

Obermayer German Jewish History Award Ceremony 2017
Karen S. Franklin Remarks
January 23, 2017

“Thank you, President Wieland, for your kind introduction, and thank you for your continuing support of the Obermayer Awards.

Our program tonight is profoundly diminished by the loss last year of Arthur Obermayer. Little could he have known in the year 2000, when the awards were established, that his dedication to bring to individuals who have raised awareness of a once-vibrant Jewish history and culture in their communities would have a profound impact on the lives of so many.

Tonight marks the 17th year of the awards, and the fourth year we are presenting distinguished service awards. We thank Arthur for his vision, and we remember him with respect and with great fondness.

Tonight we welcome here Arthur’s wife Judy, and sons Joel, and Hank. And we extend our thanks, too, to Arthur’s daughter Marjorie Obermayer Raven, who could not be here.

The family’s decision last year to develop the program that was so important to Arthur gives honor to his memory. The award program continues as a project of the Obermayer Foundation, with the co-sponsorship of the Berlin Parliament, Leo Baeck Institute, and the German Special Interest Group of JewishGen.

This past year brought exciting changes and growth in the awards program. For the first time, acknowledging the tremendous growth of community activities in commemoration of Jewish life in Germany, we honor organizations as well as individuals.

This year, two of the awards, as well as our distinguished service award, will be presented to groups. The decision to expand the category of awards acknowledges the extraordinary development of such by organizations throughout Germany.

We added two extraordinary jurors to the jury. You will hear about them shortly.

We extended the visibility of the award with lectures at conferences, and with extensive publicity and outreach. We are working to further these activities internationally in 2017.

This year we are evaluating ways to move the awards forward by raising awareness of the awardees’ work, and creating more opportunities for the awardees to work with one another, and take advantage of their shared expertise.

Last year the Obermayer family worked with the Leo Baeck Institute to prepare a book chronicling the accomplishments of awardees in the years since they received their honor. We were delighted to learn from these extraordinary individuals of the value of the Obermayer Awards has had to them, and of the breadth of their activities and their continuing passion. A number of the awardees from past years are here tonight, and I ask them to stand as we welcome them.

Tonight we honor recipients of the 2017 Obermayer German Jewish History Awards. Later this evening we are going to hear from each award recipient about his or her work, with visuals projected on the screen so that we can learn about their activities.

But first, we want to acknowledge and thank again the President of the Berlin Parliament, Ralf Wieland, whose leadership role has made this event possible. Additionally, this event would not have come to fruition without the expert support of the Protokoll Office headed by Karin Brandes and Sabine Hahn of the Foreign City Relations Office.

We also want to thank the jury who reviewed all of the nominations. With us tonight are five of the seven jurors. In addition to President Ralf Wieland, we welcome a new juror, Hank Obermayer, of the Obermayer Foundation, Dr. Sara Nachama, the executive director and vice president of Touro College Berlin, who played a major role in the original implementation of these awards, and Dr. Frank Mecklenburg, Chief Archivist and Director of Research at the Leo Baeck Institute, who reviewed and evaluated all of the supplemental materials together with me. (you may applaud).

Two jury members could not be in attendance this evening, Professor Dr. Rabbi David Ellenson, former President and now Chancellor of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and a new juror, Hanno Loewy, president of the Association of European Jewish Museums.

We also acknowledge the presence tonight of Dr. William Weitzer, executive director of the Leo Baeck Institute, a co-sponsor of the Awards Program, and Jeanette Rosenberg, a co-coordinator of Gersig, a co-sponsor of the awards.

I would also like to thank Betty Solbjor, our United States Coordinator and Program manager, who has overseen the entire award process, made all of the arrangements in Berlin for the participants. Betty, we are ever so grateful to you this year, a most challenging one, as we moved forward without Arthur. (...)"