain neutral in the event of a war, as had been the case during World War I. By contrast, the Jewish population of the Netherlands—some 200,000 persons in the 1930s—became very anxious as soon as Hitler seized power. Already in the spring of 1933 the Jewish community formed the *Comité voor bijzondere Joodsche belangen* (Committee for Particular Jewish

*Alle G. Hoekema is an associate professor of missiology (retired) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam; for many years he taught at the Mennonite Seminary in Amsterdam. The author is greatly indebted to Ineke Visser Way, Kalamazoo, Mich., for her help in correcting the English text of this article. The photos in this essay are used with permission of the Fredeshiem Board, Archives Fredeshiem, Gemeentearchief Steenwijkerwold.

Concerns) to address the growing flood of Jewish refugees from Germany and other countries, such as Austria and Poland. By 1936, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches in the Netherlands had also established committees to assist Jewish refugees—especially Catholics and Protestants of Jewish descent—who sought safety in the Netherlands.

In the beginning, however, most church members were generally skeptical of such committees. Even after Dutch churches began to awake to the seriousness of the threat following the *Anschluss* (annexation) of Austria by Nazi Germany on March 12, 1938, many Dutch citizens remained hesitant about how best to respond. Indeed, when the number of refugees, who arrived either legally at the invitation of the Dutch government or illegally, rapidly increased to more than 10,000, at least according to most estimates, the Dutch government issued a decree on May 7, 1938 stating:

Henceforth, a refugee will be regarded as an undesirable element to the Dutch society and therefore as an undesirable alien, who must be barred at the border and, when encountered within the country, expelled back over the border.¹

The situation worsened following the *Reichskristallnacht* of November 9-10, 1938, when Nazi supporters burned or demolished thousands of Jewish shops, offices, houses, and synagogues, and hundreds of German Jews were killed or imprisoned. As a result, Jewish refugees continued to stream into the Netherlands, most of them hoping to obtain a visa for the U.S., the United Kingdom, or a Latin American country, or documents permitting them to emigrate to Palestine/Israel (*aliyah*), which at that time was not yet an independent state.

INVOLVEMENT OF DUTCH MENNONITES

A comprehensive history of the experience of the Mennonite Church in the Netherlands during World War II remains to be written. Gerlof Homan's 1995 survey on Dutch Mennonite responses to the war offers the most extensive report available. Homan's essay provides a valuable overview regarding the response of the Dutch Mennonite church to the Nazi regime, describing both the efforts of several Mennonites who

1. Circular letter to the attorney generals and others by the minister of justice, C.M.J.F. Goseling, who was responsible for refugees who entered the country illegally. According to one source, the Roman Catholic, traditionally anti-Jewish attitude of this minister played a role in his decision. See C. K. Berghuis, *Joodse vluchtelingen in Nederland, 1938-1940, Documenten betreffende toelating, uitleiding en kampopname* (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 223.

assisted Jews or were somehow involved in resisting the Nazi regime as well as the responses of some who took the side of the Germans.² Thanks to the contribution of Homan and others we know that individual Dutch Mennonites (*doopsgezinden*) offered support and shelter to Jewish victims and others forced into hiding, sometimes for several years. Other *doopsgezinden* were involved in small resistance groups, and a number of them lost their lives as a result.

Besides these individual efforts, at least two groups of *doopsgezinden* provided direct assistance to Jewish refugees who fled to the Netherlands during the last years before World War II. In both cases, these Mennonite groups cooperated closely with the interdenominational Protestant Committee for Assistance to Refugees of Race and Faith (*Protestantsch Hulpcomit  voor Uitgewekenen om Ras en Geloof*), which had existed in various permutations since 1936 and provided material assistance and shelter to Jews and Christians of Jewish descent. The committee assisted German refugees who had an official invitation to enter the Netherlands or had arrived by crossing the border illegally. The Dutch Mennonites contributed substantially to the work of this committee through their financial assistance and gifts-in-kind, and by making their conference centers and holiday resorts (*broederschaps-huizen*)—including Schoorl (near Alkmaar), Fredeshiem (near Steenwijk), Bilthoven (near Utrecht), and Elspeet—available as temporary shelters for Jewish refugees.

This essay—drawing on the findings of my recently-published book, *“Bloembollen” voor Westerbork*, and some newly acquired sources—offers a small contribution to the larger history of the Dutch Mennonite response to World War II, a history whose urgency is all the more pressing in light of the fact that it will soon be impossible to draw on the memories of living witnesses of the events. This article will not focus

2. Gerlof Homan, “‘We must and can stand firmly’ . Dutch Mennonites in World War II,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (Jan. 1995), 7-36; translated as, ‘Nederlandse doopsgezinden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog,’ *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen n.r.* 21 (1995), 165-197. See also Elisabeth I.T. Brussee-van der Zee, “Broederschap en nationaal-socialisme,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen n.r.* 11 (1985), 118-129; and Gerlof Homan, “Een doopsgezinde gemeente in oorlogstijd: Zuid-Limburg, Heerlen,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen n.r.* 31 (2005), 263-276. Other sources are Nine Treffers-Mesdag, “De doopsgezinde pastorie in Sneek onder de bezetting. Enige persoonlijke indrukken van de positie en de houding van doopsgezinden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen n.r.* 24 (1998), 273-280; Andr  J. du Croix, “Weerloos weerbaar; het verzet van dominee Andr  du Croix (1910-1945),” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen n.r.* 31 (2005), 223-262; and Alle G. Hoekema, “Een oorlogsdagboek van een Haagse predikantsvrouw, 1940-1945,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen n.r.* 34 (2008), 105-126. See further Ann Keuning-Tichelaar and Lynn Kaplanian-Buller, *Passing on the Comfort: The War, the Quilts and the Women Who Made a Difference* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2005).

primarily on those expressions of Dutch Mennonite assistance, in which committed members of the *doopsgezinde* congregations in Koog-Zaandijk, Zaandam, Westzaan, and Wormer/Jisp, along with individuals like Jacob ter Meulen and Abraham Mulder, and board members of the *Algemeene Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden* like T. O. Hylkema, assisted the families of some 60 to 100 mainly Christian-Jewish refugees.³ Instead we will concentrate primarily on a second initiative—Mennonite assistance to a group of nearly forty refugee children from Germany and Austria.

