

The building complex at Weber Square—an architectural and cultural reflection on heritage

The following account provides an overview of the eventful history of the faculty building at Weber Square, from its beginnings at the dawn of the 20th century, through the significant damage it suffered during the war, developments during the GDR period, and its appearance today.

1903—the beginnings

Due to a steadily growing number of teacher training students around the turn of the century, the Saxon State Parliament gave its approval in 1903 for the construction of a teacher training college at what is now Weber Square.

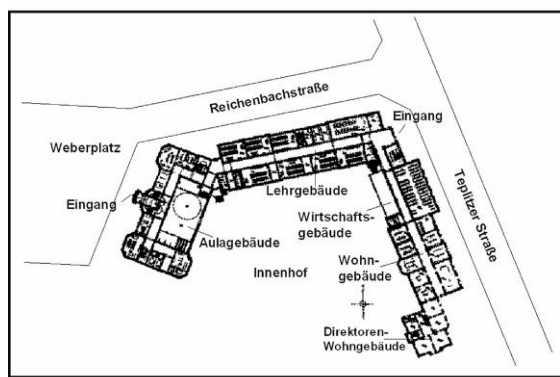


Fig. 1: Floor plan of the original building complex

The main entrance on Teplitzer Strasse/the corner of Reichenbachstrasse was adjoined to the south by both a service building and the director's residential building, which was set back. The training building for practical training classes was located parallel to Reichenbachstrasse. The main assembly hall building at the former Reichenbach Square (now Weber Square) closed off the building complex to the west. After a four-year construction period, the new building of the teacher training college of Dresden-Strehlen was formally inaugurated as the 'FRIEDRICH AUGUST SEMINAR' on April 6, 1910.

The **assembly hall building** (Fig. 2) was given special significance from its architecture alone: Two mighty side *risalits* (or *avant-corps*) stood in opposition to a dynamic-looking central building—a choice of façade that also took into account its character as a public, royal educational institution.



Fig. 2: The assembly hall building (photo from 1910)

A three-part stained glass window depicting Pestalozzi instructing a student was located above the entrance area on the second floor. At the top of the central building was a bas-relief, visible from afar, depicting 'Christ as a sower,' who, like in a parable, sowed the seeds (doctrine) that were to be accepted and bear fruit. The ceremonial hall of the assembly building could seat around 500 people.



Fig. 3: The training building

The **training building** (Fig. 3) was located between the assembly hall and tower building parallel to Reichenbachstrasse and was easily recognizable by the emphasis on axes typical of school and public buildings.

The **service building**, crowned by the clock tower, housed, among other things, a room directly below the clock room, which provided a view of Dresden and Strehlen. The sandstone portal at the main entrance to Teplitzer Strasse, which is still preserved today, was decorated with the Saxon coat of arms framed by two lions.

The **residential buildings** on Teplitzer Strasse were used not only to house the teacher training students but also to provide health care. The director's offices were also located there. The director's living quarters were located in the villa-like, somewhat set-back **director's residential building**.

The inner courtyard formed by the building arrangement was mainly used as a sports field. A park for general recreation and a botanical garden adjoined the south side, which was still open at that time.

The **interior design** (Fig. 6), with its stucco-decorated ceilings and sweeping interior wall paneling, reflected influence from Art Nouveau as well as Neo-Baroque. The aesthetic highlight was undoubtedly the ceremonial hall in the assembly hall building.

1923—the Pedagogical Institute

Far-reaching social restructuring and the renunciation of any monarchical form of government in the wake of the First World War also led to new educational concepts: Future academic teacher training was to combine scientific pedagogy with scientific studies. From then on, training was the responsibility of the newly founded PEDAGOGICAL INSTITUTE, the inauguration of which took place on May 2, 1923, and the former Saxon Minister of National Education, Prof. Dr. SEYFERT, was appointed as its director.



Fig. 4: Extension after 1923

The sharp rise in student numbers after 1923 made it necessary to build an **extension** (Fig. 4). A sober building was designed in the style of more recent German school buildings. Clear geometric shapes, such as the square and the circle, can still be found in the ribbon windows that seem to visually hold the façade together. Several new seminar rooms, a gymnasium, and a ceremonial hall (Fig. 6) on the second floor for around 650 people—now Viktor Klemperer Hall (Fig. 5)—were thus created.



