

The Cahn family



Foto: Nathan Cahn (Archiv Jessurun/Amsterdam)

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The Cahn family's roots can be traced back to the town of Friesheim in North Rhine-Westphalia, where members of the family were quick to make a name for themselves in the property market.

Nathan Joseph Cahn was born in Friesheim around 1770. His grandson Nathan, known as Norbert, was born in the same town in 1846. He later married Amalie Schmidt, a Jewish woman from the town of Hattingen. Her father Salomon was married to Sybilla Cohen, the widow of a merchant from Hattingen named Gumpertz.

In 1856, Salomon Schmidt purchased the *Bügeleisenhaus* (flatiron house) in Hattingen for 1,000 thalers and set up a private slaughterhouse and butcher's shop – Hattingen didn't have a public slaughterhouse until shortly before the turn of the century.

In 1872, the house, located on Haldenplatz, became the property of Salomon Schmidt's daughter Amalie and her husband Norbert Cahn, who continued to run the butcher's shop with his son Carl. In 1907, Norbert acquired a neighbouring property and moved the shop to the new premises. From that point on, the *Bügeleisenhaus* was used for rental purposes.

In 1910, after marrying Amalie Mayer, Carl Cahn took over his father's butcher's shop. Even though the consumption of pork is forbidden under Jewish dietary laws, the Cahn family slaughtered and sold the non-kosher meat, thereby attracting customers beyond the Jewish community.

In 1938, Carl Cahn sold, 'by total mutual agreement', his 'beef and pork butcher's shop with electric operation' to the butcher Wilhelm Stratmann. Following a property devaluation by the local district office and the deduction of the remaining mortgage, Stratmann ended up paying 12,040 Reichsmark, less than half of the originally agreed purchase price. The handover of the business on 1 November 1938 completed the so-called 'de-Jewification' of the traditional butcher's shop founded by Salomon Schmidt on Haldenplatz in 1857.

In the wake of the sale of the shop and the November Pogroms, during which Carl was imprisoned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, Amalie and Carl Cahn were determined to emigrate. In late autumn 1939, they applied for exit visas at the Chilean consulate in Berlin. Why Amalie and Carl Cahn never managed to leave Hattingen is not known.

In 1941, they were relocated to the Hattingen *Judenhaus* (or 'Jews' house', a National Socialist term referring to buildings where Jews were forced to live after being expelled from their homes) in the Ruhr meadows; they were officially de-registered from these premises on 28 April 1942. They were deported on the second train leaving the administrative district of Arnsberg for the Zamość ghetto near Lublin. It is likely that Amalie and Carl Cahn were murdered immediately after their arrival.

What about Carl Cahn's siblings?

Bertha Cahn, married to the cattle dealer Nathan Mendel from the town of Linnich since 1903, emigrated to the Netherlands. She was deported to the Auschwitz extermination camp in 1942 and murdered there on 27 November 1942.

Rosalie Cahn, married to the cattle dealer Abraham Kamp since 1911, lived in Cologne. She emigrated to the Netherlands. From there, she was deported to the Sobibor extermination camp, where she was murdered on 23 July 1943.

Selma Cahn, married to the butcher and cattle dealer Alfred Abraham since 1928, was forced to leave her home in Duisburg and relocate to a *Judenhaus* on 19 December 1940. Both she and her husband were deported to the Riga ghetto in Latvia on 11 December 1941. They were murdered there in 1942.

Johanna Cahn, Selma's twin sister, married to the cattle dealer Albert Perlstein since 1913, lived in the Eifel region. In 1938, they sold their property and fled, going into hiding in France. Albert Perlstein died in 1968; Johanna in 1972.

Julie Cahn died in 1878, aged one year; Hedwig Cahn died of a heart attack in 1930, aged 49.

Four of the seven children of the Cahn family were murdered by the National Socialists.

The house on Haldenplatz

The location of the *Bügeleisenhaus* between Fernhandelsweg, the town hall and Kirchplatz suggests that its builder, Wilhelm Elling, was a member of the wealthy merchant class. In any case, he was sufficiently affluent to add a trapezoidal extension to the house towards the end of the Thirty Years' War. Its idiosyncratic design is reminiscent of an iron, which, in around 1900, earned the building its nickname *Bügeleisenhaus*, or flatiron house.

A few days after the 1938 November Pogroms, and again in 1939, the local heritage society in Hattingen attempted to take possession of the house and applied to the local NSDAP group for the building to be 'aryanised', a term coined by the National Socialists. In 1941, following the deportation of its Jewish owners, the house was initially transferred to Westphalia's Chief Finance President with an eye to selling it.

However, because the building was in such a bad state of disrepair, no buyers could be found; thus, in July 1942, the house was expropriated, becoming the property of the German Reich. In 1945, the building – by now dilapidated but relatively undamaged by the war – passed into the hands of the Jewish Trust Corporation (JTC). Although demolition seemed almost inevitable, the building continued to house war refugees and returnees – at times, up to seven families – right up until the early 1960s.

In 1953, the first post-war committee of Hattingen's local heritage society negotiated with the JTC regarding the purchase of the house. On 11 July 1955, the society acquired it for 2,000 marks. Its aim, once renovations were complete, was to create a *Heimatzentrum* for refugees and displaced persons. Before opening in 1962, the building underwent reconstruction: its gable ornaments were removed, the stable out front was demolished and the large windows were dismantled. The only features to remain virtually unchanged were the staircase in the hall and the butcher's shop window.

Jewish life in Hattingen

21 September 1484

The words ‘des Joden gude’ in a sale deed may be the earliest known reference to the existence of Jews in Hattingen.

8 December 1498

John II., Duke of Cleves, Count of Mark, using the powers of his *Judenprivileg* decree, ordered the expulsion of Jewish families from Hattingen, permanently banned them from returning and resettling there in future, and barred Jews from doing business or even practising a trade in Hattingen.

April/May 1809

First resettlement of a Jewish person in Hattingen.

1816

Documentary references to ‘teacher and sexton’ are evidence of Jewish religious activities being carried out in Hattingen.

7 June 1871

Laying of the foundation stone of the new community centre (featuring a synagogue and school) on Bahnhofstrasse.

13 September 1872

Festive consecration of the synagogue.

9 March 1933

First boycotts targeting Jewish-owned businesses.

1 April 1933

National boycott of Jewish businesses organised by the Nazis.

9 November 1938

Destruction of Hattingen’s synagogue and looting of Jewish-owned businesses and flats.

4 March 1939

On the occasion of the demolition of the destroyed synagogue, the newspaper *Heimat am Mittag* announces: ‘Hattingen is now free of Jews’.

26 June 1941

Forced relocation of Hattingen’s Jews to the *Judenhaus*, the former gun factory near the Ruhr river.

April 1942

All 24 Hattingen Jews deported in the three transports of 1942 were murdered in Eastern Europe.

July 1987

Inauguration of ‘Synagogenplatz’ with the memorial stone bearing the inscription ‘Lest we forget’.