

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# The Silbersteins – from Raseyn to Germany and beyond: Patriots, Persecuted, and Patriots again<sup>1</sup>

### The family in Upyna

Johanna Rolnik was the elder sister of Wolf Rollnick (my namesake and grandfather) and of his brothers Meer, Behr and Chaim (Lewenson). She was born in the little town of Upyna in 1840, daughter of Yosel and Feiga Rolnik. When she was about twenty, she married Tzvi Hirsh Thier from Taurage<sup>2</sup>. A son Leyb (Louis/Moritz) was born in 1863 and another Isidor (Wilhelm) in 1865. By the end of 1866, they had left Upyna for Germany. We know this because the list of real estate owners of Upyna for 7 and 28 September 1866 does not list the Thier or Ter or any similar family, although Johanna's father and brother are listed, and we know, too, that Johanna and Tzvi's next son Herman (Chaim) was born in Germany in 1867 (on the 12th July, in the town of Nakel, now Naklo in Poland, in the Netz valley).

Why did they leave Lithuania so early? This is a real question. We saw in the second chapter that the great immigration from the Russian Empire really started only after 1891 with the expulsion of the Jews from the big cities. The Rolniks of Lithuania began to leave earlier, but only at the beginning of the 1880's. We will see in the chapter on the Wynberg Rollnicks (Ostrich feathers...) that an early pioneer to South Africa, Elias Abrahams, had arrived there already in 1873, and it was he who drew the Gurvich sisters and thus the Rollnicks and Rifkins to the Cape. There were only very few Jewish traders and

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is supported by a particularly fine collection of documents, letters and photographs collected by great grandchildren of the Silberstein family's founders. The difficulty here has been to choose between the many fascinating aspects of the family's history.

<sup>2</sup> Taurage is at (A) on the map on page 261. At the time of his death in 1912, his parents were no longer alive, having last lived in Tytuvėnai, 80 Km from Upyna and 100 from Taurage. We saw in an earlier chapter that there were Rolniks with roots in the town.

ostrich farmers in the Cape in the mid-sixties. And here we have Tzvi Thier, already in 1866 determined to leave Upyna (B in the map on page 266) for the West, to seek a better life in Germany. Tzvi would afterwards make his living as a cantor and shochet (ritual slaughterer) in towns in Prussia, later to be Germany<sup>3</sup>. I have found data on the number of shochets in Upyna in 1847, and the number is unlikely to have been very different twenty years later. In 1847 there were 6 shochets to serve 45 families, by far the largest occupation category, twice that of the tailors or shoemakers, three times the number of tavern owners. Perhaps Tzvi felt that he could do better in another country. But there was an additional factor that would have begun to worry the Thiers. They had already two sons and the Russian army was avid for recruits. Sam Aaron points out in his guide to genealogical studies of the Litvaks<sup>4</sup> that before 1874, when conscription became universal in Russia, it was the local communities that prepared the lists of boys available for conscription and no changing of names could offer a way of avoiding being on the list. Whatever the reason, the Thiers did make the decision to emigrate to what was then Prussia.

Crossing the border from Lithuania to Prussia, the family name got changed to Silberstein. There are three stories around the family name change. In one, when the Thier family reached the border, it emerged that Tzvi had either no papers, or the incorrect papers. The Passport Control Guard solved the problem saying that an old man by the name of Silberstein had died in the town the night before, and that Tzvi could have the deceased's identity papers. Thus Tzvi adopted the identity of Silberstein. The other two stories, each championed by a great-grandchild of Tzvi, and that had been passed on by a grandson, both suggest that Thier was together with Silberstein at the immigration office and that when the original Silberstein, for one or

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<sup>3</sup> “A variety of factors—including increased hostility in Eastern Europe and the growing economic attractiveness of the West—stimulated the westward migration of cantors and rabbis. These highly skilled individuals became a valuable and sought-after commodity by congregations in West European synagogues, providing a stylistic alternative to the more modern musical practices that had been adopted there. Few East European cantors had access to formal musical education until the early nineteenth century, when a small number were enrolled in conservatories in Moscow, Berlin, or Vienna. The majority learned their craft as meshorerim, beginning their training in the service of famous cantors and eventually assuming their own positions after their voices had matured. A cantor's first position might typically involve other duties, including serving as a ritual slaughterer or religious teacher. Although the most successful cantors eventually attained positions in which they could devote themselves entirely to the cantorate, others generally sought other forms of employment. . . .” Taken from a fine article on chazzanut: <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Cantors>

<sup>4</sup> Sam Aaron: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Lithuania, Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, London.