Following the *Reichskristallnacht* in the fall of 1938 the British government began to ease its restrictions on refugees seeking to enter England. Certain specific groups, especially children, were now allowed visas. The decision led to an exodus of predominantly Jewish children from a host of European cities like Prague, Berlin, and Vienna. Thousands of children, unaccompanied by their parents—who sometimes were already being forced into concentration camps—fled Germany. This massive initiative, which came to be known as *Kindertransporte*, was supported by many individuals and several Jewish and Christian organizations.⁴ Foremost among the Christian organizations were the Quaker International Center, along with the Schwedische Israelmission in Vienna, and an office headed by Heinrich Grüber, a pastor in Berlin. All three relief organizations played a key role in the story of the Jewish children who are the focus of this paper.

TRANSPORT OF CHILDREN BY TRAIN, 1938-1940

Beginning in 1925, in the aftermath of World War I, British and American Quakers, cooperating closely with German Quakers, established offices in several major cities in Germany (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin) and in Vienna. These groups played an enormous role in bringing Jewish refugees, including children, to safety in the U.K. and elsewhere.⁵ In 1922 the Swedish Lutheran Church established the *Schwedische Israelmission* in a poor Jewish section of Vienna, where it offered social and economic assistance to residents as well as to the

3. An extensive report about the tragic fate of this group of refugees has been given in Alle G. Hoekema, "*Bloembollen*" voor Westerbork. *Hulp door Zaanse en andere doopsgezinden aan (protestants-) Joodse Duitse vluchtelingen in Nederland. 1939-1945*, Hilversum: Verloren, 2011. This study also contains the minutes of this working group in the Zaan River area.

4. See www.kindertransport.org/history and www.usmmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005260.

5. See Jennifer Taylor, "The Missing Chapter: How the British Quakers helped to save the Jews of Germany and Austria from Nazi persecution," www.remember.org/unite/quakers.htm (accessed on June 9, 2012).

influx of refugees from Eastern Europe following World War I. From 1938 until the summer of 1941 the mission shifted its focus to those who were fleeing the threat of National Socialism, helping some 3,000 persons—Jews and Christians of Jewish descent—to migrate to safe countries.⁶ Since Sweden remained neutral during the war, Swedish pastors with diplomatic passports were able to coordinate this relief work. In Berlin, Heinrich Grüber—an evangelical pastor who had a Dutch mother and who, for some time, had studied in Utrecht, Netherlands—founded the *Hilfsstelle für nicht-Arische Christen*, also known as *Büro Pfarrer Grüber*. From 1936 until he was taken prisoner by the Nazis in November 1940, Grüber served as the pastor of a Dutch-speaking congregation in Berlin. Through his risky efforts over 1,100 Christians of Jewish descent, along with other political activists and intellectuals, managed to make it safely to the Netherlands and other countries. On November 1938, three weeks after the *Reichskristallnacht*, the Mennonite pastor T. O. Hylkema, along with two representatives of the *Protestantsch Hulpcomité*, visited Grüber and also a Quaker center in Berlin where they discussed the increasingly dangerous situation of the Jews and evaluated possibilities to help them to migrate to safe countries.⁷

In the Netherlands itself, Truus Wijsmuller-Meijer (1896-1978) founded a special Children's Committee to facilitate the transportation of children out of Nazi-dominated territories. Wijsmuller-Meijer was a daughter of an Amsterdam banker and married to a well-known banker. She was already actively engaged in social work before founding an organization in 1938 to help bring Jewish children from Germany and Austria into safety. Wijsmuller-Meijer personally accompanied several children's transport cohorts, and courageously intervened directly with Adolf Eichmann—the Nazi leader who, from 1938 onward, was responsible for the so-called Central Office for Jewish Emigration in Vienna—seeking permission to save hundreds of children.⁸ Among her many co-workers were Mies Boissevain-van Lennep⁹ and Anna Maria

6. See Ulrich Trinks, "Die schwedische Mission in der Seegasse," www.christenundjuden.org/artikel/geschichte/58-trinks-die-schwedische-mission-in-der-seegasse (accessed on Sept. 6, 2012). The *Schwedische Israelmission* had to change its name to *Schwedische Mission* after the Germans seized power in Austria.

7. See Hoekema, "Bloembollen" voor Westerbork, 50.

8. See her autobiography, *Geen tijd voor tranen* (Amsterdam: Van Kampen en zn, s.a.).

9. Adrienne Minette Boissevain-van Lennep (1896-1965) was a well-known advocate of women's rights and during the war a prominent member of the resistance movement; both her husband, Jan Boissevain (1895-1945), and two oldest sons, Jan Karel (1920-1943) and Gideon Willem (1921-1943), died because of their involvement in resistance movements.

Cosquino de Bussy-van der Lelie,¹⁰ both of whom belonged to the Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam. During the war Mies Boissevain and her family were members of a resistance group called CS-6, which included other Amsterdam Mennonites as well.¹¹

According to several sources Wijsmuller-Meyer's organization, with the help of the Quakers, the *Schwedische Mission*, and Heinrich Grüber, managed to bring almost 10,000 children into safety. During a period of almost a year and a half, a train left Germany or Austria every week, with 150 children aboard. Several women from the Children's Committee discreetly accompanied the children during the train ride, sometimes even unnoticed by the children themselves.¹² Most of the children traveled directly to Hoek van Holland, a harbor near Rotterdam, and sailed from there by ferry to Harwich, England, where they were met by representatives of Jewish or Christian organizations.

