

Robert Alexander – from West Prussia to Berlin

Robert Alexander was born on March 29, 1864 in Lidzbark (Lautenburg) in West Prussia, now Poland, as the son of the merchant Louis Alexander and his wife Berta Alexander (née Glück). At the end of the 19th century, the family moved to Berlin, where Robert trained as a merchant and began working in the leather industry.

On December 23, 1901 Robert married Martha Becker in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, after which they lived in Uhlandstraße. Between 1904 and 1908, three sons and twin daughters were born.

They moved several times during this period. From 1912, the family lived in Steglitz, Feuerbachstr. 12, where Robert ran a shoe store, then at Sedanstr. 17. Business was good, so the family moved to a larger apartment at Grunewaldstr. 18 in 1919.

In 1928, Robert and his family were living at Vionvillestr. 20 in a newly built prestigious housing estate at Stadtpark Steglitz. By this time he was financially well off enough to stop working.

In 1933/34, however, the tide turned: the apartment at Vionvillestr. 20 had to be given up. Robert and Martha rented a small apartment at Arndtstr. 12, now Gritznerstr. 41, where they lived together with their twin daughters Hansi and Lola. Due to the anti-Jewish measures of the National Socialist government, the financial situation of Jewish citizens became increasingly precarious.

On June 24, 1941, Robert died in the hospital of the Adass Yisroel synagogue community in Elsässer Straße (today: Torstraße) in Berlin-Mitte. The cause of death was given as "circulatory failure". The hospital was closed by the Nazis just a few months later, in September 1941.

Martha Alexander, née Becker - family happiness and social advancement

Martha Becker was born on April 9, 1882 in Metz (now France) as the eldest of five siblings of the merchant Max Becker and his wife Therese (née Wollstein). Martha had four siblings: Arthur, who died fighting for Germany in the First World War, Paul, Gertrud and Margot, who was born in 1902 after the family moved to Berlin.

At the age of 19, Martha married the 37-year-old merchant Robert Alexander, who was almost twice her age, on December 23, 1901 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf.

The marriage produced five children: Bernhard, born on June 12, 1904; René, born on May 8, 1905; the twin sisters Hansi and Lola (Tana), born on June 20, 1907; and Klaus, born on June 10, 1908.

Martha's husband Robert Alexander was a successful merchant in the leather industry, especially in the shoe business. Research into the residential addresses clearly shows some social advancement: in 1919, the Alexander family moved to Grunewaldstr. 18. Whereas the family had previously lived in back courtyard apartments, they were now able to rent a larger apartment on the first floor of the front building, the "Bel Etage". In 1928, Martha and her husband Robert - now quite well off - moved to Vionvillestr. 20 in a newly built residential complex at Stadtpark Steglitz.

From 1933, the couple's financial situation deteriorated considerably, which resulted in them moving into a small apartment at what is now Gritznerstr. 41. In 1941, Martha and her daughters had to leave their apartment in Berlin-Steglitz and move with other families to a shared "Judenwohnung" in Gutzkowstraße in Berlin-Schöneberg.

On July 24, 1942, Martha took her own life there with an overdose of Veronal. She was 60 years old. Martha was buried in the Weißensee Jewish Cemetery.

Bernhard – deported and murdered

Bernhard Alexander was born on June 12, 1904 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf as the eldest of the five children of Robert and Martha Alexander.

After leaving school, Bernhard completed a commercial apprenticeship. He began working as a cab driver. From 1928, Bernhard was employed by various cab companies in Berlin. Little is known about his life in his twenties and thirties; he remained single.

In December 1938, all German Jews were banned from driving vehicles by the "Decree of the Reichsführer SS and Chief of the German Police". At this time, Bernhard lived at Schlosstr. 28 with the widow Martha Gradenwitz. Four of her relatives were still living here in 1939, along with four other Jewish people.

From June 1940, Bernhard had to undertake forced labor at the Berger & Kulp coal yard at Berlin's Westhafen port. In May 1941, he was arrested and taken directly to the "Wuhlheide labor education camp". As a prisoner there, Bernhard would have been forced to labor under extremely hard, concentration camp-like conditions. At the end of 1941, Bernhard was admitted to the Jewish Hospital in Wedding with a serious leg injury.

On September 24, 1942, he was taken from his hospital bed and deported to Raasiku, Estonia on the 20th Osttransport. Upon arrival, he was most likely shot in the Kalevi-Liiva pine forest and buried in a mass grave.

Hansi and Lola – the fate of the twin sisters

Hansi and Lola were twins, born on June 20, 1907 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. After finishing school at Lyceum II in Steglitz, both Hansi and Lola began vocational training in their father's shoe store.

From 1937, **Hansi** worked as a sales assistant in the shoe department of the Wertheim department store in Leipziger Straße. When the Wertheim department store was "Aryanized" in 1937, Hansi lost her job. From April to October 1938, Hansi worked in a small country hotel on Lake Rößlin in the Mecklenburg Lake District, then as a housemaid for a Jewish couple until April 1941.

From April 1941, she was forced to work at the Siemens factory in Gartenfeld (Berlin-Spandau).

On February 27, 1943, Hansi was arrested at the Siemens factory as part of the "Fabrikaktion" factory raids. She was deported to Auschwitz on March 1, 1943 on the 31st Osttransport and murdered.

Hansi's twin sister **Lola** opened a store for boys' clothing at Schadenrute 3 in 1928, where her mother Martha also worked. The store was destroyed during the November pogroms in 1938. Lola then took on sewing work and delivered newspapers.

From April 1941, Lola was made to do forced labor at the Alfred Teves GmbH aircraft engine factory in Berlin-Wittenau, under the supervision of factory supervisor Wilhelm Daene. He belonged to a resistance group. In January 1943, he warned Lola of the coming Fabrikaktion raid and hid her in his house in Konradshöhe.

The Daene couple also offered Ursula Finke protection there, and gave both women work in Margarete Daene's lending libraries in Friedrichshain and Moabit, using forged identity papers.

In August 1944, Lola and Ursula were recognized by a Jewish informer at Gesundbrunnen station. Ursula threw herself in front of the train and survived the war seriously injured in the Jewish hospital. Lola had to go underground and constantly change her hiding place.

Lola and Ursula survived National Socialism and were reunited in May 1945. After the war, they lived together as partners and ran a dressmaking business in Pankow, until Lola's death in 1965.

René and Klaus

The two brothers ran haulage businesses in Steglitz: Rene lived at Herderstr. 10 and Klaus at Marschnerstr. 42. Both were married to non-Jewish wives. This offered them and their children protection from deportation, but not from dispossession and degradation: both had their driving licences revoked, Klaus' lorries were destroyed and Rene's taxi was expropriated. He was made to shovel coal as a forced laborer from 1940-1945, while Klaus worked in rubbish collection from 1943-1945. Although both were able to work as taxi drivers again after the end of National Socialism, their health was severely damaged.

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Alexander Family Robert and Martha, Bernhard, Hansi and Lola