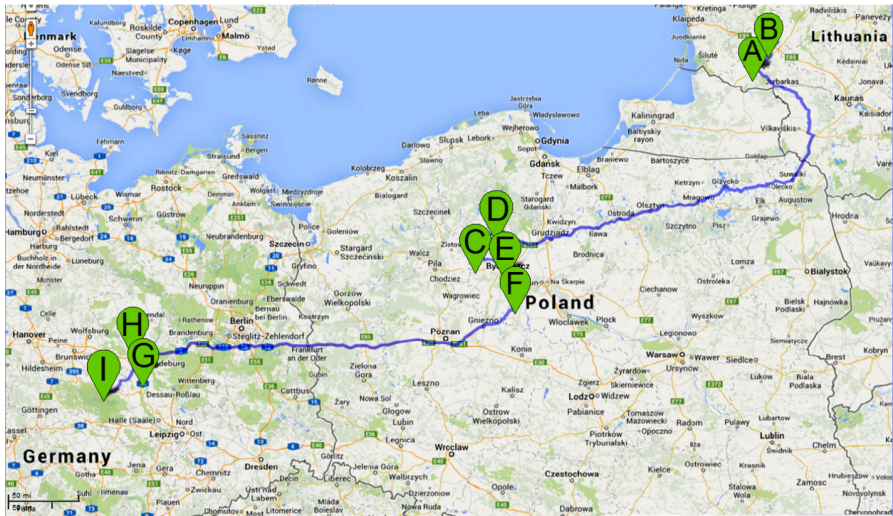
another reason, failed to respond to his name, Thier stepped forward<sup>5</sup>.

In any event, it was as Silbersteins that their lives continued in the new country.

I am continually amazed by the fact that the Silbersteins and Rolnicks knew of each other's whereabouts (and the name change) over more than a century and kept contact over those years. Fifty years after the separation, in about 1917, Abe Rollnick, as we shall see in the next chapter, visited his Silberstein family when he was in New York. Almost fifty years after that (in 1960) my mother, Lily (nee Rollnick) asked that we invite Kurt Silberstein, then living in Cambridge, to attend our son Moshe's circumcision in that town. Fifty years after that again, the Silbersteins and Rollnick/Steins are in almost daily e-mail contact.

### Life in Nakel, Prussia

Nakel, where Chaim Silberstein was born, lies on the Netzel/Noteci



*The movements of the Silberstein family from 1866 to the 1930's. The towns indicated are: A, Taurage; B, Upyna; C, Nakel; D, Vandsburg; E, Bromberg; F, Pakosc; G, Schoenebeck; H, Magdeburg; I, Thale*

<sup>5</sup> One greatgrandchild writes: "Here is what I know about the name. My Dad's memory was that the name was originally something like Thierl. He explained that whenever the German government faced an ailing economy it created large numbers of low-level functionaries in uniforms. Thierl was traveling with Silberstein, who died. [I believe this was their immigration into Germany.] Silberstein had papers and was somehow expected. When the [small? humble? frightened? modest?] Jewish cantor encountered a uniformed German who barked "Silberstein?" he responded, "Ya". This is fairly consistent with all of the other versions I've heard. In all versions, Thierl and Silberstein were together, Silberstein died, and Thierl assumed his identity. A US cousin hadn't heard about the border, but heard that they were in line together, perhaps in alphabetical order, when Silberstein died." A Ter family lived in Tytuvėnai in the mid and late 19th century. Was this Tzvi's family?