The children frequently left home without any idea of what to expect. Some children remained in the Netherlands because their parents preferred to have them nearby. Sometimes the final destination was not determined until the very last moment before a child left home. Olga Pollak, for example, whose father had contacts both with the *Schwedische Mission* and with the Quakers in Vienna, first thought that the *Kindertransporte* would take her to Sweden, and then to England. In the end, however, she was sent to the Netherlands.¹³ Nine-year-old Ingelene Erlbaum who, together with Elfriede Hajek, managed to escape through the assistance of pastor Grüber, left Berlin thinking that she was going to a boarding school.¹⁴ Instead, all of these children—whether they

She and her husband were members of the Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam. See Gerlof Homan, "Nederlandse Doopsgezinden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog," 183, and the biography by Els Meulendijks, *Heden-Verleden, blijmoedig gedragen: Mies Boissevain-van Lennep (1896-1965)* (Gouda: Het Zuidhollands Verzetsmuseum, 1994).

10. Anna Maria le Cosquino de Bussy-van der Lelie (1888-1954). She may not have been a member of the Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam herself, but her husband was.

11. Henriette Augusta Haak-van Eeek and her husband, Jurrian Haak, belonged to the same group. Both died in concentration camps. See Hoekema, *'Bloembollen' voor Westerbork*, 199.

12. Luzia (Peelen-) Kornthal and Olga (Visser-) Pollak were hardly aware of the accompaniment of a few nameless women in the train before they had crossed the Dutch border. They arrived together in a train that had left Vienna on Feb. 14, 1939. Vera, Dolly Carmen, and Herbert Pick also boarded the same train.

13. Such decisions were based primarily on the practical possibilities these organizations had to help a child to leave the country in haste. See Hoekema, *'Bloembollen' voor Westerbork*, 56, with a quotation from an e-mail by Mrs. Olga Visser-Pollak, Oct. 29, 2008.

14. Interview of the author with Mrs. Ingelene de Jong-Erlbaum, July 25, 2008.

belonged to the Jewish religious community, as did the majority, or were Catholics or Protestants from Jewish descent—were first brought to the “Quarantaine Station Beneden Heijplaat,” a temporary refugee camp near Rotterdam. There, several hundred Jewish refugees were detained. This was a gloomy and severe place, clearly unfit for young children without their families since there were no adults to accompany them and no possibilities to attend a school. At the camp, strict, orthodox Jews lived side-by-side with liberal Jews and with Christians of Jewish descent. Anselm Citron remembers the dominance of orthodox Jews “with lengthy, sung Hebrew prayers before every (kosher) meal.”¹⁵ Not surprisingly, this situation sometimes created tensions. Luzia Kornthal, another child with whom Dutch Mennonites came into contact, recalls:

The weeks there were not very pleasant. Of course, many of us felt homesick. It was a rather large camp with several hundred people. As children we tried to amuse ourselves with table tennis and other games. Here we got acquainted with the orthodox Jews, who considered us as trash when they heard that we had been baptized. We were not aware of the orthodox Jewish customs and had to help in the kitchen. Occasionally we made a mistake and brought the wrong plates into the *kosher* kitchen. They [i.e., the orthodox Jews] smashed the plates before our eyes and we had to collect the pieces. They had no friendly word for us; only disapproval.¹⁶

In coordination with the various organizations involved with the children’s transport, the Dutch government tried to find orphanages or children’s homes for all unaccompanied children. The Protestant and Catholic children formed a minority who often hardly knew that they had a Jewish background. On behalf of the government, the *Protestantsch Hulpscomité voor Uitgewekenen om Ras en Geloof* began to seek out a separate place for them where they would be accompanied by adult professionals.¹⁷ Here, the Dutch Mennonites had something to offer.

15. Anselm Citron in a letter to the author, April 15, 2008.

16. Luzia Anna Peelen-Kornthal, *Herinneringen die blijven. Mijn jeugd in oorlogstijd*. Unpublished manuscript, Amsterdam 1993. A positive and sympathetic view of orthodox Jews in the Mennonite *broederschapshuis* in Bilthoven is given by Nine Treffers-Mesdag, “De pastorie in Sneek onder de bezetting,” 273.

17. In fact, for all inhabitants of these temporary camps semi-permanent lodging was sought. A number of conference homes, orphanages, empty boarding schools, and other lodging places were made available. In the end, this decentralization of the shelters made government control difficult. Therefore the government intended to build one single refugee camp for the large number of adult Jewish refugees; it was constructed near the village of Westerbork in the eastern province of Drenthe in October 1939. When the Germans occupied the Netherlands in May 1940, this camp became a notorious

When pastor Hylkema reported on the alarming circumstances following his visit to Berlin at the end of November 1938, the boards of the *Gemeentedagbeweging*,¹⁸ which was in charge of several conference centers, and the board of the recently revived *Algemeene Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden*¹⁹ immediately discussed the possibilities of offering several Mennonite conference centers as temporary shelter for this group of children. In a joint action, the boards decided that the conference center in Schoorl (near Alkmaar) would be used for families and single adults, while Fredeshiem (“home of peace”) would be dedicated to children. Nobody knew how long the refugees would have to stay; however, the local board at Fredeshiem did set a limit of July 1, 1939.²⁰ Since the government did not make its final decision until March 10, the board had only a short time of preparation before the children’s departure from the refugee camp near Rotterdam. Nevertheless, the center was in order when the children arrived in Fredeshiem on March 21, 1939. The contrast for the children—from a despairing place with an explosive atmosphere to a quiet, peaceful resort—was profound. As Luzia Kornthal stated:

Beautifully located in the midst of woods, this place was a relief to us—almost as if we moved from hell into heaven. There were separate dormitories for boys and girls. We slept with about twelve in a dormitory, where each of us had a kind of berth. [. . .] After the massiveness of [the camp near] Rotterdam it was wonderful for us to have a little corner of our own, even though it was small.²¹

At the same time, a number of children had been traumatized by their experiences at home. Several had witnessed the Nazi occupation of Vienna, along with the execution of Jews there, the military parades, and

concentration camp and from 1942 onwards the central place from which 100,000 Dutch Jews were sent to the extermination camps in Germany and the present Poland.

