

02 The Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds

The site before 1933

The site surrounding the two "Dutzendteich" lakes and comprising Luitpold Grove park, the municipal stadium and the zoo in the south east of Nuremberg, about 2.5 kilometres from the city centre, had always been a traditional recreation and leisure area close to the city. In the late 19th century, public swimming baths, a lake-side café and promenade were established near Dutzendteich. In 1906, the Bavarian Jubilee Exhibition was held on the site, commemorating the incorporation of Nuremberg, formerly a Free City of the Empire, into the Kingdom of Bavaria in 1806. After this event, the site developed into a recreational area. In 1912, the zoo was opened here.

Luitpold Grove was a popular venue for political events, too. Here, on 12 August, 1923, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and 50,000 democratically minded citizens pledged allegiance to the Weimar Constitution. A war memorial honouring the dead of World War I was erected on the north eastern side of Luitpold Grove in 1928/1929. The park in conjunction with the integrated municipal stadium south of Dutzendteich lake also dates back to the 1920s. The site was then considered to be one of the most modern recreational areas and was awarded a gold medal in the Arts Competition on the occasion of the IX. Olympic Games in Amsterdam in 1928.

The "Party Rally Grounds": 1933-1945

Nuremberg was designated "City of the Party Rallies" by the National Socialists for several reasons. Long considered a city with a worthy historic tradition, Nuremberg was conveniently situated in the centre of Germany and boasted excellent traffic connections. Nuremberg had been a workers' and industrial city as well as a stronghold of the Social Democratic Party. Nevertheless, the Nazi Party could establish itself here at an early stage and with fairly good election results, mainly due to the propaganda spread by the "Franconian Führer" Julius Streicher, publisher of the virulently anti-Semitic propaganda paper "Der Stürmer".

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These were important factors in Hitler's decision to declare Nuremberg to be the "City of the Party Rallies" in 1933. Later, the propaganda was to make good use of Nuremberg's role as a mediaeval centre of trade, art and culture and as the venue of imperial diets – and in presumed historic continuity as venue of the Nazi Party Rallies.

The first Nazi Party Rallies were held in 1923 in Munich and in 1926 in Weimar, followed by those in 1927 and 1929 in Nuremberg. Between 1933 and 1938, the Nazi Party Rallies were held in Nuremberg during one week in September of each year.

In 1934, Hitler decreed that the site surrounding the two Dutzendteich lakes was to be redeveloped and fashioned into the "Party Rally Grounds". Hitler's favourite architect, Albert Speer, was entrusted with the overall construction management. He created a visual link between the Party Rally Grounds and the mediaeval silhouette of the Old Town with the Imperial Castle. All obstacles to this plan were to be removed. Thus the zoo had to be relocated. The "Nuremberg Party Rallies Association" (Zweckverband Reichsparteitage Nürnberg ZRN) was founded in 1935 for the organisation and financing of the party rallies as well as the building programme, members being the Nazi Party, the German Reich, the State of Bavaria and the City of Nuremberg.

With the beginning of World War II on September 1, 1939, the rapid progress of building came to a standstill, but the necessary provision of natural stone as well as all planning and project work continued. After the end of the campaign in France in 1940, building resumed, using the forced labour of prisoners of war for the construction of the Congress Hall and on the foundations for the German Stadium. Huge amounts of granite from over eighty quarries were delivered to Nuremberg. Under the heading "extermination through labour", thousands of concentration camp inmates were worked to death in quarrying the stone for the NS building programme. As the war continued, construction again came to a standstill in late 1942. The administration of the enterprise "NS Party Rallies", however, continued until March 1945, under the overall management of the Reich's Ministry of Finance.

The former SA and Hitler Youth camp south of the March Field, between 1939 and 1945 was a POW and forced labour camp. It was freed by American troops on 17/18 April 1945 and then used as an internment camp for leading members of the Nazi party and the SS.

US Army Base in 1945

On 20 April, 1945, Hitler's birthday, following fierce fighting, the US army took Nuremberg. Three days later, they held a victory parade at the Zeppelin Grandstand. Afterwards they blew up the swastika which was installed on its central block. After the war, the US Army used the former SS barracks as well as large parts of the grounds for its own purposes. Between 1951 and the mid 1960s,

the Great Road served as an airfield for the US Air Force. Up until its withdrawal in 1992, the US Army used the former SS barracks and parts of the grounds for military and other purposes, such as sports events.

Refugee Camp

Beyond the former SA camp, the international refugee organisation "United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration", UNRRA, established a camp for displaced persons and refugees, predominantly from Eastern Europe. This camp existed until 1960.

The Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds since 1945

As far as the overall site was concerned, the City of Nuremberg was intent on restoring the original function of recreational area around the two Dutzendteich lakes. In the 1950s, the city administration had the ground between today's "Silbersee" (the excavation for the **German Stadium** which had filled up with ground water) and Luitpold Grove re-developed into the Volkspark Dutzendteich. The grandstands in **Luitpold Arena** were demolished in the 1950s in the course of the landscaping of the park. Today, the area is a park again and much appreciated by Nuremberg citizens as a recreational area close to the city centre.

The former **March Field** and the camp area to its south were used as building ground for the new satellite town of Langwasser which was to solve the urgent housing problem (foundation stone laid on 29 March, 1957). The eleven completed towers on March Field were consequently blown up in 1966/67. Langwasser today houses about 35,000 people.

After 1945, the NS buildings of the Zeppelin Grandstand and the Congress Hall became property of the City of Nuremberg. The **Zeppelin Grandstand** has been used as a venue for all sorts of open-air events, such as motorcycle and car races and city marathons, and since the 1970s rock concerts. In 1967, the pillars on the grandstand were demolished, as they were structurally unsound, and in the 1970s, the side towers were reduced to half their original height for the same reason.

Under the auspices of the "Committee for the Rebuilding of the City of Nuremberg", the **Congress Hall** and the space on the Great Road were used for the first German Building Exhibition in September 1949. Nine months later, from 14-30 July, 1950, the City of Nuremberg celebrated its 900th anniversary in this area. In 1969, Nuremberg City Council, following the concept of "trivialising" the structures, decided to use the unfinished structure of the Congress Hall for storage purposes and to rent out rooms to various companies.

In the post-war years, the NS buildings were utilised in a pragmatic fashion. Several plans for their use were never



March 2016



implemented, such as the re-development of the Congress Hall into a football stadium or a shopping centre. The Congress Hall currently serves as a storage centre for various municipal departments. The **buildings were classified** as historic monuments, examples of "the monumental buildings style of the Third Reich", in **1973**. Since that time, the City of Nuremberg has been responsible for their maintenance and has spent a considerable amount of money on this task.

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Place of Remembrance

In 1985, the City of Nuremberg opened the small exhibition "Fascination and Terror – Nuremberg and National Socialism" in the Zeppelin Grandstand on the former Party Rally Grounds. Until shortly before the opening of the Documentation Center, this exhibition provided information on the topic. Because of structural problems, it could, however, only be held open during the summer months. The continuously growing number of visitors and the approaching 950th anniversary of Nuremberg put up the demand for better and much more comprehensive information about this chapter of the city's history (see Press Text 03).

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