

MAKING CONNECTIONS: A GERMAN-JEWISH VILLAGE IN AMERICA

HOW GENEALOGICAL DOCUMENTS IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA AND GERMANY REVEAL AN EXTENDED FAMILY IN SMALL-TOWN AMERICA

BY EMILY C. ROSE

As we all know, researching one's family history and writing are solitary pursuits. When my book was published in German and then in English, I was not prepared for the incredibly positive reaction to my research. I received telephone calls, e-mails, and letters from all over the world. Subsequent publicity about the book, my presentations, and my website attracted even more communications.

I always responded, and in many cases was able to find information to answer queries about ancestors and native villages and towns. Not surprisingly, I was usually the one providing the genealogical or historical documents. One casual communication, however, gave me information that led to research that shed new light on a short sentence in my book: "Shortly after his arrival [in 1848], Simson [Berlizheimer] married Nanette Loewenthal, who had also emigrated from Württemberg."¹

In 2002, I received a call from a reader. He wanted to share with me the coincidence that his ancestor was the first president of the Jewish Publication Society, the organization that had published my book. He mentioned that he had a chronicle written by his ancestor when he first came to America in the 1850s. I asked him to send it to me as I love reading memoirs.

I started reading the six-page typed memoir.² Moritz Neuburger wrote that he was born in Haigerloch in the Principality of Hohenzollern, where his grandfather had been the cantor and his deceased father had served as the teacher. Since my family was from the neighboring village of Mühringen, in the kingdom of Württemberg, I had visited Haigerloch as a tourist. I continued reading. After Moritz arrived in America in 1854, he worked for his Burgauer, Wolf, and Levi cousins (from Haigerloch and nearby Hechingen) who were living in Ft. Adams and Woodville, Mississippi. Then came the key sentence: "In the meantime, Henry Burgauer had concluded to leave the South. He had a cousin named Lowenthal living in Rock Island, Ill.... This was in the spring of 1856."

Using the usual American sources (censuses, city directories, photographs, and family interviews), I knew that my Berlizheimer ancestors had emigrated in the 1840s and 1850s and settled in Chicago. What I had discovered during my five summers of research in the German archives was that the documents there could shed even more light on immigration and life in America.

From a document I had found in the inheritance and estate records (*Testamente* and *Erbschaftsunterlagen*) in the Mühringen village archive, I had learned that Simson and Nanette had settled in Davenport, Iowa. A notarized document stated that Simson, living in Davenport, renounced his uncle's inheritance. These letters and affidavits in the inheritance records contain a wealth of information about the children, nieces, and nephews of the deceased.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I asked Rose about the reaction she received to her book, *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*, published in 2001 (reviewed in *Stammbaum 21*, Summer 2002). One response from a German reader led to the discovery of a distant cousin who was the founder of the Berlitz School of Languages. Now she relates communications from another reader, which opened new avenues of connecting distant cousins. Once again, Emily used her successful strategy for research to uncover a network of families in Germany and the American Midwest in the mid-nineteenth century.

Research guidelines for those pursuing Jewish genealogical investigations in Germany are available in the section "A Blueprint for Researchers," in the author's book, *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*. An extended bibliography, a model family history interview, and other research information may also be found on her website, www.portraitsourpast.com.

1 Emily C. Rose, *Portraits of Our Past: Jews of the German Countryside*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia: 2001, p. 233.

2 Morris Newburger, "Memoir to 1856." Private collection, Herbert Kaufmann.

3 Fleishaker, Oscar. "The Illinois-Iowa Jewish Community on the Banks of the Mississippi River": Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva Univ., 1957. H.F. Kett & Co., *The Past and Present of Rock Island County, IL*, Chicago: H.F. Kett, 1877.

4 Ira Glazier and P. William Filby, eds., *German to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving at US Ports, Vol. 8*, September 1854, p. 197.

5 Jonathan D. Sarna, *The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888-1988*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia: 1989, pp. 22-23.

BELOW: Solomon Löwenthal, Cantor in Mühlingen (b. 1797 Mühlingen, d. 1867 Mühlingen). Private collection, Elinor Eidelman.



I checked with my relatives; no one had known of any family member who had ever lived in Davenport. Nevertheless, I was able to find information about Simson of Davenport in books about the town and in city directories from the 1850s. I tracked Simson to Davenport and across the Mississippi River to Rock Island, Illinois. In those sources, I found mention of Berthold Löwenthal and several Rosenfelds whose names I recognized from documents I had gathered in Mühlingen.

I had always wondered whether Berthold Löwenthal was related to Simson's wife. Sometimes the family registers note the name of a child's husband when she married someone from another place, but I never found Nanette Löwenthal in any register. Nanette's death certificate stated that she was from Württemberg, but I never found a document with any mention of Mühlingen. Prior to receiving the memoir, one of my newly discovered cousins had answered that question. She sent me a handwritten Lowenthal family tree that listed the marriage of Nanette and my ancestor, Simson (Samson) Berlizheimer.