18. The *Gemeentedagbeweging*, later also named *Elspeetsche Vereeniging*, was founded in 1917 by several young pastors who had been touched by the spirituality within the Quaker center Woodbrooke in Birmingham, U.K. See Hoekema, *‘Bloembollen’ voor Westerbork*, 26-28.

19. In 1710 several Dutch congregations decided to form a *Fonds voor Buitenlandsche Nooden* (Fund in behalf of Foreign Relief). It ceased its activities in 1758, but was revived after World War I as a general committee. In the 1930s it became a dormant fund again, but when the Rhöhnbruderhof Hutterites needed help in 1937, once again it was revived. See Hoekema, *‘Bloembollen’ voor Westerbork*, 34-36 and 49-50.

20. See for this decision: Archives Fredeshiem, in Gemeentearchief Steenwijkerland, Archive 95, inv.nr. 5. *Hiemwar* is the Frisian word for “board”; though located outside this province, Fredeshiem was owned by the Mennonites in Friesland. The minutes of the board meetings during those years have been written in Frisian. From July 1939 on, the board wanted to have the house available to regular guests again.

21. Luzia Peelen-Kornthal, *Herinneringen die blijven*.

the persecution of their parents. Pastor Lenie Leignes Bakhoven later recalled some of the horrifying stories recounted by the children during their stay in Fredeshiem.²² "You don't know this," some teenage boys had said, "but in our place they [the Nazis] committed arson three times during one year. When they came to our house they hit our father and captured him; and in my house they robbed everything."²³

WHO WERE THESE CHILDREN?

The names of all thirty-nine children who originally belonged to this group were entered in the Fredeshiem guestbook on March 21 and again on March 30, 1939. The group consisted of sixteen girls and twenty-three boys, ages 6 to 14 at the time of their arrival. Several of them came from Vienna; others from Berlin, Cologne, Hamburg, and South Germany. In five cases, two or even three children belonged to the same family. Some of the children had two Jewish parents; others had only one.

1939

2/3 Groep kinderen (Borst Vluchtelingen):
 Leiding: H. C. Leignes Bakhoven
 J. Michiels, A. K. Bakhoven, G. Oomen, H. C. Leignes Bakhoven, J. van der Meer

Kinderen:

Liza Bronckhorst Olga Pollak Anke Klein Jolke Georg. R. de Koning Kämpf Karlheinz G. Th. Karstner Hannelore Borch Rens Dord Wie Josephson	Dierk Dreyer Sami Neline Kohn Elfriede Hajek. Ida Jansz Jimmy Bos. Jan Hendrik Lopes Vera-Wastella Böh Anst Klein Bliff Carman-Pick
--	---

Fredeshiem guestbook with the names of several refugee children

Throughout their stay, the children continued to keep in touch with their parents by mail, though this became much more difficult after the

22. Helena Cornelia Leignes Bakhoven (1910-1996) was pastor of the rural congregation of Leermens-Loppersum in Groningen, and from 1940-1947 of the Mennonite congregation in Borne. After World War II she became the first female member of the A.D.S. board and served other congregations.

23. An anonymous typescript document, preserved in the municipal archives of Borne. The document clearly had been written by Pastor Lenie Leignes Bakhoven during the fall of 1939 and served as a lecture in one or more Mennonite congregations. Courtesy of Mrs. Annette Evertzen.

war broke out on May 10, 1940. Parents, too, could send letters, which provided welcome solace to their homesick children; and a few parents even managed to visit their children, though the strict government rules made this difficult. Quite a few letters by parents to the leadership of the home, written between June 1939 and June 1940, are still extant in the archives.²⁴ All of them show deep concern and anxiety, along with desperate hopes for reunification. On June 29, 1939, for example, the mother of Berti Fallmann, who had managed to escape to England, wrote from Lancashire to the headmistress of Fredeshiem: "you cannot do a better work than help me to bring our boy to England."²⁵ Some children, such as Katharina and Johann Weiss, Edith Josephovicz, and Anna Leo, did receive permission to travel to England—but only after much diplomatic struggle and financial guarantees provided by their families.²⁶ Other children were not as fortunate. Marianne Glogau never was able to emigrate, though her sister Lisbeth, who was not part of the group of children in Fredeshiem, did manage to escape—family finances were simply not sufficient to guarantee the passage of both children.²⁷ Marianne probably returned to Vienna in the summer of 1940; neither she nor her parents survived the Holocaust.

Some parents in Germany or Austria expressed hope that their children would soon join them again. Others, however, understood very well that this would be dangerous. The parents of Kurt Kren acknowledged the possibility that their son would need to live with foster parents in the Netherlands: "At this moment we as parents are unable to know and to express our feelings about whether or not to rejoice about this possibility. We can only hope and pray that the Almighty God sees to it that our child goes to good people. . . ."²⁸ Meanwhile, the parents of Ingelene Erlbaum tried in vain to enable her

24. Stadsarchief Amsterdam (SAA) Archives Algemeene Commissie Buitenlandsche Nooden 1118/176 b.

25. SAA 1118/176 b. "Sie können kein besseres Werk tun als mir zu helfen unsern Buben bald nach England zu bringen."

26. We have brief letters by Edith (Dita) Josephovicz (Aug. 1, 1939) and Katharina Weiss (Aug. 24, Sept. 5 and 18, 1939) to Mrs. Vos-Kielstra; SAA 1118/176 b. The young Anna Leo was a daughter of Pastor Paul Leo, one of six evangelical pastors of Jewish descent who had to flee from Germany. Five of them, among them Leo, managed to escape to England. During a few months, Pastor Leo assisted the group adults in Schoorl.