river, where that river is joined to the immense Oder-Vistula waterway by the Bromberg/Bydgoszcz canal (C on the map). The town had been growing rapidly since the canal was improved in 1863, the Jewish population doubling in a few decades. They clearly needed a cantor-shochet, a position that Tzvi would fill over the next twenty years. But Nakel is some 450 km from the Lithuanian/Prussian border, so how had Tzvi known that there would be this unfilled cantorial position waiting for him there? Had the Search Committee extended its range to include even a little town such as Upyna in neighbouring Russia? More likely, someone from Upyna or its environs was already established in Nakel and had arranged the appointment<sup>6</sup>. There is no family memory of the Thiers crossing the border under the hay in a farmer's cart, as most immigrant families did, so perhaps they came to the border armed with a legal letter of invitation. But was the letter addressed to Thier or to Silberstein?

In 1873, Tzvi Silberstein became a naturalised Prussian citizen, together with his wife and children.

Nakel's thriving community had 982 Jews by 1871, a well-established Jewish school for the younger children, and was led by a series of Rabbis some of whom, including those during Tzvi's tenure of his post, went on to play important roles in the wider German community<sup>7</sup>. By 1890, Nakel's Jewish residents were owners of 87 out of the 330 trading, craft and industrial companies listed, the number including numerous tailors and furriers, but also bakers, a whitesmith<sup>8</sup>, a haberdasher, butchers, and glaziers.

Three more children were born to Tzvi and Johanna: Paula, Jennie and Dagobert, Paula and Dagobert (born in 1875, the last child) in Nakel, Jennie in nearby Vandsburg (D on the map). By then, older ones were already attending school.

The photograph on the next page shows the family in about 1880. Paula, who would have been ten at the time, is not in the photograph, so she had probably died young. The cantor is in his full regalia, Johanna looks happy, surrounded by her five surviving children. All of them are well-dressed, a traditional family, occupying a substantial presence in their society.

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<sup>6</sup> Did the Upyna community, I wonder, complain about the "brain drain" of their well-trained shochets to Prussia?

<sup>7</sup> The most famous, probably, was Dr Nathan Porges who was the Rabbi in Nakel from 1874 to 1878 and went from there to Mannheim, Pilsen, Karlsbad and later to Leipzig. He was the author of "Ueber die Verbalstamm-bildung in den Semitischen Sprachen", Vienna, 1875 (written while he and Tzvi Silberstein were both in Nakel) and "Bibelkunde und Babelkunde", Leipzig, 1903. [http://encycl.opentopia.com/term/Nathan\\_Porges](http://encycl.opentopia.com/term/Nathan_Porges)

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitesmith>



*The Silberstein Family – Tzvi and Johanna Silberstein (formerly Thier) with their children: Herman (formerly Chaim), Wilhelm (formerly Isidor), Louis (formerly Moritz), Dagobert and Jenny.*

In 1883, Moritz finished high school and began to study medicine. Isidor (by now Wilhelm) followed his brother and then, in 1887, graduated as a doctor of medicine from Greifswald University<sup>9</sup>, an old-established institution situated 450 km North-West of Nakel, close to the Baltic Sea. Clearly, Tzvi was managing to support the family adequately, providing them with the fine education then available at the German gymnasia and universities<sup>10</sup>.

In 1888, having found himself at odds with the rest of the family<sup>11</sup>, Herman left home and went to America. (As we will see, this move to another country was to prove decisive for the family's survival after Hitler came to power). His younger siblings finished school, Dagobert going on to join his brothers as a doctor (studying also at Greifswald University), Jenny taking up nursing.

The town of Nakel was, however, beginning to lose its Jewish

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<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1456: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Greifswald](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Greifswald)

<sup>10</sup> Tzvi must have felt justified in his decision to leave Lithuania for Germany, although this had involved separation from the families that remained. He had exchanged the poverty and backwardness of the shtetl community for a comfortable life in a developed society. He did not live to see the consequences of that move, some decades later, with the rise of Nazism.

