

## Museum Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind



View down Rosenthaler Straße from Hackescher Markt, ca. 1930

This museum tells the story of Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind. On this site during the Second World War, the brush manufacturer Otto Weidt employed mainly blind and deaf Jews who produced brooms and brushes here. Otto Weidt's efforts to protect his Jewish employees from persecution and deportation are shown through the stories of a number of different people. As danger grew, he looked for hiding places for some of them. One of these hideouts was in the rooms that now house this museum.



## Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind

In 1936 Otto Weidt established his firm under the name Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind in the basement of Großbeerstraße 92 in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. From 1940 on the workshop was based at Rosenthaler Straße 39 in the Mitte district, occupying the entire first floor of the side wing of the building.

Blind and deaf Jews produced brooms and brushes in the workshop. The factory was classified as "important for the war effort" because some of its products were made to order for the Wehrmacht. Otto Weidt managed to protect his workers from deportation for some time by bribing Gestapo officers.

Although its workforce was severely reduced after the deportations in 1943, the Workshop for the Blind maintained production until shortly before the end of the war. After the war Otto Weidt continued running the firm; his wife, Elise Weidt, took over after his death in December 1947. In 1952 the Provisioning Office of East Berlin City Council closed down the Workshop for the Blind.





Employees of Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind at Rosenthaler Straße 39, Berlin, 1941

- 1 Mr. Hampel  
non-jewish, commercial salesman, fate unknown
- 2 Frieda Schwarz, born 1896 in Berlin  
murdered 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 3 Simon Weiß, born 1900 in Berlin  
survived the Nazi dictatorship because of his mixed marriage
- 4 Siegfried Lewin, born 1902 in Wongrowitz near Posen survived the  
Nazi dictatorship because of his mixed marriage
- 5 Mr. Farber  
fate unknown
- 6 Alfred Levy  
fate unknown
- 7 Gustav Kremmert, born 1899 in Berlin  
non-jewish, fate unknown
- 8 Inge Deutschkron, born 1922 in Finsterwalde  
survived the Nazi era in hiding
- 9 Rosa Katz, born 1898 in Samter near Posen  
murdered 1942 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 10 Siegfried Lewin, born 1909 in Mogilno near Posen  
murdered 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 11 Otto Weidt, born 1883 in Rostock  
non-jewish, died 1947 in Berlin
- 12 Werner Basch, born 1908 in Berlin  
murdered 1945 in Dachau concentration camp
- 13 Leo Goldstein, born 1925 in Berlin  
murdered 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 14 Alice Licht, born 1916 in Berlin  
escaped 1945 from Christianstadt (subsidiary camp of Groß-Rosen  
concentration camp), died 1987 in Israel
- 15 Erich Frey, born 1889 in Berlin  
murdered 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 16 Herbert Sommerfeld  
survived the Nazi dictatorship because of his mixed marriage
- 17 Kurt Wolf, born 1902 in Berlin  
murdered 1942 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 18 Chaim Horn, born 1902 in Piotrków Trybunalski near Łódź  
murdered 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 19 Max Horn, born 1926 in Brandenburg an der Havel  
murdered 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp
- 20 Dr. Siegfried Lesh, born 1893 in Krone an der Brahe  
murdered 1943 in Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp

The other people in the photo have not been identified



Berlin, den 29. Jan. 1943

Hallo, hallo, hier spricht Berlin!  
Bitte, hören Sie näher hin;  
Wir schalten um für eine Stunde  
und bringen alles kunterbunt!

Meine Damen und Herren, ich will Ihnen be-  
richten,  
es gibt da so einige Geschichten,  
die man so nicht veröffentlichten kann  
und besser weitergibt von Mann zu Mann.

Es läßt sich nicht leugnen,  
es ist so in der Tat,  
man lebt im selben Reich und bildet doch  
seinen eignen Staat.

Da gibt es zum Beispiel den Präsidenten Weidt,  
der dem Namen nach bekannt weit und breit,  
der unsich versammelt seit mehr als einem  
Jahr

Eine recht betrüchtliche Judenschar,  
mit der teilt er Freud und Leid  
im bangen Hoffen auf eine bessere Zeit.

Er fertig an zwar Besessendheiten,  
doch ist das mit der Turnstrich gewesen.

Er sagt von sich selber:

"Ich bin Revolutionär!"  
Und nahm sich deshalb Marlechen Kusanke her,  
der man schon seit frühesten Jugend eingeblut,  
Sozialismus heit die Parole heut.