27. SAA 1118/176 b, letter of Wilhelm Glogau in Vienna, Sept. 18, 1939.

28. Letter of July 27, 1939, SAA 1118/176 b.

emigration to Palestine/Israel. Ingelene survived the war in Dokkum, Friesland.²⁹

FREDESHIEM AND JOHANNESHOF

We do not know much about the time that the children spent in Fredeshiem, from March 21 to the end of June, 1939. For the first six weeks, a young and energetic Mennonite pastor, Lenie Leignes Bakhoven, was in charge of the group, assisted by several other individuals. Leignes Bakhoven succeeded in giving the children a strong feeling of love, safety, and unity. She taught them community songs used in Dutch youth camps, held devotions with the group, took walks with them in the surrounding woods, and comforted them in many ways.³⁰ After Leignes Bakhoven left to resume her normal pastoral duties, she was succeeded by another female Mennonite pastor, Johanna van der Slooten, who had a partly Jewish background.³¹ Several members of *doopsgezinde* congregations had Jewish ancestors. Those who were fully Jewish were clearly endangered during these years and some of them were murdered in extermination camps.³²

Since the children were not allowed to attend school, they received private lessons in Fredeshiem from several volunteer teachers. The children were divided into three age groups: ten children followed lessons of the elementary school; seven were taught at a middle-school level; and the others at the level of a high school.³³ Some even received help with Latin and Greek. The lessons turned out to be sufficient to attend Dutch language schools after they were transferred to a new location later that summer. From there, one boy, Hansjürgen Heide, wrote a proud postcard—in almost impeccable Dutch—to Rico Oosten, his former teacher in Fredeshiem:

29. SAA 1118/176 b. Letter dated Aug. 29, 1939. Together with Elfriede Hajek Ingelene Erlbaum did hide in the house of the *remonstrant* (Unitarian) pastor, Angeniëtte Frevel.

30. She later confessed that these children had become “a part of herself.”—In the earlier mentioned anonymous document, Municipal Archives Borne.

31. Johanna van der Slooten (1900-1968) served the congregations of Delft (1929-1932), Hindeloopen/Koudum (1932-1939), and IJlst; in 1946 she went to Steenwijk and from 1960 till her retirement she worked in Wassenaar.

32. See Hoekema, ‘Een oorlogsdagboek,’ 111ff and Gerlof Homan, ‘Nederlandse Doopsgezinden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog,’ 184.

33. Letter by pastor Leignes Bakhoven to Miss Frouke Zantema, who was a candidate-teacher, July 1, 1939. SAA 1118/176 b. The three- or four-year U.L.O. was a type of junior high school, meant for children who after that would go to a vocational school, whereas the five-year H.B.S. prepared pupils to continue at university level.

We feel very sorry that you have left us. How are your brother and your sisters and how is your mother doing? The teacher at the M.U.L.O. is very satisfied. All of us owe this to you. Three days ago we had to do a Dutch language exercise, in which I made only 8 mistakes. I hope you will write some time, too. . . .³⁴

Another letter, written by Katharina Weiss, who had been allowed to migrate to England, to Mrs. W. H. Vos-Kielstra,³⁵ then the leader of the group in Dieren, also demonstrated a fluency in Dutch language. During the war, this fluency helped the remaining children to avoid betraying themselves when German soldiers addressed them.

The best impression we get of the children's stay in Fredeshiem and Johanneshof is provided by two photo albums that depict the children in a variety of settings—peeling potatoes; playing together; on an outing to Giethoorn, a nearby lake; and other activities.³⁶ They seem to be a large and carefree family.



A group of the youngest refugee children, Fredeshiem, April, 1939

34. Postcard inserted in an album with photographs of the group, originally belonging to Rico Oosten, now in the Mennonite Library Amsterdam, signature HS 65-610. Probably (part of) the group had visited Oosten's family in Wolvega, not far from Steenwijk.

35. Unfortunately, not much is known about Mrs. Vos. Her father, Tjepke Kielstra (1852-1936), had been a Mennonite pastor and afterwards a school overseer and Hebrew language teacher; later he initiated the Mennonite congregation in Zeist. One of her brothers, Johannes Coenraad Kielstra, was from 1933 till 1943 the governor of the Dutch colony Suriname (Latin America).

36. One album is part of the Fredeshiem Archives, now in Gemeentearchief Steenwijkerland (Archief nr. 95); the other album can be found in the Mennonite Library and Documentation Center in Amsterdam (see footnote 34). In this second album we also find passport photographs of half of the children; Mrs Luzia Peelen-Kornthal helped the author to identify several names.



Older refugee children in the garden of Fredeshiem

Since the Fredeshiem board wanted to reclaim the center during the holiday period for its regular guests, the group needed to relocate at the end of June. The solution was found at Johanneshof, a children's home in Dieren, not far from Arnhem and Zutphen, that belonged to a Freemason organization in The Hague. It is not clear how this contact was made, though it might have been facilitated by several Dutch Mennonites who were members of the Freemasons. Since the *Protestantsch Hulpcomité* had depleted finances, the Dutch Mennonites guaranteed the rent and living costs for one year.³⁷ Johanneshof proved to be a very good setting for the group.³⁸ After several initial problems had been resolved with the local government, which had initially refused to pay the children's school fees, the younger children attended school in the village of Dieren while the older ones traveled by bicycle or bus to different schools in larger towns such as Zutphen and Arnhem. Initially, the leadership was in the hands of the teacher, Bart Heeg, and then of Tine Du Croix-Boersma.³⁹ In the fall of 1939, leadership was taken over by a Mrs. W. H. Vos-Kielstra, who accompanied the group of children until the home was closed by the Germans in August 1940.