<sup>11</sup> As in all such breaks, there are numerous accounts of why Herman felt it necessary to leave home. In one, which his own descendants hold to: "He seemed to have been escaping the family fate of being a doctor. All of his brothers were doctors and his sister, Jenny, was the head nurse in a hospital." [But this couldn't be correct. His younger brother was still at school at the time and Jenny was only sixteen..But in America Herman was able to develop his undoubted artistic talents...wds]. In another story, Herman had committed some misdemeanor and left home for that reason. Perhaps he was simply "a third child". <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/14335112/ns/today-parenting/t/what-are-effects-middle-child-syndrome/>



population, many citizens moving to the rapidly developing interior of Germany, some overseas. Indeed, the number of Jewish residents had dropped by almost half (to 520 members) between the time that Cantor Silberstein had arrived in Nakel and the year 1896, when he moved to Pakosc, (F on the map on page 261), some 60 Km away. Here he had a joint appointment, working also in Hohensalza/Inowrazlaw/Inowroclaw (the names change with sovereignty), a dozen Km away. Inowrazlaw was by far the more substantial community, with some 1500 members, a fine synagogue, depicted below<sup>12</sup>, and a long history of famous rabbis<sup>13</sup>.



Tzvi was to remain in Pakosc and Inowrazlaw until his retirement in 1909 (Johanna had died in Pakosc, in 1904).

The family has preserved two fine letters written to Tzvi on his retirement by heads of the Pakosc and Inowrazlaw communities. Here is one (translated by Peter Nash of Australia): *“Over his 13 years employment as Cantor and Butcher (?) in our congregation Mr. Hermann Silberstein, through his conscientiousness in carrying out his duties, also*

<sup>12</sup> The following is a description of the synagogue by an unknown Jewish man in 1941: “The new synagogue ... was one of the most beautiful in Europe, and maybe in the whole world. ... The emperor Wilhelm II was present at the ceremony of consecration. The synagogue stood in the most beautiful square in the city, in a beautiful garden, and was an amazing temple. The inside was rich with expensive mosaics, light, and the extraordinary ceiling, onto which the light from two high windows shone. Through one of the windows one could see the grandeur of God, through the other, the Star of David.” <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/article/inowroclaw/11,synagogues-prayer-houses-and-others/160,synagogue/> The synagogue was totally destroyed during the Nazi era.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/article/inowroclaw/5,history/>

*through his guidance and modest behaviour, gave us full satisfaction in every respect.*

*Through special circumstances, Mr Silberstein has decided to give up his position, and draw back to private life.*

*We see his leaving us with sadness, and only wish Mr Silberstein success, many many years of ongoing good health, and enjoyment in retirement. Pakosch, 1 April 1909 The Jewish Corporation Committee Chairman H. Samelson".*

The other, signed by Rabbi Kohn, who is mentioned in the history of Inowroclaw [the Polish spelling], mentions also Cantor Silberstein's: "*fundamental knowledge and his orthodoxy*".

### **The children of Tzvi and Johanna begin their independent lives.**

Moritz, the first-born and the first to finish university, became a ship's doctor working on vessels that carried goods and people between Europe and the West Indies. Letters that he wrote on his voyages have been preserved by the family. Here is an excerpt from one, written to his brother Wilhelm and sister-in-law Martha.

*45 latitude, 5.8.1900*

*Dear Wilhelm and Martha,*

*Today is Sunday and tolerable weather. The sky is still grey, with now and then a cool rain shower, but the wind is milder. When the sun breaks through the clouds, one begins to feel that we are heading south; the grim earnest that was the North Sea's show is disappearing and the wild storms of the west wind have made way to a friendly, deep hum that is so pleasant and calming. How bad the weather was these last days and how sadly our little ship managed the wild water, deserted by the world, twisting and pitching, slowly forcing its way through with all its heart and soul!*

*Now that the elements have quietened, one notices peace in all souls and I am taking advantage to write to you, not about our family, but just some notes from my life, from the world I am experiencing, pictures and thoughts, that are passing through my mind.*

