

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Maurice Meier's 70th anniversary

Seventy years ago today was a significant day for both Maurice Meier and me. I was born in the Reading Hospital, and Maurice Meier arrived at Ellis Island from Europe aboard the Queen Elizabeth. He later moved to North Hanover Street in Pottstown.

In the 1970s and 1980s, I used to see Meier and his wife, Gretel, strolling around town together. They were both very short, and in the summer Gretel held a parasol. They looked like the old school Europeans they were.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Meier was a prosperous farmer living with his wife and two children in southern Germany until 1933, when a late-night phone call warned him he was about to be arrested for being Jewish.

Meier immediately fled to Switzerland and was later joined by his wife and children.

They bought a farm in France and started over. But a few years later, in August 1939, Meier and other German-born residents were arrested and sent to French prison camps because they couldn't be trusted in wartime.

After Germany defeated France in 1940, Meier was moved to a different prison camp in unoccupied France.

These camps were little different from German concentration camps. The barracks had dirt floors, no windows, and no heat, and Meier contracted an acute sinus infection that eventually destroyed his hearing.

Meanwhile, Meier's wife and family, back in occupied France, were rounded up by the Nazis and shipped to German concentration camps where they were killed.

In the fall of 1942, the Germans occupied all of France, and Meier escaped to Switzerland before he could be seized by the Germans.

After the war, with nearly all his family killed, he was eventually able to make his way to New York, where one of his sisters lived. From there he moved to Boyertown to live with Rudi Abrams, the brother of his late wife.

It was there he met and married Gretel Guggenheim, a sister of Abrams' wife. They had escaped Germany in 1939. The Meiers moved to Pottstown and set up a business making shoe inserts.

Meier never learned English because of his deafness. When I interviewed him in 1985, his wife acted as translator.

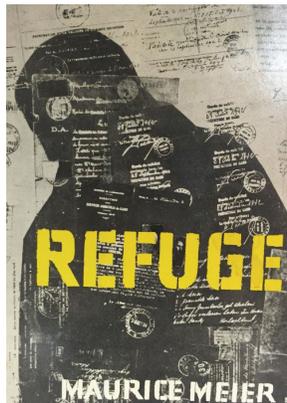
He wrote a book about his wartime experiences, partly in hope (this was long before the internet) that someone who knew of any surviving family members might contact him. That never happened.

Meier also wanted people to know the French ran concentration camps during the war, and they were just as cruel as the Germans.

"By the hundreds they died of freezing, starving, illness."

America was once a country that proudly sheltered the persecuted.

Maurice Meier, one of many refugees we welcomed, helped make Pottstown a better place.



MAURICE MEIER, a German Jew who lost most of his family during World War II, emigrated to the United States on Dec. 20, 1948, and lived the next four decades at 160 N. Hanover Street until his death at age 94. He wrote a book about his experiences fleeing the Nazis called Refuge.