37. On a yearly basis, this would be some 15,000 Dutch guilders; a weekly laborer's income would be some 15 guilders. The *Protestantsch Hulpcomité* took over the financial responsibilities for the group adults and families, which at that time had moved to a home in Sluis, near the Belgian border. See the anonymous typescript document, Municipal Archives Borne.

38. See for these problems Hoekema, *'Bloembollen' voor Westerbork*, 60-61.

39. Mrs. Du Croix was the wife of André du Croix, who from 1938 till his death in 1945 was the pastor of the Mennonite congregation in Winschoten. Du Croix died around March 10, 1945, in the German concentration camp Bergen-Belsen.



The entire group of refugee children, Johanneshof, Dieren, July 29, 1939

In the meantime the political situation became more and more tense. The continuing stream of Jewish refugees proved that their life was in danger in Germany. Many people realized that it was simply a matter of time before the Germans would invade the Netherlands, which, in fact, happened on May 10, 1940. Sensing this danger, the leadership of the children attempted to procure identity cards that registered all the children as *arisch* (i.e., non-Jewish), and avoiding references to Jewish surnames such as Sarah or Israel.⁴⁰ Erika Singer's father wrote a very concerned letter from Nüttermoor, in East-Friesland, Germany, when he heard that Erika was to be given a "Jewish" pass. "My child is of first-generation mixed blood," he insisted, "baptized and born as a Protestant (*evangelisch*). Following her mother, she has a certificate as an Aryan (2 Aryan and 2 Jewish grandparents), so according to the *Law* she needs to receive an Aryan pass."⁴¹ Other parents were undoubtedly also concerned about the future of their children: what would happen when Germany occupied the Netherlands? Would they still be safe, or would they face threats familiar to their parents in Germany?

In such a situation, there must have been an enormous amount of correspondence and necessary arrangements by Du Croix and later Vos on the one hand, and on the other by the board of the *Algemeene Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden*, the *Protestantsch Hulpcomité*, local

40. We do not know whether this effort succeeded in all cases. — See, for example, SAA 1118/176 b, letter of July 18, 1939, from Children's Committee to the director of Johanneshof.

41. SAA 1118/176 b, letter dated July 9, 1939. Emphasis in original. The letter has been written from a "Baracke" in Nüttermoor; probably this means he was imprisoned in the Nazi *Kriegsgefangenenlager* in Nüttermoor.

authorities, and high administrators in the Ministry of Interior Affairs in The Hague. One of the many documents of government officials in The Hague mentions in the margin the fact that Mrs. Vos was a sister of the governor of Suriname. This certainly was helpful.⁴² Also, many practical matters had to be settled. For example, the imminent danger of war meant that the home had to be made shell-proof, the children had to practice what to do in case of fire or bombing, and voluntary firemen identified and trained.

MAY 10, 1940: OUTBREAK OF WAR

Early in the morning of May 10, 1940, the children heard airplanes, shooting, and bombs falling. Vos informed the group that the war had begun—the Germans had invaded the Netherlands. “We had to get up as quickly as possible,” one of the children wrote to her parents, “and pack our rucksack, which we had received two days earlier, with clothes. I hadn’t thought it was possible that everybody would be firm; nobody panicked. I had to take care of a small boy. . . . The smallest children were told that it was just an air-raid warning.”⁴³ The whole group evacuated to the village of Loenen, some seven miles north. Vos later recalled, in a report, “On Friday morning [May 10], at around 6:30 a.m. we evacuated with the children to Loenen, where we remained till Sunday afternoon.” Back in Dieren, the home was found intact except for several broken windows, and the presence of ammunition left by Dutch soldiers.⁴⁴ Several days later, German soldiers entered the house. The children had been instructed absolutely not to speak German at all; fortunately, the Germans did not know they were children of Jewish background.⁴⁵

Vos searched strenuously for emigration possibilities, visiting many consulates. Unfortunately, it soon became clear that the house was to be closed. The situation for Jews in the Netherlands was now as bad as it was in Germany. The children in the *Johanneshof* would either need to return home or be distributed to host families. On the advice of the secretary-general of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Dutch leadership of the group sent a letter to all parents, to learn what they preferred.

42. See National Archives The Hague, 2.04.58 inv.nr. 70, letter by Mrs. Vos-Kielstra to the Ministry of Interior Affairs Afd. A/VI, May 22, 1940.

43. Luzia Peelen-Kornthal, *Herinneringen die blijven*. Quotation from a letter dated May 11, 1940, which never could be sent to her parents.

44. National Archives The Hague 2.04.58 inv.nr. 70, report Mrs. Vos to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, May 22, 1940.

45. Luzia Peelen-Kornthal, *Herinneringen die blijven*.

Some parents continued to hope—in vain, as it turned out—that emigration to England or another country would be possible. Several parents sent worried letters from Germany and Vienna. The mother of Luzia Kornthal asked on June 14, 1940: “. . . will the changed situation make necessary a change in the accommodation and education of the children, or even the return of the children to their families? You will understand that I am very concerned as to the future of my child.”⁴⁶ Almost two weeks later, Erika Singer’s mother wrote from Vienna: “Please, if it is possible, let Erika stay there so that it is not necessary for her to encounter all the unpleasant things here.”⁴⁷ From Berlin, the father of Karl-Heinz Reichel sent a message requesting that his son not return to Germany. The father was disabled and the matter of the mother’s racial identity (*rassische Angehörigkeit*) had not yet been settled.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the father of 14-year-old Theodor Kanitzer urged that his child “be sent back to Vienna as soon as possible.”⁴⁹ Kanitzer indeed went back by train and survived the war.