*I am still as in a dream. The dream began on the 23rd June. On that day I became the leader of 115 Javanese, workers going to Surinam with families and all they possess. In Amsterdam another 125 joined us. This band of people with their illnesses, wishes and conflicts have totally laid claim to my life, so that I am forced to live their world and I am speaking about a dream. I have the great satisfaction that they trust me and are easy to guide. Some of the women have such sweet and delicate figures. But also some are like real boatswains and some have faces from which an aesthetic viewer can only turn away. Serves the aesthetic viewer right, you would say! Why worry about their aesthetic, take care of their illnesses and do not worry about their appearances. .... And really beautiful flowers of people one can find here on*

our ship. .... We also had some deaths. One case concerned a favourite of mine, a little girl aged 2. When her mother woke one night, she found her child dead beside her. I have never heard such heartrending, wild and despairing lamenting, never experienced such a humane and true expression of pain. It sent chills through me..... Again and again the poor mother pressed the cold child to her heart.... until finally the father, who the whole time had sat quietly and still, took the child out of her hands. He straightened out the little legs, laid the little arms across its chest and murmured in a deep resigned voice: "Allah il Allah". .... In these moments one realizes the solidarity of humans, that it is independent of colour and climate, independent of class and upbringing, confirming my empirical proposition, that man always remains man and that the European does not have the right to mistreat and murder Asians and other non Europeans: they feel pain like we do!!

22.8.1900

In the meantime our ship has reached Paramaribe. The troublesome time has passed, my Javanese are delivered and I can concentrate on the impressions of my surroundings and can concentrate on myself. I was surprised that, as per usual, the arrival in the West Indies touched me, even though I have been here four times already. This trip on the wide Surinam River, bordered by beautiful green emerging from the many slim palms. Huge trees covered with yellow and red flowers are strewn amongst the green masses like colourful flowerbeds. Between the trees are plantations and more plantations, gleaming in white colours. A calm wind curls the yellow water and carries sharp aromas from the land. And everything is so different. No shrill whistle of locomotives, no smoking factory chimneys. A cloudless blue sky spans the landscape and birds are chirping merrily. Another corner, and there lies Paramaribe in front of us like a European city, only that all houses are white. Quickly I make myself free so I can observe the well-remembered street life, the merry Negro population with their strange costumes, with their innocent talk and the friendly laughter of children. Our yellow delicate Javanese women look at their crude black sisters with contempt. They feel themselves as a superior race. Good luck to you, you poor children of Java, who are going towards an unsure destiny! I love you very much.

Enough for today. I have to meet up with an Englishman who is waiting for me.

Sincere greetings.

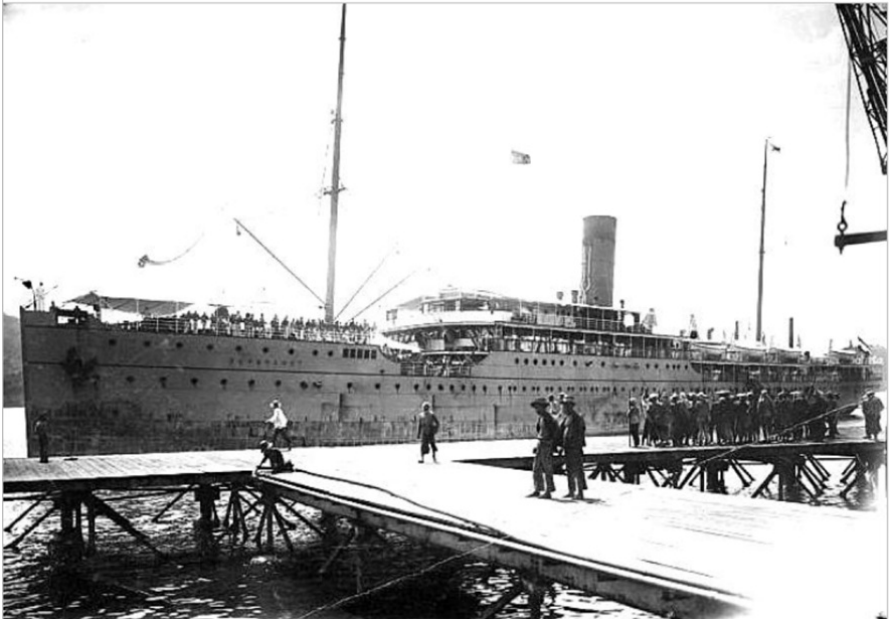
(This and the other letters from Moritz translated by Nadia Teinert).

