

# Civil Courage in Action: Identifying the Courageous Women in the Rosenstrasse Protest

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## Abstract

During the time of the Nazi regime, interfaith marriages, especially between Jewish men and non-Jewish women, were outlawed. As the Gestapo increased their power in the city of Berlin, over 7000 Jewish men were arrested. In the end of February and beginning of March of 1943, hundreds of non-Jewish wives initiated the Rosenstrasse Protest, in an act of civil courage to save their Jewish husbands from being deported and killed. This protest continued to grow as women fought for their husbands' releases. Because of the overwhelming growth and power of the protest, the Jewish men that were detained were eventually released. The courageous acts of their wives and family members have often gone unspoken about and their genealogical pasts forgotten. To commemorate these courageous acts and to bring to light the familial connections, our research team has put together a genealogical database accompanied by a series of biographies. This database begins with protesters from the Rosenstrasse Protest, cases of intermarriage, civil courage, and women's resistance. From these connections are built as the rest of their genealogy and family history is compiled. Once completed, the comprehensive database and the accompanying biographies will (a) be used to further contribute to the historical studies of Germany during the Nazi regime and (b) serve as an online resource for descendants to find lost family records and build their own genealogical history.

## Introduction

In the early 1940's, the National Socialist Worker's Party, the Nazis, took power in Germany. They forced Jews into ghettos and concentration camps, with the only exception being those who were married Aryan women. In 1943, Nazis in Berlin kidnapped over 1700 Jewish men from their workplaces and homes, forcing them into a Jewish Community Center. As their wives learned that the plan was to send these men to concentration camps, they became outraged and protested for their husbands' releases. These protests, known as the Rosenstrasse protests, lasted for two months, displaying their unity and courage, as they rushed the Community Center. These 6000 women protested unarmed against armed SS soldiers. Finally, their husbands were released on March 6, 1943, which gives testament to the bravery and resilience of these women in the face of antisemitism. Our goal of the project is to identify and locate protesters of Rosenstrasse and spread awareness of the protest and civil courage of these women. We have worked to achieve this as we continue to compile a database of the genealogical records of these women accompanied by a series of biographies on their lives. This comprehensive database will be used to further contribute to the historical studies of Germany during the Nazi regime and serve as an online resource for descendants to find lost family records and build their own genealogical history.

## Methods

- Research protesters from an existing database
- Look for updated information such as birth, marriage, and death certificates.
- Opened the documents and reports and cross-referenced them to see if the results of our searches matched the individual we were given
- Compile our results into the sheet, so it can be entered into our database.



Figure 1.1: Birth and marriage certificates for Ms. Schwarzenberger. She was born on February 6, 1886, in Berlin to Wilhelm Gustav Paul Block and Emilie Kaufmann and married on December 19, 1932, in Berlin, Germany to Julius Schwarzenberger.



Figure 1.2 Image of Margot (Miriam) Beck (Protester) and Gerhard (Gad) Beck (Her Husband)

## Results

These results are preliminary as our research project is continuously being updated over time in our database. Specifically, we found eight potential matches for protesters and researched ten protesters into our pre-existing Google Sheets database. From these researched matches, we found two certificates of baptism and multiple birth and marriage certificates. This data allows us to identify and understand the background of these women with where they came from, their Jewish spouses, etc. With the results of our genealogical research, we send our data to the biography and Wikipedia teams of the Rosenstrasse foundation so that they can write corresponding biographies and correctly add accurate and unbiased information to the Rosenstrasse protest Wikipedia page.

## Conclusion

In conducting our research, we were able to find birth, marriage, and death certificates for the eight women we researched. Our findings further enabled us to further build each woman's family tree and our genealogical database. Although it was difficult to find other accounts of their lives and struggled to find pictures to identify some of the women. With these being our preliminary results, we are confident that we will be able to find more records as our search continues. With this, we were also able to find the names and other women that were potentially protesters themselves or connected to other protesters. Moving forward, we will begin to conduct research on these women as well to expand our database and gain a better understanding of the events of the Rosenstrasse Protest and how each woman and her family was connected.

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