

Heritage preservation and Nationalism in Bergedorf

From 1945, the district of Bergedorf became a place of refuge for refugees and displaced persons from the German eastern territories which had effectively fallen to Poland and the Soviet Union. Those affected came from East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia.

The living

The first refugees from East Germany arrived in Bergedorf before the end of the war. In the period that followed, the population of the district increased massively. The Bergedorf administration set up several larger refugee camps. It used existing housing barracks for forced laborers or inns. In addition, the housing office confiscated rooms in private flats and assigned them to displaced persons. These forced accommodations often lasted for several years and led to numerous conflicts. The housing situation only eased in the course of the 1950s years through various housing construction projects in Bergedorf and the surrounding area.



Gisela Matthes from East Brandenburg was moved with her six sons in an empty military military barracks.

Photo: around 1946, privately owned

Living together

While some contemporary witnesses report a great willingness to help among the local population, others mainly remember rejection and hostility. When thefts occurred, the expellees were the first suspects. Those affected also report of humiliation at school and of shame due to their own poverty. However, the longer they lived together, the more the prejudices diminished and the relationship normalized.

The “Landsmannschaften”

After the end of the war, associations of refugees and expellees were initially banned. When the ban was lifted in 1948, a number of so-called Landsmannschaften were founded. They organized homeland evenings and folk dance groups and, from 1951 onwards, shaped the annual “Bergedorfer Heimatwochen”. In Bergedorf the Pomeranian Landsmannschaft was particularly active.

The nostalgic cultivation of their own culture was mixed with political demands. In 1955, for example, the Landsmannschaften opened the exhibition “Deutscher Osten - Deutsche Heimat” in Bergedorf. The opening speech was given by a folklorist with a relevant Nazi past. And in the same year, a memorial was erected at the Bergedorf cemetery at the instigation of the Landsmannschaften, a “Memorial to the Dead of the German East” was inaugurated, which combined mourning for the war dead with the demand for the return of the eastern territories.

The integration of the expellees in Bergedorf was ultimately successful, but accompanied by sometimes aggressive nationalist rhetoric.



Membership card of the Pomeranian Landsmannschaft, issued in 1950.

Kultur- und Geschichtskontor Bergedorf



“Ostdeutscher Heimatabend” in November 1955 in the Hasse-Aula in Bergedorf.

Photo: Privately owned

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