Other letters from Moritz to his brothers followed. In one, from 1902, he writes: *You've probably heard that one of my written works is*



*finally being printed. This has been very encouraging for me.*

But we have been unable to trace this publication. Other letters that have survived are more concerned with family questions. One was written while Moritz was attached to the newest vessel of the Maatschappij Nederland line, the Rembrandt, seen here docking at Sabang, somewhat north of Sumatra on the 21 November 1906 (Moritz is pictured on the right, but maybe one can see him also in that line of ship's crew, looking out from the Rembrandt, over towards the dock):



A few years after this voyage, while on a visit home to his brother Wilhelm (Isidore), Moritz died after a painful illness.

Wilhelm was the first of the new generation to marry and the first to move from Prussia to settle in Germany proper. He and his wife, Martha Schwarz, set up their home 500 Km from Pakosc, in Schoenebeck (G on the map on page 261), where their two sons, Adolf and Walter were born. The family is of the opinion that Martha died in childbirth, but there is no documentary evidence for this. Wilhelm married again, this time to Hedwig Loewenberg and they produced a son, Heinz.

Jennie, in 1903 or 1904, married (her second marriage) Carl Maerker who was living in Hecklingen (H on the map on page 261), where



*Hedwig, Wilhelm and Walter Silberstein, about 1915. Hedwig looks calm and inwardly happy, Wilhelm dignified and little Walter, thoughtful, perhaps mischievous?*



*Carl Maerker*



*Jennie with Johanna, Wolfgang, and Ottilie*

their first three children, Johanna, Ottilie, and Wolfgang were born.

In 1910, the Maerker family moved to Thale where Annelise was born.

Dagobert, youngest of the Silbersteins, married Clara Schwerin. We see them (below, left) in their wedding photograph. The couple lived in Magdeburg (I on the map on page 261) where their two sons, Kurt and Rudolf (below right) were born.



The three families (Walther's, Jennie's, and Dagobert's) lived within half an hour's train ride from each other in their early married life (G, H, and I on the map on page 261).

Germany was entering into prosperous times in the great industrialization which had followed German unification. The breadwinner in two of the families was a qualified doctor, in the third a businessman who was successfully developing his family business. The life of these three families, apart from worries about childhood illnesses, their elderly parents and the like, must have been settled and comfortable in the years leading up to the First World War.

During their holidays, Dagobert's sons, Kurt and Rudi, would go to their mother's family in the village of Mengerlinghausen, where their grandparents Jacob and Sophie Schwerin lived in a grand house. The house had been a palace, owned by the Prince of Waldeck. The children were left with memories of happy carefree days in the quaint country village.



*Mengerlinghausen Schlosschen 1973<sup>14</sup>. (Picture taken by Rudi Silverton on his visit to Mengerlinghausen in 1973)*

## **The Patriots: World War 1**

The patriotism that was enthusiastically taken up by Europe's population in 1914 was taken up also by our Silberstein and Maerker families. Wilhelm and Dagobert Silberstein, Adolph (Wilhelm's eldest son), and Carl Maerker all served in the German military effort in the 1914-1918 war, although the three fathers were no longer young. Dagobert, the youngest, volunteered right at the start. He was commandeered "as an assistant doctor of the Landsturm<sup>15</sup> infantry to

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<sup>14</sup> The Mengerlinghausen 'Schlosschen' – (Little Castle), was the residence and business location of Jacob Schwerin born in the town in 1857. He was highly regarded in his town as a business man, trading in feed-stocks and fertilizers, textiles and groceries.

