

Opening Ceremony of the Historical Site Adlerwerke

25 March 2022



Greeting note by Michael Weber

Local chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Mr. Swistak and dear Mr. Muszynski,

Today is a historic day. One should rightly be careful with this formulation, but I say it deliberately. It is a historic day for me as the head of the district, for the district of Gallus and for Frankfurt, because today a piece of German and Frankfurt history is made visible that has been hidden and even suppressed for many decades. The cruel time of National Socialism belongs to Frankfurt's history and therefore must remain constantly before our eyes, so that we do everything to ensure that this history is never repeated.

A few days ago, I was sitting at the breakfast table with a friend. This friend has lived in Frankfurt for many years, she knows the Gallus Theater, the Adlerwerke building and is also otherwise interested in Frankfurt's city history. However, she has never heard of the concentration camp. When I told her that there was a concentration camp here in Gallus and that this concentration camp was one of the most murderous and brutal camps and how many prisoners died here, she was visibly shocked and literally sat across from me with her mouth open.

I was just as shocked many years ago when I learned about it. I asked myself at that time: How can it be that the people of Frankfurt, that I have never heard anything about it and that this has been forgotten or even deliberately suppressed?

It was clear to me at that time that I wanted to make sure that this history was known, that everyone could find out about the injustice that happened here in the district, and that schoolchildren in particular from Gallus and from all over Frankfurt could come to terms with this history. I then joined the support association and later supported the project as much as I could in my political work in the local council and now as local chairman.

Now, fortunately, I am not the only one and by far not the first one who has supported the establishment of a memorial and educational site. Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity today to say thank you to the many people who have contributed along the long way so that we can open the Adlerwerke History Site today.

The first important contribution was made in 1985 by the social pedagogue Ernst Kaiser and the teacher Michael Knorn, who together with students researched the history of the Katzbach concentration camp in the Adlerwerke and later wrote a book about it. This was a great achievement and perhaps a kind of starting signal.

For the continuation of research about the history of the Katzbach concentration camp, we owe, among others, to the association Leben und Arbeiten in Gallus und Griesheim (Living and Working in Gallus and Griesheim), and here Lothar Reininger and Ulla Diekmann are to be particularly mentioned. In many events, actions and through information brochures, they have brought the commemoration of the opera into the public consciousness of the city of Frankfurt. Just last Sunday, the LAGG carried out an impressive commemorative action. The names of the 1616 prisoners were held up on posters on the banks of the Main River by many volunteers in a human chain that stretched for miles. Thank you for doing this important work in the district for over 25 years.

I would also like to thank Stefanie Grohs, who in 2015 commemorated the concentration camp prisoners with the art installation "Mitten unter uns" ("In the midst of us") by attaching cloth bandages with the names of the former concentration camp prisoners to trees all over the district with about 350 volunteers, thus giving new impetus to the discussion about establishing a memorial.

In 2015, the "Förderverein für die Errichtung einer Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte KZ-Katzbach in den Adlerwerken und zur Zwangsarbeit in Frankfurt am Main" (Association for the Promotion of the Establishment of a Memorial and Educational Site KZ-Katzbach in the Adler Works and on Forced Labor in Frankfurt am Main) was founded. A long and complicated name, but an important milestone on the way to this "Historic Site Adlerwerke". Thanks to the entire board of the association, to Elke Sautner, Andreas Dickerboom, Svenja Keim and to the long-time chairman Horst Koch-Panzner.

Dear Horst, I would like to thank you personally, because without your work, your tireless commitment, your countless discussions with supporters, trade unions, actors in the district, with city politics, the cultural office and many others, without the many events and association meetings planned and carried out by you, this memorial would not have come into being. Many, many thanks for your years of commitment.

A few meters from here is the Golub-Lebedenko Square and the Julius Munk complex. The prisoners Adam Golub and Georgi Lebedenko tried to escape, were caught and immediately shot here in Gallus on the open street. The Austrian resistance fighter and doctor Julius Munk tried to help the prisoners in the Katzbach concentration camp as best he could. The names of these three prisoners are forever visible in the district thanks to Ortsbeirat 1. I would like to thank my colleagues from Local Advisory Council 1 for deciding on these designations and for their constant cross-party commitment to this historical site and also for making funds available from the budget. Thank you very much.

And then after decades of suppression on the part of the City of Frankfurt, the Department of Cultural Affairs under Ms. Hartwig decided to support and co-finance this place of history and to do so at a time when funds are scarce. This can be called a turning point in the culture of remembrance in this city. Therefore, many thanks to Ms. Hartwig and Ms. Melnikow-Schneidmiller and to all the employees in the Cultural Office who were involved and thus actually made the history site possible.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the Studienkreis Deutscher Widerstand, and here in particular Thomas Altmeyer, who in recent months has taken care of the very practical realization of the Adlerwerke History Site.

Dear Thomas, you have not only invested time and energy, but you have also been and are still putting your heart and soul into it, because it is a real concern of yours that history is not forgotten and that young people in particular are given a place where they can come to terms with their own city history and the Nazi era.

Ladies and gentlemen

77 years ago yesterday, the few survivors of the Katzbach concentration camp were sent on the so-called death march. Only 40 of the 350 prisoners survived this march, and many of the exhausted prisoners were simply shot during the march and left in the ditch. Just as the 19- and 21-year-olds Adam Golub and Georgi Lebedenko were executed in front of this place here in Gallus. And the people at that time looked the other way, even betrayed them. Yes, perhaps out of fear of being targeted themselves.

But today we no longer look away.

Today, with this place of history, we set a sign that history must not and will not repeat itself.

With this place of history, we are creating a space for intensive examination of topics of anti-Semitism, forced labor and Nazi terror.

With this educational site, young people have the opportunity to learn about what the hatred of Jews and racism can lead to.

And with this memorial, the names of the 1616 prisoners will never again be forgotten.

I wish the "Adlerwerke History Site" that many Frankfurt residents visit this place, learn and research here and understand what happened back then and thus anti-Semitism and racism is hopefully counteracted, because unfortunately it still exists today.

I wish the staff every success and I ask all of you who are here today and who are listening that you continue to support this important project.

Thank you very much.