

# Antonie Brandeis-Reute, “Women’s Colonial School in Rendsburg” (1927)

## Abstract

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Although the Versailles Treaty had forced Germany to forfeit all of its overseas colonies in 1919, many Germans anticipated their eventual return to German control. From foreign-policy initiatives to popular culture, the Weimar Republic often exhibited what some historians refer to as a “colonialism without colonies.” The Colonial School for Women [*Koloniale Frauenschule*] in the northern town of Rendsburg, west of Kiel, reflected just one aspect of this far broader impulse in interwar Germany.

The school was founded in 1926 at the initiative of the Women’s Association of the German Colonial Society [*Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*, FDKG], and it was modeled after the German Colonial School in Witzenhausen, an all-male academy dating back to 1898 that continued to train men for overseas trade and settlement throughout the entirety of the Weimar Republic. The founding of the Colonial School for Women coincided with a number of events at the time that brought Germany’s former colonies back into the public consciousness. In August 1926, for instance, nearby Hamburg, basked in nostalgia for the former overseas empire during its “Colonial Week” [*Kolonial Woche*], which included the premiere of a film set in a German colony, *Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden* [I Had a Comrade], whose final intertitle proclaimed: “Through peaceful work, we want to win it [the overseas empire] back—for it was German... and shall become German once again!” [*In friedlicher Arbeit wollen wir es zurückgewinnen—denn es war deutsch ... und soll wieder deutsch werden!*]

Like the Witzenhausen school, the Colonial School for Women aimed to prepare its students for productive life in developing regions of the world, principally in the former German colonies in East and Southwest Africa. It admitted its first cohort of young women in May 1927 for a year-long program of instruction that included household skills, poultry raising, dairy management, shoe repair, locksmithing, fence construction, toolmaking, riding, shooting, and foreign languages (English and Spanish, plus the option of adding Herero or Swahili). The program also sought to instill in women a sense of mission to cultivate Germanness abroad, both culturally and racially. The FDKG clearly envisioned these women providing a pool of potential wives for German men in the former colonies, in order to grow the German population and to counteract any temptation on the part of these men to take non-German wives.

This article made such concerns about “mixed marriages” and miscegenation clear when it claimed that the white settler population in Southwest Africa, which had attracted more settlers than any other former German colony, had at least seven times more men than women. The article’s author, Antonie Brandeis-Ruete (1868-1945), however, was herself the child of a “mixed marriage.” Her father, (Rudolf) Heinrich Ruete had married princess Sayyida Salama Emily bint Said while working as a trader on the island of Zanzibar, and the couple returned to Hamburg shortly before Antonie’s birth. Heinrich Ruete died in an accident in 1870, and Antonie’s mother, who now went by just “Emily,” had to raise the family on her own in an unfamiliar country. Antonie experienced an itinerant childhood as her mother pursued various ventures to support the children. Antonie Ruete later married Eugen Brandeis in 1898 and lived with him while he served as the colonial governor of the German Marshall Islands. Until her return to Germany in 1905, she devoted herself to collecting ethnographic objects, many of which became part of museum collections. After her return, she became active in the women’s colonial movement and joined the FDKG in 1908. In 1926 she was one of the co-founders of the Colonial School for Women and represented the FDKG on its board.

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## Source

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*Der Kolonialdeutsche* (Berlin)

The Women's Colonial School in Rendsburg

by Antonie Brandeis-Ruete

The Women's League of the German Colonial Society has always seen one of its main tasks to be preparing those young women who embark to live in our colonies.

The war interrupted this work, and now that many families are returning to our former colonies, it was cause for celebration that the Women's League was asked to cooperate with the Colonial Women's School in Rendsburg, since the school's aspirations, the strengthening of family life, education of youth, and preservation of German girls abroad and in the colonies, coincide with the traditions and aspirations of the Women's League. The Women's League has two members who have been entrusted with a seat and a vote among the school's trustees, and it will aim to fund scholarships for two girls who intend to go to Africa.

In German South West Africa there are seven to ten white men for every woman, so that it is a worthy task to strengthen the maternal element there. East Africa has also been opened for Germans to return, and hopefully many women will also make their homes there.

The women and girls who seek to devote themselves to the nice task of being companions for German men in distant lands may not leave their homeland without the necessary instruction. They require specialized training that will make it possible for them to carry out their duties in unfamiliar surroundings, primitive conditions, and strange climates. It is here that the Women's Colonial School in Rendsburg can offer a hand. But it is not only practical knowledge that the young emigrant woman requires. Her mental capacities must also be strengthened so that she keeps a harmonious disposition even in unfamiliar circumstances. In the home community of the school, the best strengths for the service of the general good should be awakened, in contrast to the self-serving tendencies of the present age.

The school building stands with its towers on the banks of the Kiel Canal, surrounded by evergreen forest. The interior furnishings reflect all the demands of modern hygiene. Airy bedrooms and living spaces and large, sunny terraces. The utility rooms are arranged on the principle of functionality. On the other side of a small copse, there are orchards and vegetable gardens and the barns for the small livestock and poultry. This ensures that the young girls do not remain inexperienced in these areas. The school's leadership lies in the hands of a couple who gathered their own experiences abroad and are not unfamiliar with the requirements of German farm life. The instructions of the school subjects lie in the hands of proven teachers, and thus the prognosis of the school, which opened its doors on May 2, is very bright. The course of study takes one year, the girls should generally not be younger than 18. Applications are accepted in April and October. Room and board costs 900 Marks a year.

The Women's Colonial School does not arrange for positions but the Women's League will help young women who have successfully graduated from the school apply as maids in South West Africa, to the extent that their suitability for working abroad has been established during their year of study.

Farmers abroad have heartily welcomed the school's foundation, for it guarantees that suitable human material will be prepared. On the other hand, the farmers will gladly send their daughters to Rendsburg, so that girls who have grown up in Africa can gather knowledge in the old homeland and learn to love the German homeland.

May the school be a blessing with reciprocal benefits here and there, and may the seeds planted in young

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souls bear rich fruit to promote the honor of Germandom abroad.

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