

Machseh Lajesoumim



# Machseh Lajesoumim

*A Jewish Orphanage in the City of Leiden  
1890-1943*

*Jaap W. Focke*

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*Machseh Lajesoumim* (Refuge for orphans) was the name shown on the new building, above the front doors, partly visible on the photograph on the back cover. Its official name, which adorned the old building on Stille Rijn (Fig. 2.1), was “*Centraal Israëlitisch Wees- en Doorgangshuis*”, that is, National Jewish Orphanage and Transit Home.

This book is dedicated to the memory of the children and staff of the Jewish Orphanage in Leiden who perished in the Holocaust.

*Alleenlijk wacht u, en bewaart uw ziel wel, dat gij niet vergeet de dingen, die uw ogen gezien hebben; en dat zij niet van uw hart wijken, al de dagen uws levens; en gij zult ze aan uw kinderen en uw kindskinderen bekend maken.<sup>1</sup>*

*Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons.<sup>2</sup>*

Deut. 4:9

- 1 Statenvertaling.
- 2 King James.



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Lotte Adler

Frankfurt, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1925-Sobibor, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1943

Photograph taken in Frankfurt am Main (Germany) in 1937 when she was  
12 years old

Lotte's father was arrested in 1937 and killed in KL Buchenwald on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1938. After *Kristallnacht* (9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> November 1938) her mother sent Lotte and her younger sister Henny to safety in Holland by train with the *Kindertransport* of 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1938. They were taken in by the orphanage in Leiden that same night. But the Germans caught up with them when they invaded Holland in May 1940.





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# Foreword

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The Nazi German anti-Jewish enterprise, commonly called “the Holocaust” or “Shoah”, which was aimed at eradicating the *jüdischen Geist* (“Jewish spirit”) and its racial carriers “the Jews”, engulfed Europe between 1933 and 1945. It resulted not only in close to six million murdered Jewish souls but also in the almost total destruction throughout Europe of Jewish life as it had developed over many centuries.

Jewish society everywhere, including in the Netherlands, changed dramatically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to emancipation, integration, secularization, politicization, economic diversification, and emigration. However, various Jewish traditional customs and social features which had been central to Jewish social existence since antiquity, continued – even if in forms adapted to modern standards. Two of these features were education and caring for the weak, especially orphans. These features were anchored in biblical teachings: regarding education – “Hear, my son, the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the teaching of thy mother”<sup>1</sup> and “train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it”<sup>2</sup>; and regarding the obligation to care for orphans – the recurring instruction to not forget and to defend “the stranger, the fatherless, and the

1 Proverbs 1:8.

2 Proverbs 22:6.

*widow*”.<sup>3</sup> These teachings were taken care of in Diaspora Jewry in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period by what we would call today non-profit organizations (in traditional terms: *Chevrot Kadisha*). In the modern period in the Netherlands, this tradition was integrated into the local system of social organizations that were run by the various segments (*zuilen*) of Dutch society, which included orphanages. This is the general Dutch-Jewish background of the *Machseh Lajesoumim* orphanage of Leiden described in this detailed and moving study.

Shortly after the occupation of the Netherlands in May 1940, the persecution of the Jews started, and it encompassed all levels of Jewish life. The lethal phase of these persecutions was the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question.” This phase, which was the ultimate realization of the Nazi enterprise, targeted Jews in the most remote places (such as the islands of Rhodes and Kos in the Mediterranean) and all of them – whether old or young. Thus came also the end to the *Machseh Lajesoumim* orphanage of Leiden.

To what extent is a detailed study of one, relatively small, institution in a tiny Jewish community of importance? Due to my position as Head of the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research people often ask me: After so many years of research – is there still anything new to learn? I respond by saying, that when I entered the field of Holocaust research in the first half of the 1970s, I never thought that this field would expand and intensify so much as we experience today. But it did. And the reason is that the Holocaust was a watershed event in European and global history. In spite of the fact that the Holocaust was a relatively short historical event – twelve years and 98 days – it affected many countries and societies, and had long-term reverberations regarding ideologies, concepts of life and morality, academic standards, education and more. In this context, it is important not to talk about the Holocaust in vague, generalizing terms but to get acquainted with the specifics, even with minuscule acts. The study presented in this book contributes precisely to that. Moreover, the acts of memorization of the victims who perished and the describing of the rehabilitation of the few who survived are a contribution to the needed rebuilding of the concept of human dignity. The author, Jaap Focke, took it upon himself to carry out this job and dedicated many years to painstaking research that would enable him to reconstruct the history of *Machseh Lajesoumim* and its orphans, situate the institution’s fate in the proper context and reconstruct the human image of the orphans. The result is a study that should be used in Holocaust education; through this one example, the encounter with the enormity of the Holocaust can be better understood.

