

## **DIGITAL ART EXHIBITION: Pioneers of Women's Movements in Kazakhstan and Germany**

Agnes Wabnitz (1841 – 1894)

*Pioneer in women's rights in Germany*

### Achievements

She founded several associations in Berlin to improve working conditions and wages of working women. As a delegate of working women she fought for their rights in the *Generalkommission*, the first union of single trade unions in Germany.

### Family

There are only little information about Agnes' family background. She came from Silesia. Her grandfather as well as her father put up resistance against social circumstances. The grandfather took part in the rebellion of the Silesian weaver and her father took part in the revolution of 1848.

She came from bourgeois circumstances, had several brothers, and never got married.

### Training/Profession

Agnes Wabnitz had a good education. She benefitted from that after her father's death and she had to earn money. She worked as a governess – the only profession women were allowed to work. But it was hard for her to take on a subordinate role and so she didn't work as a governess for a very long time.

Besides, she had to care for her ill mother – a task her brothers were not asked to do.

In the beginning of 1870 she moved to Berlin with her mother. Berlin was the capital of the newly founded German Empire and she hoped to find a job.

The jobs for women were limited in that time: maid, industrial worker, or homemaker. Because of her mother she had to work as homemaker – the worst-paid job. She sewed coats.

She began to defend herself against the bad conditions. In 1885 she founded the association of seamstresses. The first demand was: the women shouldn't pay from their wages for the sewing machine, the room, the heating, the lighting and the material.

Agnes Wabnitz appeared in meetings and was a popular speaker. She worked hard, courageously, and humorously, for the rights of working women.

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The association was forbidden by the police – women were not allowed to unite for political aims or to join a political party.

In 1886 Agnes Wabnitz was sent to prison. She protested and went on hunger strike and as a result of that she was categorized as „constituting a public danger and mentally ill“. She was fed compulsory in a lunatic asylum in Berlin.

After a suicide attempt and because of public protests she was released.

Later she started her political commitment again and founded an association to support female persons released from a hospital.

In 1894 she should be sent to a prison again. She committed suicide . She feared to be declared a minor and be sent to a psychiatric clinic. She poisoned herself on the cemetery on which the victims of the 1848 revolution were buried.

Her death caused much attendance.

„The entire working people honoured the dead woman“ was written in the social-democratic newspaper „*Vorwärts*“. Crowds of people came to her funeral and laid wreaths. There were more wreaths than on the Emperor's grave.

There is a grave of Agnes Wabnitz on the cemetery of the Non-denominational Parish in Berlin, Pappelallee.