<sup>15</sup> A uniformed reserve set up in the German Empire in time of war consisting of former reservists aged 40 to 44, and of all citizens between 18 and 44 who had not been called up for normal service. <http://www.answers.com/topic/landsturm#xzz1ODM0NifU>.



the II ancilliary battallion foot-artillery-regiment, Encke no. 4, on 29 August 1914", and served as medical physician right through the war. For three years, from the end of 1916 to the disintegration of the German army in December 1918, he kept a diary. This remarkable document was found by family members in 2009, transcribed (by Margarete Ritzkowsky) and translated (by Elisabeth Kissel)<sup>16</sup>. I quote extensively from it in what follows, giving as it does a valuable direct account of life in the Army and of insights into the diarist himself<sup>17</sup>.

The foot-artillery-regiment Encke was formed from volunteers and conscripted men in the Magdeburg region. Its regimental barracks in 1915 were in a substantial building in the town:



Dagobert served as head physician here for a number of years, until being sent in November 1916, when the diary begins, close to the front at Amblimont in the Ardennes, deep into France. There he was a resident doctor in the mine-launching school. The "mines" were poison gas cylinders. (It is ironical that soon after the US entered the War, Dagobert's second cousin, Harry C. Rolnick, would reach the same sector of the front, but on the other side of the lines, also serving as medical officer. These two branches of the Upyna Rolnick family were not in contact at this time.)

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<sup>16</sup> Margarete Ritzkowsky: [www.suetterlin-service.de](http://www.suetterlin-service.de) [info@suetterlin-service.de](mailto:info@suetterlin-service.de)

Elisabeth Kissel: [www.ekgermantranslations.com.au](http://www.ekgermantranslations.com.au) <http://www.proz.com/profile/1127230>

<sup>17</sup> The previous and the many quotations to follow from Dagobert's War Diary, are reprinted by permission of Naomi Silverton, Dagobert's granddaughter, holder of the Copyright.



The diary begins (Kurt is his eldest son, Ollchen is a pet name for his wife, Clara):

4.XI [1916...months generally in Roman numerals...wds] Departure from Magdeburg I would have never thought it possible, but Kurt understood completely what was going on. Ollchen was very brave, Father, as always, formal, or so it seemed.

6. XI. Arrival Stenay. Went to the mine-launcher school at Amblimont. Lodgings in an abandoned house which used to belong to a cow farmer, up one stairway, one room (!) remaining, floor is totally ruined, bed: pillow filled with straw wood-wool, only straw sacks, no blankets. Slept very well (in underpants and socks). Reported to the captain and adjutant the next morning, breakfast in the mess (jam). Sick bay is still to be set up properly. Invited to a bottle of wine with the captain in the mess in the evening

9.XI. Surgery day! Spend 4 hours today in the commander's shelter occupied with mine-launcher sharp shooting. The heavy mines make the whole shelter shake. Today I received the first letter from home sent through the forces' mail system.

10.XI Sharp shooting with heavy and light mine-launcher targeting trenches....Very interesting time in the observer shelter. ... Postcard from Grete.

11. XI. Listened to lecture about gas<sup>18</sup>.

12.XI. First Sunday. Tonight very unstable in the mess, until 2 am with liqueurs and Kupperberg-Gold [champagne]. Very nice men, some of them very musical. We heard virtuoso-like performances of some of Mozart's symphonies, Orpheus in the Underworld, Grieg, everything for four hands,

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<sup>18</sup> Here follows Dagobert's summary of the lecture: *The first types of our gasmasks were cotton waste with vinegar, the French had the 'pig nose'. Current mask has a three-layer cartridge (impregnated by a cork-type mass and activated carbon). Gas from Prof. Haber (Habermine – [Haber cylinder]) at the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institute.*

*A light mine launcher will shoot 60 in 1 minute, two heavy ones will shoot 1 every 5 minutes. Gas cylinders (A.B.C.K. only diphosgene, phosgene), impact of phosgene often only has a measurable effect on the lung after one day has gone past (lung emphysema), earlier chlorine, [Br.]*