Rosh Hodesh Av 5780/22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020

3 Deuteronomy 24:21 and many more places.



[Dan Michman was born in Amsterdam in 1947 and came to Israel as a child in 1957, when his father, Jozeph Melkman (Michman), was appointed General Director of Yad Vashem. After his military service, he studied Jewish history and Hebrew linguistics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he earned his doctorate in 1978 by writing a dissertation on *"Jewish Refugees from Germany in the Netherlands, 1933-1940"*. In 1976 he joined the faculty of the Department of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University, teaching and researching in the field of modern Jewish history in general and in the Shoah in particular. He has been involved with Yad Vashem's scholarly and educational activities since the early 1980s and served as Chief Historian from 2000 till 2011. He has published books and articles in a variety of languages on the history of Dutch and Belgian Jewry, Israeli society, and mostly on various aspects of the Shoah – historiography, ghettos, *Judenräte* and Jewish leadership, Jewish religious life, problems of Jewish refugees and migration, resistance, Western Europe, the survivors, the impact of the Shoah on Israeli society and religious Jewry, and more.]







# Acknowledgements

When Mr. F.J.M. Smits in The Hague commissioned two journalists of Q-Productions, Gerard Kerkvliet and Martin Uitvlugt (probably in 1971), to investigate what happened to the Jewish orphanage in Leiden in March 1943, he truly laid the first stone for this book.<sup>1</sup> Their interviews with Hijme Stoffels and Emilie Stoffels-van Brussel, which eventually also led to the recovery of the Stoffels' wartime archive, as well as with Piet de Vries and other survivors of the war, were instrumental in preserving the memory of the orphanage and its inhabitants. Cor van Zegveld<sup>2</sup> initiated serious academic studies about the Jewish population in Leiden, until he had to pass on the work to Leonard Kasteleyn in the late 1990s, who spent another twelve years searching archives and interviewing survivors. Most importantly, he established or confirmed the identity of almost all the children and the staff of the orphanage in the many extant photographs. The present author became involved in 2006. Leonard passed on the work and part of his research results to me in 2014. When speaking in this book about “we” or “us”, it is intended to include the author as well as his predecessors, although I remain solely responsible for any errors or shortcomings.

Without the willingness of survivors to talk to us, this book could not have been written. Many contributions by Mimi de Wind-Weiman, Piet de Vries, Hans Kloosterman, the families Klein and Philipson-Armon, Mary Vromen-de Raay and her daughter Shifrah Romano, Roni Maor (Aron Wolff), and Kurt and Helga Gottschalk are gratefully acknowledged.

I also thank Jopie Schröder-Vos and Mien Stam-van der Staay, the friends of Lotte Adler; Mr. L. Brussé and his sisters for their account of Sally Montezinos; Johanna and Marij van der Kroft for the stories about their mother, Betsy Wolff; Marianne Kroese, the daughter of Piet de Vries; Deborah Shelton and Hanna Sherak, daughters of Eva and Ruth Herskovits; Miriam Spziro-Baitalmy concerning the children of the SS *Bodegraven*; and the families of Emilie and Hijme Stoffels. Peter de Jong, Mieke Vink, Ab van Brussel and Frits Stoffels all shared their memories and allowed the author access to the war archive of Hijme and Emilie. The “Joods Monument”<sup>3</sup>

1 Smits lived in the neighbourhood, until he was arrested by (or by order of) the German police. After the war, when he asked about what happened to the people who lived there, he did not get clear answers, until he asked Gerard Uitvlugt to investigate. It is significant (see Ch. 10) that he took inquisitive action some 25 years after the war. *Leids Dagblad*, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1984.