Diese Idee fürwahr der Hauptgedanke der Kusanke  
war

und wäre es auch stete geblieben,  
hätt Menschen nicht sein Spiel mit ihr getrie-  
ben.

Man sagt sie heut, Politik gehört dem Mann,

- 2 -

Eine Frau zeigt besser, was sie in der Tasche  
kann.

Meine Damen und Herren, da kam neulich noch  
eine neue Sensation,  
Ein Herr vom Donaustrand reist in besonderer  
Mission.

Ein jeder fragt: Hab'n sie schon gehört,  
Ein jeder sagt: Ich weiß's genau und schwört,  
Schon raunt man es in allen Gassen,  
Schon schallt es laut durch alle Straßen,  
Robert Gerö, Kultusgemeinde Wien  
ist plötzlich mit seinem Stab in Berlin ersche  
um die Kleinen der K.G. erst anzulernen,  
wie man Wohnungen leer macht von Juden mit  
Sternen.

Doch waren seine Rutschläge auch gut und nicht  
gar rar,  
Man wußte z.B., wo Razzie war,  
Drum packte auch im Kofferschimmer,  
Iwolo und verschwand für immer.

Doch nun laßt nicht schlussessen,  
die Sendung ist aus,

Die Ätherwellen brachten die Nachricht von  
Haus zu Haus.

Ich hoffe, ich habe Euch gut unterhalten  
und würde gern noch viele Abende gestilten.  
Ich wünsche Euch weiter guten Empfang  
habt für das Zuhören herzlichen Dank.



Hello, hello, Berlin calling!  
Please listen very carefully;  
We're switching over for an hour  
To bring you a program packed with variety!!

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to tell you  
there are certain stories around  
That can't simply be broadcast in public  
And are better passed on in person.

It can't be denied,  
It's an actual fact,  
We live in the same Reich but build our own state.

Take President Weidt, for example  
Whose name is known far and wide  
For more than a year he has gathered around him  
A pretty considerable bunch of Jews,  
He shares their sorrow and their joy  
Anxiously hoping for better times.

He may produce brushes and brooms,  
But that was only the cover story.  
As he says himself,  
"I'm a revolutionary!"  
And so he took on little Marie Kusanke,  
Whom people persuaded from her earliest youth  
That the slogan of the day is socialism.

In truth, this was Kusanke's major idea  
And would have remained so forever,  
If little Hans hadn't played his game with her,  
And now she says, politics is for men

While a woman should show what she can do in love.

Ladies and gentlemen, recently there was another new sensation,  
A gentleman from the Danube shore is abroad on a special mission.  
Everybody asks, Have they heard already.

Everybody says, I know all about it, and swears,  
People are already whispering it in all the byways  
It's already echoing loud through all the streets  
Robert Gero from the Vienna Jewish Community  
Suddenly turned up with his staff in Berlin  
To instruct the underlings of the local Jewish Community  
In how to clear out households of Jews with "stars."

But his tip-offs were good and not all that rare.  
We knew, for example, where there was a round-up,  
So among those who packed in the glow of a candle,  
Was Lucie, and she vanished forever.

But let me wind up now,  
The broadcast is over,  
The ether waves carried the news from house to house.  
I hope I've entertained you well  
And I'd like to organize more evening performances.  
I wish you continuing good reception  
And thank you very much for listening.



Alice Licht grew up in a comfortable middle-class Jewish family in the Berlin district of Tiergarten. She planned to study medicine, but by 1933 she was no longer allowed to attend college. She took a secretarial course, completed it in 1935, and started work at the Jewish Aid Association in Germany. In April 1941 she had to begin working as a forced laborer at ACETA AG, a parachute silk factory owned by IG Farben. She was able to obtain a discharge by feigning a stomach ulcer. Otto Weidt gave her a job in June 1941.

In February 1943 Otto Weidt hid Alice Licht and her parents, Käthe and Georg Licht, in a stockroom in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg. When the Workshop for the Blind was betrayed as a refuge in October 1943, the Lichts were among those arrested by the Gestapo. They were deported to Theresienstadt Ghetto, and six months later to Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

When Otto Weidt heard of this, he went to Auschwitz to offer his brushes for sale to the concentration camp authorities. By this time Alice Licht was in Christianstadt, the sub-camp of Groß-Rosen concentration camp. Otto Weidt followed her there. He managed to send her a message via a Polish worker that he had left street clothes, money, and medicines for her nearby the camp. Christianstadt camp was disbanded at the end of January 1945 as the Red Army advanced, and Alice Licht succeeded in escaping.