Fig. 5: Viktor Klemperer Hall



Fig. 6: The ceremonial hall

In 1936, the Pedagogical Institute was converted into an independent state institution, which aimed to standardize teacher training and to ideologize it in line with National Socialism. The Pedagogical Institute lost more and more of its importance, until teaching was finally discontinued in the wake of the turmoil of war.

Destruction, reconstruction, a new beginning

On the evening of February 13, 1945, the Pedagogical Institute was struck by bombs and burned down to the perimeter walls (Fig. 7). Only the extension was largely spared from the flames and could be used again relatively quickly. As early as 1946, teaching and lectures were resumed in the newly named Faculty of Education, which was headed, among others, by K. TRINKS.

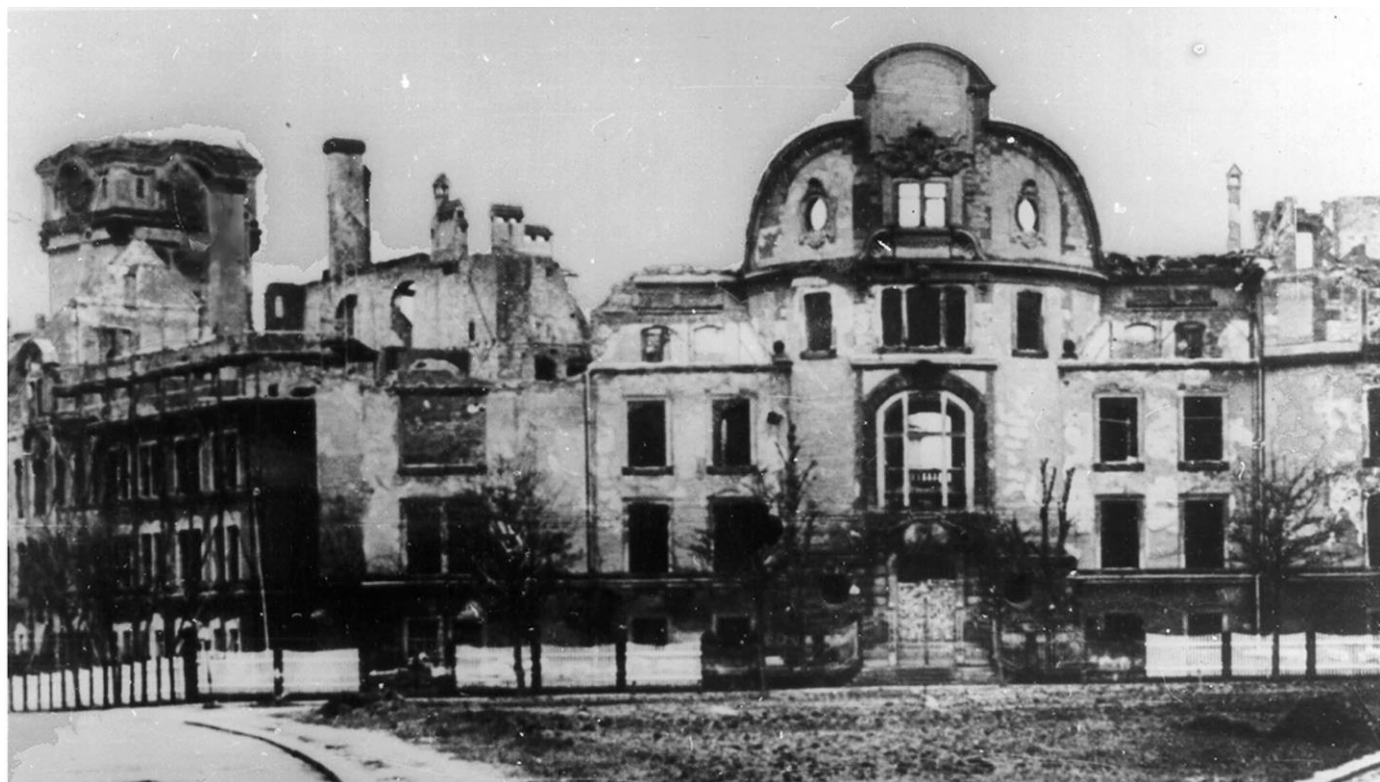


Fig. 7: The destroyed Weber Square building after February 13, 1945

After the founding of the GDR in October 1949 and the necessity derived from the 'Cultural Revolution' to create new, socialist teaching institutions, the Faculty of Education was expanded to include the FACULTY OF WORKERS AND FARMERS, whose name reflected its purpose. For about 15 years, this educational institution played a thoroughly important role in introducing young skilled workers to academic institutions and in spreading Marxist ideas.