Next question: Was the "Lowenthal cousin" in the Neuburger memoir the same Berthold Löwenthal from Mühlingen?

The connections began, but neither easily nor clear-cut. Through genealogical research using records from Southwest Germany, and censuses, address books, and R.G. Dun and Co. credit rating reports in America, I discovered a complex web of family connections in Germany and America. Single men and women, families with children and elderly parents emigrated in the 1840s and 1850s from four neighboring villages: Haigerloch, Hechingen, Mühlingen and Nordstetten. Although books about the Jewish communities in Rock Island and Davenport did not fit genealogical data and connections into their research, it turned out that a large percentage of the Jews in these communities were related to each other.³

I first contacted all the families listed in the memoir and in books about Rock Island, as well as relevant families listed in the Jewish Family Finder on JewishGen.org. Most of the first-generation immigrants had changed the spelling of their surnames: Neuburger to Newburger, Burgauer to Burgower, and Löwenthal to Lowenthal or Loewenthal, etc. We formed a small e-mail group, and everyone generously sent me their family trees and photographs. Through this group, cousins were reconnected, and people discovered distant cousins unknown until then.

In 2003, I returned to Germany to do more research. I located Jewish family registers in the Stuttgart State Archive for the families involved and looked at the birth, death, and marriage registers. In Haigerloch, I copied the cemetery documentation citations and the trade register pages for the families. I looked at the information I had previously collated for Mühlingen, especially the apprenticeship records and family registers.

Even with these data, there was a missing link. Who was Henry Burgauer's Lowenthal cousin? How were the Burgauers related to the Löwenthals in Germany? From the family trees and family registers I received, I learned that Sara Burgauer's parents were Hinle Burgauer (Haigerloch) and Bella Levi (Mühlingen) and that Sara's brothers were Michael and Henry. Thus, Henry Burgauer's father was Hinle Burgauer and his mother was Bella Levi (Levi). Another tree showed that Bella Levi's father was Hajum (Haiman) Levi, the cantor in Mühlingen.

In 1828, when Jews in the kingdom of Württemberg were obligated to take surnames, the prior and new surnames were listed in several places. People had to sign official lists indicating their former and new surname, and this list was published. In the documents I had found that most of the Levi family in Mühlingen adopted Löwenthal as a family name. Thus Bella Levi was Bella Löwenthal. Further evidence was an old photograph identified as "Sol, the brother of Henry Burgower's mother." Since Bella Levi (Löwenthal) had a brother named Solomon, the photograph was of Solomon Löwenthal, Mühlingen's cantor for over fifty years.

I discovered more connections. In the Morris Newburger memoir, Moses Regensburger (Haigerloch), his wife Sara Burgauer (Haigerloch), and their children came on the same ship to America as Morris Newburger in 1854.⁴ Morris Newburger's mother was Auguste Regensburger,

sister of Moses Regensburger. A Burgauer cousin had an old photo of one of Morris's two brothers who had emigrated a few years later, but she had no idea of the family connection until now.

There were connections with other Jews from diverse places who also settled in Davenport and Rock Island. Berthold Loewenthal's half-sister married Judas Ochs in Nordstetten; they emigrated with their children and were joined by her father-in-law and brothers-in-law. His other half-sisters married a Heinsfurter and a Heidenheimer from Mühlingen. Several Rosenfelds from Mühlingen settled in Rock Island — they were related to the Ulmanns in Haigerloch and the Epsteins from Mühlingen. And on and on.

In most cases, the men formed small businesses together in Rock Island and Davenport. Eighteen men also joined together to establish Congregation Bene Israel [Bnai Israel] in Davenport in 1861; the minutes of the congregation were in German.

Of course, not everything is neatly tied up. I still wonder if an "A. Rosenfeld" listed in Davenport in 1856 was the brother-in-law of Simson Berlzheimer and cousin of all the other Rosenfelds who settled there. There are also still several unconnected Burgauers and Epsteins.

So how did a recent immigrant become one of the founders and the first president of the Jewish Publication Society? Morris Newburger married a Hochstädter from Hechingen (related to many Hochstädters in Haigerloch) and joined the Hochstadter brothers in Philadelphia where he prospered in men's clothing and then banking businesses. Since Morris's ancestors had been teachers and cantors, he continued to pursue that interest in America and was chosen to lead the Jewish Publication Society in Philadelphia in 1896.⁵

It is often said in jest that all German Jews are related. I have found profound truth in this statement so that in all stages of research we need to look beyond just our direct-line-ancestors for extended family connections. This open-ended mindset will lead to new and fruitful avenues of research.

In the interest of furthering genealogical discovery, I always encourage each person to place all memoirs, letters and photographs in public archives like the Leo Baeck Institute, and to publish his or her research. In this way other people can use the information already collected, and from there, you just never know.



AT TOP: Berthold Newburger (b. 1830 Haigerloch, d. 1909 St. Louis). Private collection, Elinor Eidelman.

ABOVE: Morris Newburger (b. 1834 Haigerloch, d. 1917 Philadelphia). Private collection, Herbert Kaufmann.