2 Cor died on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2006, aged 86.

3 [www.joodsmonument.nl/](http://www.joodsmonument.nl/).



and the website created by Frans Hoek<sup>4</sup> proved to be useful to unearth hitherto unknown material, such as photographs submitted by Mrs. M. Gilliamse, allowing the identification of Debora Sanders, and Mrs. Henny Schippers, who found a photograph of Philip Poons. I thank Mr. A. Stofkoooper for his support concerning his father; Mr. R. Bosten for his information concerning Alexander Lipschits; Mr. F. Wolters with respect to his mother Els van Santen and her brothers Karel and Philip; Mrs. Pauline Jonkers-Stroink and Mr. A. de Bruin for information about Etty Heerma van Voss; Mr. A. van Straten with respect to his parents, who sheltered Aron Wolff.

I received generous support and research assistance from Michiel Schwarzenberg and Raymond Schütz of the Red Cross in The Hague; Guido Abuys of the Memorial Centre Kamp Westerbork; Sierk Plantinga of the National Archives in The Hague; Laurence Schram, Alexandra Matagne and Dorien Vyzel of Kazerne Dossin in Mechelen; Filip Strubbe of the Algemene Rijksarchief in Brussels; Beth Dotan and Zwi Oren of the Ghetto Fighters' House museum in Israel; Annemiek Gringold, Peter Buys and Anton Kras of the Jewish Historical Museum (JCK) in Amsterdam; Mrs. Katharina Kniefacz and staff of the Gedenkstätte Mauthausen; Thomas Rahe and Jens Brunner of the Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen; Alexander Avram, Director of the Hall of Names and the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names in Yad Vashem; Hartmut Peters (Gröschler Haus, Jever); Miriam Keesing (DOKIN); Monica Kingreen (Fritz Bauer Institut, Frankfurt a/M); Petra van den Boomgaard (NIOD); and Leo Levie, Secretary of the Jewish Community in Leiden at the time of the investigations.

I am most indebted to Hans Blom, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Amsterdam and former Director of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD) in Amsterdam, who reviewed the manuscript, and who provided repeated support and critical advice during the last few years.

I also gratefully acknowledge the willingness to provide critical comments of Prof. Dan Michman, Director of Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research; Havi Dreifuss, Professor of History at Tel Aviv University; Hans de Vries, Senior Researcher at NIOD in Amsterdam; and Barbera Bikker (Stichting Herdenking Jodenvervolging Leiden).

Last but not least, I am proud of the students of the Erasmus College in Zoetermeer, and their teachers Hans Wolf, Tibo van Wingen and Bert Schut, who have come to Leiden in their own after-school time every year without fail since 2007 until 2020 (when it was interrupted by the Corona crisis), to read out the names of the 55 children and staff who did not return from deportation, in the large hall of their erstwhile home from which they were forcefully taken on the eve of 17<sup>th</sup> March 1943, or in the garden at the back, which once was their playground.

4 Frans died on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019. The website is now defunct. Information about the Jewish orphanage in Leiden can also be found on the site [www.herdenkingleiden.nl/](http://www.herdenkingleiden.nl/).

# Preface

The presence (1890-1943) of a Jewish orphanage in Leiden, an old city in the western part of Holland, raises many questions. *What kind of institution was this? Why was it established, given the fact that there were already many Jewish childcare institutions in the Netherlands, and why in Leiden, which had only a small Jewish community? What made this institution different from the others? Who were the children, and why were they brought to an orphanage in the first place since most of them still had one or even two parents? What kind of life did they have before the war, and what happened to the children and the staff after the German invasion of Holland in May 1940? Who survived the war and how did they survive? What happened when the war was over?*

This book is chronologically structured. Following the shortest possible introduction (Chapter 1), the first period from establishment in 1890 to the inauguration of a new building in 1929 (shown on the front cover) is covered in Chapters 2 and 3. Information about that period is relatively sparse. But from 1929 the surviving stories and photographs are so abundant that this book only contains a selection. The period from 1929 to 1940 (Chapters 4 and 5) was by all accounts the happiest period in the history of this institution. It is broken into two parts, because events in Germany began to cast a shadow when Hitler took power in 1933, even as life in Holland continued much as before.

