

## Biography Benjamin Holländer

Benjamin Holländer is born on May 14th 1859 in Röhe, Germany, nowadays part of Eschweiler (Aachen). He is the second out of ten children of Moses Holländer (1832 – 1911) and Hubertina Hartog (1835 – 1900). The many branches of the Holländer family tree include Anne Frank whose mother Edith was a Holländer.

In 1889 Benjamin marries Wilhelmine Lichtenstein (1860 – 1924) at the age of 30. The couple has five children: Sophie (1892 -? Shoah victim), Leo (1893 – 1968), Friedrich ('Fritz' 1895 – ? Shoah victim), Max (25 June 1896 – 13 February 1897)<sup>1</sup> and Frieda (1898 – 1943). Benjamin's grandchild Wilma remembers him as a gentle person who took good care of his employees by providing them with a canteen, locker rooms and shower facilities.<sup>2</sup>



Wilhelmina and Benjamin Holländer: Oma and Opa Stolber

In 1894 Benjamin works as an iron and rags merchant who lives with his family at the Dürenerstraße 67 in Eschweiler. After 1921, Benjamin founds *B. Holländer & Söhne* together with his sons Leo and Fritz. The company, located in Stolberg Atsch (near Aachen), is a prominent player on the iron, steel and machinery market in the German Rheinland.

When Wilhelmine passes away on 24 October 1924, Benjamin becomes a widower at the age of 65. Fortunately business is running very well. *B. Holländer & Söhne* customers includes large regional industrial companies. Benjamin's unmarried daughter Frieda works in the company as well, albeit she is not a co-owner.<sup>3</sup> She also takes care of her father with whom she lives.<sup>4</sup> On Fridays, Benjamin attends the services held in the Eschweiler Synagogue, accompanied by his grandchildren and his cousin Sali Blech.<sup>5</sup> On Friday afternoons, he takes an uphill walk to the home of his grandchildren to bless them for Sabbath. It is a relatively happy life until 1938. But Jews are increasingly expelled from German society: they are compelled to hand in their savings, passports and other possessions, they lose their jobs and citizenship and are banned from schools and shops. In the wake of the 'Kristallnacht' of 9-10

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<sup>1</sup> E-mail Stadtarchiv Aachen dated January 30, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Wilma Neumann (born Holländer) 2016, *Wilma's Story – Growing up in Nazi Germany and Colonial Rhodesia*, at 19-20, 23.

<sup>3</sup> E-mail Friedhelm Ebbecke-Bückendorf dated 26 November 2019.

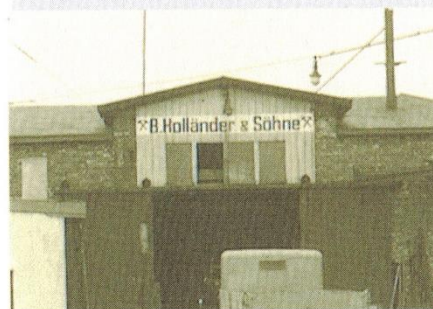
<sup>4</sup> See Neumann 2016, *supra* note 2, at 22.

<sup>5</sup> See Neumann 2016, *supra* note 2, at 21.

November 1938, Benjamin's sons Leo and Fritz are arrested.<sup>6</sup> Leo is soon released to wrap up the forced sale of *B. Holländer & Söhne* summoned by the Nazi regime. The company is sold for a bargain price on 22 December 1938. The new owner, aware of the injustice done to Benjamin and his sons, promises to compensate their financial loss. But a train accident prematurely ends his life and no compensation has ever been paid.



B. Holländer & Söhne (sons) factory in Stolberg, with an enlarged detail of the factory sign



Fritz is sent to concentration camp Buchenwald where he is imprisoned for four weeks. His detention causes permanent health issues which probably are ground for denying him visas for Mexico for which he applied after his release. Leo, his wife and their children Walter, Wilma and Doris<sup>7</sup> obtain visas for South Rhodesia (currently Zimbabwe) and leave Germany in July 1939 - one month before the breakout of WWII.

With life in Germany becoming virtually impossible, Benjamin and Frieda seek refuge in Maastricht in April 1939. They move into an apartment at the Koning Clovisstraat 84 where they are visited by Leo and his family before their departure to South Rhodesia. The apartment is nicely furnished and decorated with their personal belongings brought from Germany. Benjamin even managed to bring some withheld valuables, including his car (for which he had to pay high taxes, as was the case with all Jews who left Nazi Germany). When in August 1942 the first group of Jews is deported from Maastricht

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<sup>6</sup> See Neumann 2016, *supra* note 2, at 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> Walter, Wilma and Doris are Benjamin's grandchildren. Wilma is the author of the book *Wilma's Story*, see *supra* note 2.

to camp Westerbork - a transit camp for Jews-, Benjamin buries their valuable items in his garden. Anticipating harrowing times, he asks his neighbour Petrus Dobbelsteijn to dig up and return them to Leo after the war ends (which he did).