Alice Licht spent the end of the war in Otto Weidt's apartment in the Zehlendorf district of Berlin. She emigrated to the USA in the summer of 1946.





Alice Licht  
1940s

Alice Licht with her parents, Käthe and Georg Licht  
1919





Theresienstadt.

Elngespercht in kleinen Stuben  
sitzen tausende von Juden  
voller Hoffen, voller Bangen  
wann werden wir wieder zu den uns'ren gelangen.<sup>1</sup>  
Nachrichten haschen, Bonkes erjagen  
das sind die Ereignisse in unseren Tagen  
und daneben - der Kampf um's Leben  
Hunger und Not, Seid oder Tod  
so ist das Ghetto uns'rer Tage  
Kampf, Not und Plage.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Ein jeder, der am Morgen erwacht, überdenkt den  
Traum der Nacht

in dem er gehöfft, in dem er sich gesahnt, in dem  
er sich in seinem Zuhause gewöhnt  
in dem alles-war, alles nur Frieden war  
und übrig blieb nur die Hoffnung auf ein besseres  
Jahr.

Doch mit des Tages realen Lauf  
hört alles Fabeln und Denken auf  
ein jeder seiner Arbeit nachgeht  
in sich besetzt von dem einen Gebet:

"Almächtiger Gott erlöse uns bald  
aus den Händen brutaler Gewalt  
gib uns den Frieden, den wir so ersehen  
erhör unser Flehn, unser Klagen und Stöhnen  
lass die Sonne wieder für uns scheinen  
und Glück und Frieden über unserer Zukunft sein.

"Theresienstadt," poem by Alice Licht  
1944

Theresienstadt

Crammed into little rooms  
thousands of Jews are sitting  
full of hope, full of fear  
When will we get back to our folks again?  
Grabbing at news, running after coupons  
These are the events in our days  
And aside from this - the struggle for life  
Hunger and need, existence or death  
This is the ghetto of our days  
Hunger, need and torment.

Each of us, waking in the morning, recalls the night's dream  
in which he hoped, in which he yearned, in which  
he imagined himself at home  
in which everything, everything was just peace  
and the only thing left to hope for was a better year ahead.

But as the real-life day goes on  
All fables and thoughts come to an end  
each of us does his work  
Inspired in his heart by the single prayer:

"Almighty God, deliver us soon  
from the hands of brutal power  
give us the peace we long for so much  
heed our praying, our lamenting and sighing  
let the sun shine for us again  
and happiness and peace be upon our future.







Weidt wrote the letter on his firm's headed notepaper and addressed it to Birkenau Camp Administration.

"As supplier to various labor camps and the Berlin Gestapo, I would like to offer you a selection of our products.

barrack brooms

yard brooms

long-handled scrubbing brushes

scrubbing brushes

street brooms

office brooms and brushes.

Subject to your prior approval, I would like to present samples of these products in the period from June 12-20, 1944.

Heil Hitler! Otto Weidt."

The stamp on the left is the official stamp of the Waffen SS Command Center of Auschwitz II concentration camp, registering receipt of the letter on June 15, 1944.

On the right, under the obligatory greeting "Heil Hitler!", is the business stamp of Otto Weidt's Workshop for the Blind with his signature.

"Return - Happiness," poem by Alice Licht  
April 1945

Return - happiness

I once thought - my whole happiness  
lies in the little word 'return'  
on all the paths I trod, in all my dreams  
there was only a sense of brimming over  
after this 'return.'

And weeks went by and raced ahead  
nothing had meaning for me any longer  
like the belief in this 'return'

And now, after this return has occurred  
I'm losing the strength to carry on  
and have the feeling I could only keep on living  
if a thousand chains surround me  
if whip lashes crack around me  
and loud insults and curses resound in my ear.

And you, my friend, who has all my heart  
I've even bitterly destroyed the tranquillity  
you need so desperately.  
I know you give me everything  
I know you only think of me  
and instead of being grateful I shrink back  
in the face of what I thought would be great happiness.

But believe me, the time is not far off  
that I have longed for so much  
when I shall again become "I"  
and then, steadily, with all my might  
things will be built, life will be lived and new things created  
and then it will come true, that the word 'return'  
holds the foundation of great happiness.