The focus of this study was strongly on the people and life in the orphanage from 1929 onwards, *before* the war. But the German invasion in May 1940, the ensuing occupation (Chapter 6), and the liquidation of the orphanage (the *ontruiming*<sup>1</sup>) in March 1943 (Chapter 7), inevitably constitute an important and dominating part of this book. Chapter 8 is dedicated to those who left the orphanage before the liquidation in March 1943 and shows how terribly effective the final stages of the Holocaust were in the Netherlands. Chapter 9 includes survivor stories and Chapter 10 covers the period after liberation in 1945.

Because of the lack of data from before the inauguration of the new building, the book concentrates on the (some 168) children who lived in the orphanage for at least two to three months from 1929, including those 25 who lived in the old building and moved to the new one. Establishing the identity of these 168 children

1 For Dutch or German words used in the text, see list and explanation at the back.

and retrieving information about their lives in the orphanage, building on the work done by my predecessors<sup>2</sup> and trying to add “*a face to each name*” was a primary objective of this study. The list at the end of the book is as accurate and complete as could be achieved with the available data. Retrieving and preserving testimonial and documentary evidence became an important secondary objective of this study, particularly with respect to the period of the German occupation.

Including all the names is a fundamental aspect of this book. I believe it is also in accordance with the spirit of Yad Vashem<sup>3</sup> as explained in the Epilogue. But it presented me with two problems: 1) the reader may be overwhelmed by the large number of names mentioned in the text, and 2) it proved difficult to reconcile individual stories with the chronology. For example, the story of Sally Montezinos (Ch. 2.3) who arrived in 1926 and never really left the orphanage, unfolds gradually over Chapters 2 to 8.

I have tried to circumvent both problems by introducing a limited number of children who carry the story of the orphanage through time (see Table of Contents). Once they are introduced in a first paragraph, like Sally in Chapter 2.3, they will “return” in subsequent chapters to continue the story. In a similar way the stories of Lotte Adler, Betsy Wolff, Piet de Vries, Hans Kloosterman and a few others unfold over several chapters. Other, younger children will be mentioned “on the way” and they can be found in the text through the Persons Index. This should significantly reduce the number of names which must be remembered to follow the story of the orphanage. It should also be possible to read individual stories without reading the book from cover to cover. The compromise between following the chronology and the individual stories may lead to some duplication.

Many children and staff could be identified in at least one photograph in this book, which may therefore also serve as a monument to its inhabitants. Naturally, a lot more is known about some of the older children compared to the very young ones, those who perished in the Holocaust. The youngest of all was Louis Bobbe, who entered the orphanage in November 1942 when he was just one year and eight months old, and who was killed half a year later in Sobibor in German-occupied Poland together with his four-year-old brother, Benjamin.

Wherever possible, the facts and stories that are presented in this book have been checked for accuracy. The tremendous proliferation of data available on the internet, and the increasing occurrence of incorrect statements, often copied from one website to another without verification, made this more important than expected. All corroborative evidence, particularly documents retrieved from public

2 See Acknowledgements.

3 Yad vaShem means “a Hand [a ‘monument’] and a Name”.

and private archives during this study, has been preserved. Documentary evidence which could not be included in the book, has been placed in individual dossiers.

Foreign readers may not be familiar with the history of the Netherlands before or during the war. For their benefit, some “historical context” is included, so that the events may be better understood. Many wartime events raise difficult and controversial questions which are still hotly debated in the Netherlands today. Some of these issues are mentioned in the text or in the notes, but only very briefly, in order not to hinder the primary objectives of this book. References are listed at the end of each chapter in line with current practice. An extended bibliography (English texts where possible) is provided at the end of the book to suggest further reading on these subjects.

Many survivors or their descendants have been of invaluable assistance in making this book. The survivors are almost always excluded from genealogical sites and Holocaust websites and monuments, which is unfortunate. Indeed, both USHMM in Washington, DC, and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem have begun to make (more) survivor information available to family members and researchers or the general public. All known survivors are included in the list at the end of the book. Nine individual survivor stories are included in Chapter 9. They can be read as stand-alone stories, but the different ways in which they survived may provide valuable context to the other chapters in this book. For many people, the war did not end in May 1945, as discussed in Chapter 10.