In the end, foster families had to be found within a few days for some twenty-five children, both within the Mennonite community and elsewhere. Here the efforts of at least five female pastors, three Mennonite and two belonging to the Remonstranten (Unitarians), should be mentioned.⁵⁰ Many of the Remonstranten, like most Dutch *doopsgezinden*, were liberal-minded Christians, and therefore ready to cooperate. Before World War II these two church bodies were the only groups in the Netherlands to hire female pastors, and the rather small group of unmarried female pastors knew each other well. Others, such as Adrianus Pieter van de Water, a Mennonite pastor and member of the *Algemeene Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden*, also worked hard to help relocate the children. By August 1940, hosts were found for all remaining children. It marked the end of the happy “family” life the group had experienced in Fredeshiem and Dieren. From now on the children had to live and often hide as individuals in the homes of

46. SAA 1118/176 b. Luzia’s mother had divorced her father many years ago and had remarried; she lived in Halle, Germany, and later survived the concentration camp of Theresienstadt in Czechia.

47. SAA 1118/176 b. Letter of June 26, 1940.

48. SAA 1118/176 b. Letter of June 28, 1940.

49. SAA 1118/176 b. Postcard dated June 28, 1940, by Michael Kanitzer, Vienna. Theodor Kanitzer became a noted musicologist and president of the International Chopin Society.

50. Next to Lenie Leignes Bakhoven and Johanna van der Slooten, the *doopsgezinde* pastor Wilhelmina Cornelia Jolles in Gorredijk (Friesland) and the *remonstrant* pastors Emilie Poortman in Lochem/Doesburg and Angeniëtte Frevle in Dokkum (Friesland) took children in their homes or arranged other host families.

families they did not know; as such, life became much more difficult for them.

THE FATE OF THE CHILDREN DURING THE WAR

It has been impossible to trace the fate of all the children who were part of the resettlement effort during the war, though we have some information about most of them.⁵¹ A few examples will suggest the outlines of the general story.

Luzia Kornthal first found temporary shelter with a physician's family in Terwolde near Deventer. In the beginning she could attend school in Deventer. There she received the sad news that some of her family members back in Vienna—including her aunts and her grandparents—were transported to an extermination camp in Poland and were murdered there. The same fate later happened to her father. In May 1942, all Dutch Jews were forced to wear the Star of David, and Jewish children were forbidden to attend school. Non-Jews were not allowed to host Jews in their homes. Several months later, the Nazis began to transport Jews in the Netherlands to the concentration camp Westerbork, where they were to be distributed to extermination camps in Germany and elsewhere. Luzia had to leave Terwolde, since the Nazis no longer allowed this Protestant physician's family to host a Jewish child. Initially, she moved in with several Jewish families in the neighborhood until they were deported or went into hiding themselves. With the help of a resistance organization, Luzia received a fake identity card with a false name. A Reformed pastor, Jacob Kalma,⁵² then took her to Hegebeintum, a small village in Friesland, where a Reformed farm family sheltered her until the end of the war. It was impossible for her to attend school. Occasionally, when German soldiers appeared, Luzia was forced to hide in a small shelter in the barn under bales of hay. Following the end of the war in May of 1945, Luzia was able to pursue an education, which enabled her to work in a Lutheran orphanage in Amsterdam until she married. Luzia Peelen-Kornthal continues to live in Amsterdam.

In some ways, Olga (Olly) Pollak's fate during the war years seems to have been slightly easier. But her circumstances, too, were stressful. Immediately after the search for foster parents had started, the

51. Besides a few letters and oral information by survivors the account book of the *Algemeene Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden* provides some information about several children whose host families received an allowance. SAA 1118/176 a.

52. Jacob Jetzes Kalma (1907-1991) was very active in the resistance movement during the war and helped to find a shelter for at least fifty Jewish children. He was a Reformed pastor in Hegebeintum till 1940 and afterwards in nearby Waaksens/Brantgum.

Mennonite pastor Lenie Leignes Bakhoven wrote a letter indicating that Olga, along with Erika Singer, could stay with her in Borne. Erika first stayed with a family in Beetsterzwaag, Friesland, and joined Olga in January 1941. Together they lived in a large parsonage until the end of the war. A Jewish woman, Mrs. Menko, was hiding with her daughter in the attic of that same house; and others seeking temporary shelter often found refuge there as well. During some time, two German officers were occupying a room downstairs without ever noticing the hidden house guests upstairs. Occasionally, one or two Dutch collaborators with the Germans attended a church service led by Leignes Bakhoven. According to Olga Pollak, by referring to certain Bible texts, often with hidden allusions, Leignes Bakhoven's sermons were very clear to those who knew how to listen. In a similar way, many pastors in the Netherlands criticized the Nazi regime in those days. Aware of the danger she was in, Leignes Bakhoven always had a small suitcase prepared in case she had to flee.⁵³ Olga's mother, who had died already in 1938, was Jewish; and her father, who stayed behind in Vienna, was half-Jewish. According to the Nazi law, this made Olga Pollak fully Jewish. However, she pretended in Borne that she was only half-Jewish and, as she later wrote:

nobody ever discovered that this was not true. I had arrived from Vienna and had been baptized there [as an infant], and so, I was walking around freely like any other person without the yellow star. I was able to attend the Gymnasium high school in Hengelo and pass the final exams in 1944.⁵⁴

Erika Singer's situation was similar. Although one of her classmates was a son of a pro-Nazi family, she was not pestered at school. Fortunately she was able to send and receive letters from her father during the years. Finally, in 1949—a separation of nine years—she was able to travel to Vienna and reunite with him. In time, Olga became a nurse, married a young Mennonite man, and eventually moved with him and their children to the U.S., where she still lives. However, she realizes that if her mother had still been alive in 1940, her entire family probably would have been sent to an extermination camp.⁵⁵ In that case she either

53. Information from a not yet published manuscript by Annette Evertzen, *Twee Weense meisjes in Borne*. Quotations by Olga Visser form a part of this manuscript.

54. Quotation in Annette Evertzen, *Twee Weense meisjes in Borne*. In an e-mail to the author, dated Dec. 22, 2012, Olga Visser mentions the fact that at a certain moment her father in Vienna had to fill in a so-called *Ahnenpass*, which proved he was a half-Jew. However, on this passport he also had to register his daughter as Olga Sarah. This could have become extremely dangerous to Olga in Borne.