In the post-war years, efforts were made to rebuild the entire complex due to the increasing number of students.

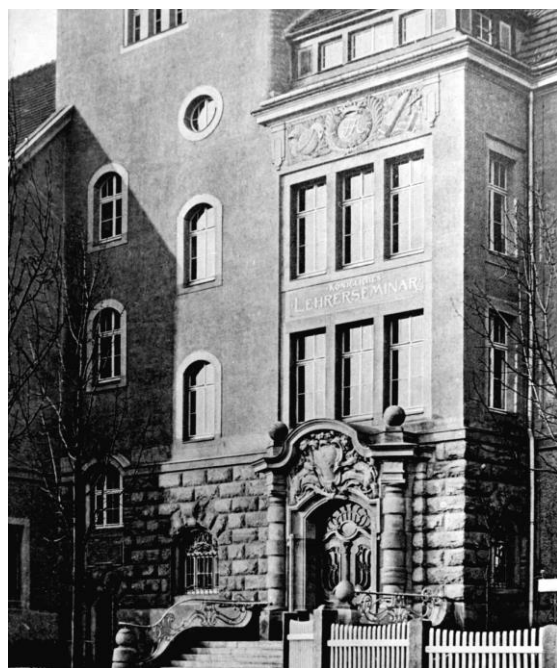


Fig. 8: View of the Teplitzer Strasse entrance

For financial and structural reasons, the decision was made to rebuild using the old parts of the building. Another task was to create a new, representative architecture committed to the working class. The former main entrance (the tower building on Teplitzer Strasse) was restored to its dominant effect.

The façade of the former assembly hall building at Weber Square was straightened and, like all the other building façades, was given a simple structure with vertical window axes and horizontal cornices. A sweeping copper roof now overlapped the

The changed choice of subject of the renewed glass picture ('Young male and female worker in connection with an ornamental design of the insignia of the GDR,' designed by PETZOLDT) also reflected the spirit of the times in art. Since the original function of an assembly hall was no longer required, the room has since been used as a reading room.

glass front of the entrance portal, and the small bell tower, reattached in the form of a light ridge turret centered above the portal, was reminiscent of a school building, and not just by chance. To the left and right of the entrance portal, two larger-than-life sandstone figures entitled 'Worker Student and Farmer Student' were given their place.

Following its reconstruction, Weber Square now has a reserved elegance.

The inner courtyard—provided with a variety of trees, bushes, and paths—was again to serve as a place for breaks and recreation. The park adjoining it to the south was converted into a teaching and cultivation garden by Soviet botanist MITSCHURIN.

1963—dissolution of the Faculty of Workers and Farmers and reconstruction of the building complex

The mission of the Faculty of Workers and Farmers was essentially fulfilled in 1963, since alternative paths of continuing education were now open, such as that via the upper secondary

school. The premises at Weber Square could now be used in a different way.

Since necessary maintenance measures were not carried out in the following decades, the general condition of the building deteriorated steadily over the years. The former MITSCHURIN GARDEN fell significantly into disrepair.

It was not until the summer of 1991 that the first renovation and reconstruction work began. The funds drawn from the 'Aufschwung Ost' (Upswing East) financial program made it possible to replace the plaster and the damaged roof covering. The stained glass of the assembly hall building was given new leaded glass. In addition, larger sections of the hallways were renovated in 1999 using the faculty's own funds. The entrance to the extension building from the 1930s narrowly escaped the fate of being demolished and was instead rebuilt to its original character (Fig. 4). 'Café Blau' can be considered a successful example of recent renovation work.



Fig. 9: Inner courtyard of the faculty building at Weber Square