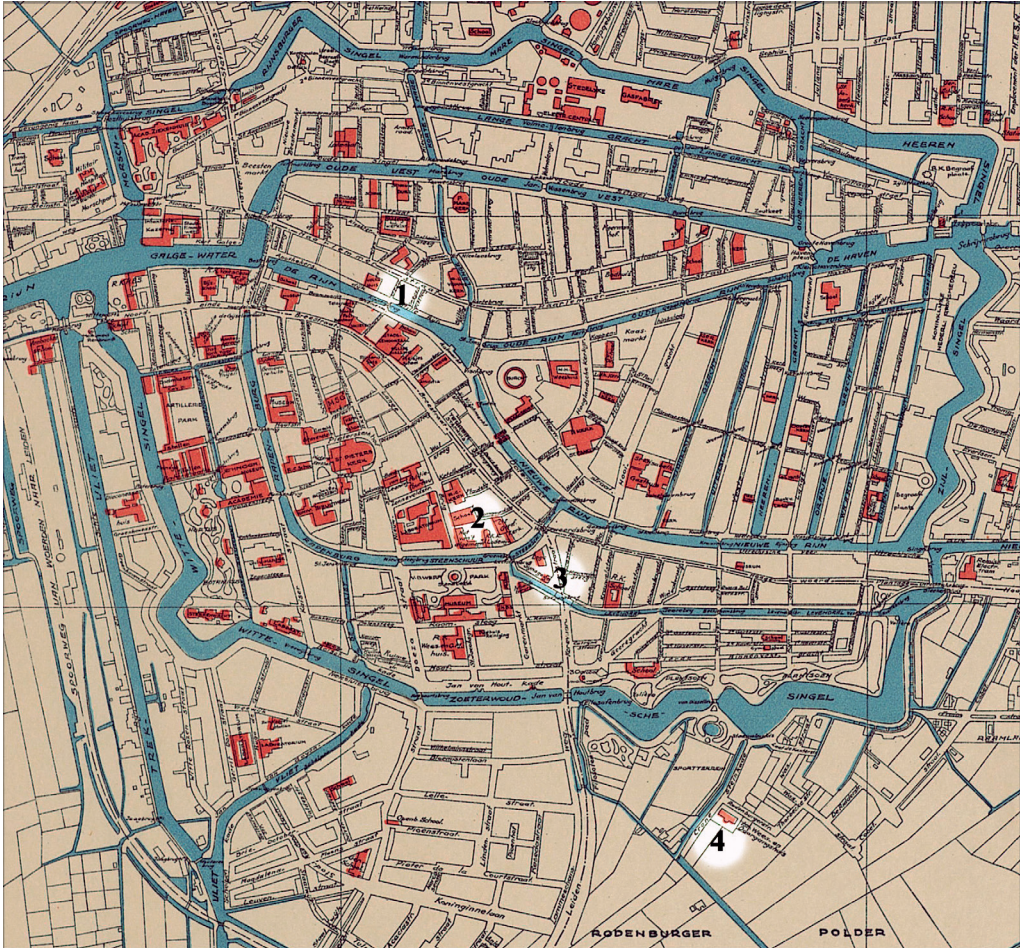
When I first became involved in these investigations, a long time ago, I may not have been fully aware of what the Holocaust had done to those who had survived. I may have confronted them with direct questions without realizing which doors inside their memory I was trying to open, and the devastating effect that could have. I have done my best to be much more sensitive in later stages of the investigation and while preparing this book, and I hope that the stories in the following chapters, and the way they are told, will be taken in that spirit.

I welcome comments, corrections, or complementary information.

*Jaap W. Focke*

*Leiden, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021*





Map of Leiden (1929) showing the medieval city centre with many canals, surrounded by the zigzagging canals called *singels*. Until the twelfth century, the Rhine River flowed through Leiden (from right to left on the map) to Katwijk on the coast. Courtesy Erfgoed Leiden (ELO LEI001019900, detail). Width of the map is approximately 2 km.

- 1: The old Jewish orphanage (1891-1929)
- 2: Langebrug elementary schools
- 3: The synagogue
- 4: The new Jewish orphanage (1929-1943)

The Rodenburger Polder (bottom right) was still under development at this time, but the new orphanage (4), inaugurated in the same year the map was issued (1929), is already shown on this map. This area would become known as the *Professoren- en Burgemeesterswijk* (van Duin & van Ommen, 2000).