Multiple relatives of Benjamin and Frieda are living in - the vicinity- of Maastricht as well. Benjamin's cousin Sali Blech<sup>8</sup> has fled to Maastricht in 1938 and will even move in with them for a short while in the spring of 1940. Benjamin's niece Mathilde Beesman<sup>9</sup> also lives in Maastricht and his nephew Erich lives in Heerlen.<sup>10</sup> It is very likely that these relatives have visited each other during their stay in Maastricht, at least until their arrest, deportation or hiding. When the first group of Maastricht Jews is deported to camp Westerbork on 25 August 1942, Benjamin is not among the persons listed. Frieda, however, is, but she does not leave. Maybe she was allowed to stay in order to look after her old father? Old and sick Jewish residents living in the Dutch province of Limburg were initially exempted from deportation. But on 8 April 1943, this group is deported too and is sent to camp Vught.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to Frieda, and by exception, Benjamin gets official permission to move to an retirement home at the Gasthuisstraat 19 in the neighbouring village of Meerssen.<sup>12</sup> Yet, during a razzia by the *Sicherheitsdienst* on 31 March 1944, Benjamin is arrested, as is his housemate Salomon Zeligman. The two men are imprisoned at the Minderbroedersberg in Maastricht. From here, Benjamin -almost 85 years of age- and Salomon are put on a train to camp Westerbork on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1944. After four days, on 5 April 1944, Benjamin and Salomon are deported to Auschwitz<sup>13</sup> and probably murdered upon arrival at April 8, 1944.

Frieda is detained in camp Vught from 8 April 1943 until 3 July 1943. Subsequently, she is sent to camp Westerbork. After three days, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, she is deported to Sobibor where she is murdered upon arrival. She passes on at July 9, 1943 at the age of 44.

Benjamin's son Fritz is deported on 22 March 1942 to Izbica, a transit ghetto in eastern Poland from where he is deported to an extermination camp.<sup>14</sup> Benjamin's daughter Sophie also becomes victim of the Shoah. Benjamin's son Leo is the only one to survive the war. In South Rhodesia, he successfully founds *L. Hollander Iron- and Machinery company*. Leo dies on June 14, 1968.

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<sup>8</sup> Sali's mother Sibilla Hartog and Benjamin's mother Hubertine Hartog were sisters.

<sup>9</sup> Mathilde's mother Henriette Lichtenstein was a sister of Benjamin's wife Wilhelmine Lichtenstein Together with her husband and children, Henriette lived in Maastricht. She died in 1930. Mathilde died in Auschwitz on 31 August 1942.

<sup>10</sup> Erich Holländer (1897-1972) was a son of Benjamin's brother Joseph.

<sup>11</sup> van Rens, H. A. J. (2013). *De vervolging van joden en Sinti tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog in de Nederlandse provincie Limburg*, p. 158-159. See also [www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/nl/agenda/5605/deportatie-van-limburgse-joden-tijdens-de-tweede-wereldoorlog.html](http://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/nl/agenda/5605/deportatie-van-limburgse-joden-tijdens-de-tweede-wereldoorlog.html)

<sup>12</sup> As indicated on Benjamin's card held by the Jewish Council. E-mail Herman van Rens dated 31 January 2020. This corresponds with the fact that Benjamin's name is not listed in the 'Vught cartotheque' set up by the Nazis. E-mail Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) dated 3 February 2020.

<sup>13</sup> E-mail Camp Westerbork, dated 20 December 2019.

<sup>14</sup> See *supra* note 3. See also See Neumann, *supra* note 2, at 51.





Opa Holländer with Walter on his lap and cousins Erich (standing) and Heinz (on toy horse), Sophie's sons

Our heartfelt thanks go to Benjamin's grandchild Doris Holländer and her husband Martin Page who have been so kind and generous to send us their late sister(-in-law)'s memoirs which are bundled in the book *Wilma's Story – Growing up in Nazi Germany and Colonial Rhodesia* (ISBN 978-194517569-5) We are grateful for your contribution to this biography.

(Photos from *Wilma's Story*)