

## Mittelweg 17

The Warburgs  
Ron Chernow

Deathwatch  
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Not all Warburg assets in Germany had remained in the firm. In October 1938, Max and Fritz set up a Secretariat with a twofold mission: to manage the Warburg blocked mark estates and to provide money and advice to needy emigrants. To supervise this office, they chose Robert Solmitz, who also assumed their places on Jewish charity boards.

The Secretariat was headquartered at **Mittelweg 17**, the old house that once belonged to Charlotte and Moritz, then to Fritz and Anna Beata. Hamburg Jews called it **the Oasis**, with good reason, for it provided relief from their barren and dangerous existence.

In December 1938, Himmler took away Jewish drivers' licenses, curtailing mobility. After September 1939, Jews couldn't walk the streets after eight o'clock in the evening, were banned from public transport, and could shop only one hour per day. They were liable to be pressed into forced-labor brigades. The two hundred thousand desperate Jews left in Germany — about 60 percent had now escaped — were thrown back on their own resources and had to band together.

At **Mittelweg 17**, the stranded Hamburg Jews cherished the older, better German culture that had sustained them. The Secretariat tried to keep local artists busy. Well-known actors read aloud from Rilke or Goethe, while pianists and violinists gave concerts in **the first-floor library**. Later on, their serenades were interrupted by air raids; the audience then descended to a large cellar shelter where the Jewish caretaker, Baer, lived with his wife and three small children. The head of the Jewish Community, Dr. Max Plaut, moved his office into the building, which seemed to gather people like a rescue boat picking up dazed survivors from a shipwreck.