

# Jenny “Henny” Schermann

(February 19, 1912 - May 30, 1942)

*This essay was written by Natalie Peyton, the Pink Triangle Legacies Project’s 2024 Public History Intern in partnership with the Zucker/Goldberg Center for Holocaust Studies at the College of Charleston. It is based on the important research of the teams at the Stolpersteine Initiative in Frankfurt, Mapping the Lives, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and feedback from Dr. Javier Samper Vendrell. Thank you for your efforts in preserving queer history.*



Prisoner photograph of Henny Schermann  
taken in Ravensbrück, March 1940.  
*Staatsarchiv Nürnberg*

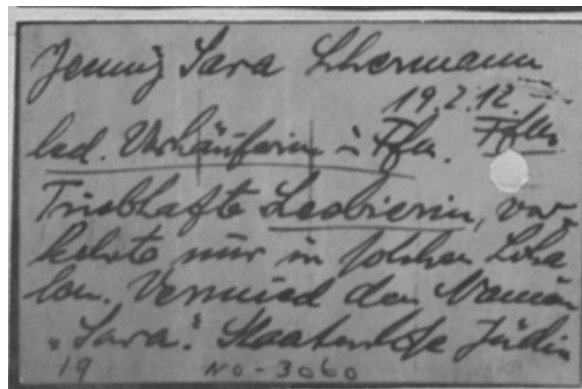
Jenny “Henny” Schermann was born to a Jewish family in Frankfurt, Germany, on February 19, 1912. Her father, Julius Chil Schermann, met his future wife, Selma, in Germany shortly after he immigrated from Russia. Henny was the family's eldest child, and she had two younger siblings. In 1931, Henny’s parents separated, leaving her mother, Selma, to take over the family shoe shop. Henny worked as a salesperson for the shop, which was located on Meisengasse Street in Frankfurt.

Jenny went by “Henny,” which was a gender-neutral nickname. This could suggest that Henny felt more masculine or ambiguous about her gender. It also suggests that others recognized and respected this by calling her Henny rather than Jenny. Henny was never married, but she had a son named Walter with a non-Jewish man. She was also a regular at lesbian bars in Frankfurt. Henny’s story helps us understand how the intersection of people’s multiple identities influenced the way they lived and the way the Nazis treated them.

In 1933, the Nazi rise to power meant that the authority of the German government could enforce the Party’s antisemitism. The Schermann family faced state-sanctioned discrimination and persecution because they were Jewish. In 1935, the Schermanns were forced to close their family’s business due to antisemitic boycotts, leaving Henny to work as a salesperson for other businesses.

In an attempt to further separate German Jews from the rest of German society, the Nazis passed the Law on Alteration of Family and Personal Names in August 1938. It forced Jewish people with “non-Jewish” names to add Jewish names to their legal names (“Israel” for men and “Sara” for women). Henny’s refusal to add “Sara” to her documentation symbolizes her commitment to personal autonomy and rejection of the Nazis’ antisemitic policies.

Upon her arrest, her Prisoner ID and Certificate of Incarceration classified her as Jewish and a political opponent. The Nazis also knew she was a lesbian and noted that on her documents. On January 3, 1940, the Nazis deported Henny to the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. Her uniform's badge consisted of two yellow triangles, identifying her as Jewish to camp officials and other prisoners.



Note written on Henny's prisoner file by Ravensbrück doctor Friedrich Meinecke that describes her as a "promiscuous lesbian" and "stateless Jew," ca. 1940.  
Staatsarchiv Nürnberg

An intersectional approach helps us understand the fate of queer women like Henny. Paragraph 175, the national anti-gay law that the Nazis strengthened in 1935, applied only to men. Therefore, a lesbian's sexuality was rarely the *only* reason for being arrested. But it is clear that Henny's identity as Jewish *and* lesbian played a defining role in how the Nazis treated her.

While at Ravensbrück, Henny was selected for murder as part of the 14 [F] 13 policy, which authorized the SS camp officials to kill sick or infirm prisoners. Records indicate that she was gassed on May 30, 1942, at the Bernberg Euthanasia Center, a former psychiatric facility that specialized in the systematic murder of "asocials" in society. Of Henny's family, only her father, her son, and her nephew survived the Holocaust.

On May 9, 2010, Henny, Selma, Regina, and Herbert Schermann were honored by four Stolperstein memorials placed at the location of their family shoe shop in Frankfurt. Regina's son, Max Meir Schermann Sherman, was instrumental in this process as an advocate for his family. His paternal grandparents, who were non-Jews, hid him until the end of the war, when his father was able to claim him. To date, he has submitted six pages of Testimony and Registration to Yad Vashem, demonstrating a clear commitment to the preservation of his family's story

## Sources & Further Reading

City of Frankfurt am Main, "Schermann, Henny, Herbert, Regina and Selma." Initiative Stolpersteine Frankfurt am Main.

Mapping the Lives - A Central Memorial for the Persecuted in Europe, 1933-1945: "Henny Schermann."

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Henny Schermann" Holocaust Encyclopedia.

Yad Vashem, "Henny Jenny Sara Schermann," Page of Testimony Collection.

Read more about Henny [online](#) and watch the video on [YouTube](#). For more LGBTQ+ Stories from Nazi Germany, visit [pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories](https://pinktrianglelegacies.com/stories).