55. Information received from Mrs. Olga Visser-Pollak in several e-mails and during personal conversations, June 2012.

would have stayed in Vienna and been sent to an extermination camp with the whole family, or the Nazi authorities subsequently would have quickly discovered her fully Jewish background.

Anselm Citron stayed with a family in Zutphen and later in Dordrecht, where he was able to attend high school. When war broke out, his parents asked him to return home, but he refused. Since his status as a half-Jew would have made it impossible to finish his Gymnasium exam in Germany, he decided to stay in the Netherlands. "In the Netherlands," he wrote, "I was a Kraut (*mof*),⁵⁶ but my friends would say: he belongs to the good side, and so I was accepted."⁵⁷ During the holidays he often stayed with Lenie Leignes Bakhoven in Borne. When the German army held a recruitment raid (*razzia*) there in 1944 to force men to work in German factories, he was accidentally captured, brought to Germany, and forced into the labor army (*Arbeitseinsatz*). Apparently his Jewish background was not recognized. In Germany he managed to escape and to return to his parental home in Freiburg. Anselm Citron later became a professor of nuclear physics at the University of Karlsruhe.

By contrast the fate of the Pick children—Vera, Dolly Carmen, and her twin brother, Herbert—was more tragic. When the Johanneshof had to close down, 14-year-old Vera stayed with a family in Lochem, not far from Dieren. The twins, who were then 7, were placed in the orphanage of the Mennonite congregation of Haarlem. However, in the fall of 1940 the parents wrote from Vienna saying that they wanted the children to return to Vienna. On October 5 the three children traveled unaccompanied by train to Berlin, and from there to Vienna.⁵⁸ Only a few months later, on March 5, 1941, the whole Pick family, along with 990 other Jews from Vienna,⁵⁹ was transported by train to Modliborzyce, five miles west of Janow Lubelski, in the district of Lublin (now Poland). In this small town thousands of Jews from Germany, Austria, and Poland were forcibly confined in a Jewish ghetto. Astonishingly, Vera was able to send several heart-rending letters to Luzia Kornthal, who at that time was still living in Terwolde near Deventer. Assisted by her host

56. Dutch term of abuse for "Germans."

57. Letter by Anselm Citron to the author, April 15, 2008. A letter by the parents of Anselm Citron in Freiburg, June 13, 1940, indicates that they, too, wished that he would first finish his "gymnasium" high school.

58. Letter by Mr. J.C. Mann, office manager of the *Protestantsch Hulpcomité* to the Board of the *Weeshuis der Doopsgezinden* in Haarlem, Sept. 23, 1940. Archives Weeshuis der Doopsgezinden te Haarlem, inv.nr. 18.

59. With the exception of the oldest son, who had already escaped to England.

family, Luzia was able to send some food parcels and letters to the ghetto, which actually arrived intact. Luzia's father was in the same ghetto. The four letters by Vera reveal the intense sadness and anxiety of the Jews in those days:

By God, you cannot possibly imagine how we live here in this witches' cauldron. . . . At least, I am not able to describe it adequately; one would have to be an author. Believe me, the Jew in Poland is worthy to be despised.⁶⁰ Yes, that is what I say. Here in the town of Modliborzyce (which means, translated in Jewish language, pray to God), there are 75 percent houses (destroyed) and 25 percent sheds. Filth holes covered with straw . . . and people, who walk around, clothed in rags and rubbish (when they would have had a fig leaf, they would have looked more appetizing). And of course there are lice on our head, our body, the walls.

Among these Jews, in their deep misery, the baptized Jews (in Yiddish, the *geschmatte*) seemed to have the worst fate, according to some bitter lines in Vera's letter: "The ones who are *geschmatte* cannot walk on the street without danger for life. We have not been registered as evangelicals [Protestants] since we are six persons who want to live as long as possible." In her last brief message, dated June 6, 1942, Vera wrote, "You can hardly imagine how much you helped us with the parcel. Only the butter was missing. . . . I work on the road with the bricks. The heat is unpleasant, but at least one sleeps during the night."⁶¹

On October 8, 1942, all Jews in this ghetto were transported to the extermination camp of Belzec, where they were murdered.⁶²

CONCLUSION

All in all, at least six children from the original group perished during the Shoah. Some got permission to emigrate before the war broke out. Right before or after May 10, 1940, several others returned home and survived. Among them were Ursula Pintus and her brother Werner, who both went back to Berlin; here Ursula experienced the atrocities

60. Likely a sad or cynical comment about the terrible fate of Jews in Poland in general.

61. These letters, written in German, are dated July 30, 1941, Aug. 1, 1941, Nov. 1, 1941, and June 6, 1942. The first quotations are from the letter of July 30, 1941. The text of the letters has been attached to the personal memories of Luzia Peelen-Kornthal, *Herinneringen die blijven*. The original letters have been sent by her to a niece of Vera Pick (daughter of the brother who survived).

62. Around half a million Jews did perish there, together with an unknown number of Roma and Poland people.

committed by the Russian army when it captured Berlin in April 1945. Later, she returned to the Netherlands.

A number of children remained in the Netherlands, found work, and married there. Some of them kept in touch with each other, even until today, or continued to have contacts with their foster families. In general, however—like other victims of this cruel war—most of them wanted to leave behind them the bitter past, in which many had seen their loved ones die. They wanted to start a new life. An exception has been Olga Pollak. As long as possible, she maintained close relations with pastor Lenie Leignes Bakhoven, with Anselm Citron, and with several others. Bakhoven visited her and her family twice in the U.S. Together with Anselm Citron and others, Olga initiated a process that led to Cornelia (Lenie) Leignes Bakhoven being listed (posthumously, in 2000) among the “Righteous Among the Nations” by the Yad Vashem World Center for Holocaust Research, Documentation, Education and Commemoration in Jerusalem.

