

*Survivors' Stories:
Anniston's Temple Beth El
and the Holocaust*



Sherry Blanton

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Karl Nathan
1878 - 1960

The son of Konrad and Sybilla Nathan, Karl was born in Emmerich, Germany and was the husband of Henriette. Karl and Felix were brothers, thus Karl and Henriette's move to Anniston. Karl was imprisoned in Theresienstadt during the war. Karl and Henriette lived modest lives in Anniston where he worked as a tailor. Karl died in Memphis, Tennessee but is buried in the Temple Beth El portion of Hillside Cemetery.

50th Wedding Anniversary
Anniston, Alabama



Henriette Pollack Nathan
1877 - 1957

Henriette (Henny) was the wife of Karl Nathan; the couple married circa 1900. Henriette, one of three sisters, was born in Aachen, Germany. Her husband, Karl, was Felix Nathan's brother. Henriette was imprisoned in Theresienstadt during the war. Theresienstadt was a Ghetto; many of the prisoners there were sent to Auschwitz. Conditions in the Theresienstadt Ghetto were so deplorable that many died there of disease and starvation; thus, the Germans built a crematorium there to dispose of the bodies. Henriette came to the United States with Karl in 1947 via Switzerland. She died in Anniston and is buried in the Temple Beth El portion of Hillside Cemetery.

50th Wedding Anniversary
Anniston, Alabama

Correspondence with George Nathan, in writer's file, December 2, 2009.

Correspondence with Michelle Kemp-Nordell, in writer's file, December, 2009.

Correspondence with Don Kemp, in writer's file, November 17, 2009. *The Anniston Star*, no date available.

Notes on the Project

The congregation of Temple Beth El in Anniston, Alabama was founded in 1888 and its sanctuary built and dedicated in 1893. Over time doctors, lawyers, teachers, businesspeople, soldiers, and their husbands, wives, children, and extended families have filled the pews. Among the members of this congregation, probably never totaling more than fifty families, were sixteen individuals with unique pasts. They were Holocaust survivors. The Birmingham Holocaust Education Committee has defined a survivor: "A Holocaust survivor is any person, Jewish or non-Jewish, who was displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social and political policies of the Nazis, and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945. In addition to former inmates of concentration camps, ghettos, and prisons, this definition includes, among others, people who were refugees or were in hiding."

Some of Temple Beth El's survivors had very dramatic stories full of danger and intrigue; others had stories filled with horror and sadness. Walter Israel described his journey as an "adventure." But all lived under the terror of a regime that made them targets simply because they were Jewish. Our survivors settled here, finding safety and security in the Deep South; they faced a new way of living from adjusting to the climate, to learning to speak English (and understanding our famous Southern drawls), to working at jobs that were as foreign to some of them as the food. Many of them now worshiped with new religious traditions; some had been Orthodox . . . others Conservative Jews; now they worshiped in a classically Reform congregation. But all were survivors. They made new lives; they married; they had children; they operated successful businesses. "America," as Greta Kemp once said, "became our country of choice and Anniston became our home."

All sixteen of our congregation's survivors are now dead, but their stories of courage and tenacity will survive. Family members have shared family records and chronicles, photographs, and personal memories. Alfred Caro, Walter Israel, and Sophie Nathan gave testimony for the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. (Alfred Caro's testimony has been posted on YouTube.) I was fortunate to be able to interview Alfred Caro, Walter Israel, Rudy and Greta Kemp, and Ernest Kohn many years ago. We can all only be better for learning about their experiences, their spirit, and their determination.

Sherry Blanton

Family Members of Our Survivors Who Helped with the Research

Alice Caro Burkett
Allan Arkus
Danny Einstein
Don Kemp
Else Israel Goodman
Fred Kemp
George Nathan Gil
Kempenich
Herbert Kohn
Michelle Kemp-Nordell

Birmingham Holocaust Education Committee
Public Library of Anniston and Calhoun-County and staff members, Teresa Kiser and
Bonnie Seymour
Lance Johnson Studios
Temple Beth El
The James Rosen Charitable Foundation
Tyson Art and Frame
University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education