*Gasmask: cartridge, eye protectors made out of cellulose acetate. Empty space. [In the margin: Made empty space smaller by winding around a strap which was attached to both sides of the carry-strap.] When entering gasfilled rooms: Draeger's oxygen apparatus with potash cartridge and oxygen latch (nose squeeze).*

*If gas cylinder breaks, attempts to purge it are handled differently according to whether it is day or night. Put gasmask on, during the day: dig into a grenade hole or similar. Don't purge until night [because heavy smoke develops?...wds].*

*we even enjoyed Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata yesterday.*

17. XI. *Today more sharp shooting (fire for effect). Everything went well. Terrible holes, trenches flattened, barbed wire was whirling about like matches.*

18. XI. *Last night heavy drinking in the mess, farewelled two gentlemen and celebrated their medals ('Berliner' Roosker) burping competition, refereed by the doctor and Lieutenant Koenig. The doctor gives a speech! Heavily drunk. Got to bed with difficulty, have used today to sleep.*

27. XI. *Went to Sedan. Return to Amblimont along the historical road Sedan - Verdun in the evening, the whole Maas valley a sea of fog, far away in the distance the thunder of the guns at Verdun.*

9. XII. *Boy (sent) with packages to Magdeburg, they will be so delighted.*

10. XII. *Examined 100 Belgians (forced to work, civilians). In the afternoon long walk across the Maas to Villers, which looks eerie in this state of total destruction by gun fire. Very occasionally one finds a remaining inhabitant. From there to Autricourt and Mouzon. Continued gun fire, even more clearly audible in the evening. One could distinctly make out the flashing of heavy calibre on the horizon.*

21. XII. *Holidays until 2. I. 17. Arrival in Magdeburg 8.30 h at night. Joyful reunion following well-known bell signal: 3x short. Lovely days, worked part-time in the practice, with children to Hagenbeck. With Olli to the Wilhelm-Theatre, Meistersinger, Wedding of Figaro. Had holidays extended until 9. I. by telegram.*

26. I [1917... wds] *On the eve of the Kaiser's birthday 3 aircraft bombs hit somewhere close. Afterwards anti-aircraft guns could be heard firing. The whole mess building was shaking.*

27. I. *Big celebration for the Kaiser's birthday.*

31. I. *Launched gas. Wind was unfavourable, the gas drifted towards us and gasmasks were therefore necessary*

5. IV. *Two pilots from the flying school at Autricourt in an Albatross plane crashed on the meadow. Dreadful injuries. The pilot with a fractured femur, open thigh wounds, broken lower arm, injuries to the face; the accompanying artillery officer has concussion, complicated fractures of the femurs, injuries to his face.*

28. IV. *A Belgium national from the civil-workers-battalion hung himself. In the afternoon the medical officer from Mouzon and a judge advocate viewed the body.*

7. V. *In the afternoon letter from home about Kurt, whose education is posing*

*more and more problems and my Ollchen isn't coping with it. I worry a lot about the boy.*

*21.V. Big argument between Brahms and the Deputy Adjutant Heisterberg. We managed to calm things down with a lot of effort. Reason: Right of priority use of a transporter to determine the bedding value for light launchers.*

*24.V. The Kaiser, Crown Prince and Hindenburg in Autricourt, Mouzon, Lombet. During the night of the 25.V. aircraft attack on Sedan, a lot of anti-aircraft gunfire to be heard, airbursts and search lights clearly visible.*

*14.IX. Awarded E.K.II [Iron Cross II] . The paymaster provides me with the emblems. In the evening celebrated my Iron Cross.*

*15.IX. Senior Lieutenant Fleck has granted me service leave to Magdeburg.*

*16.IX. Big surprise and great rejoicing. Have got here just in time for the holidays.*

*9.X. First time shooting of mines with wings attached using 6 Iko and Albrecht launchers in the presence of the general of the combat engineers. The weapon's range was very long, way beyond Chevieres. Koenig received the Iron Cross I, extensive celebrations until 2.30 in the morning.*

*Intrigues between the teaching officers are starting up again and threaten to, once again, make life at the school insufferable.*

*11.X. I have been promoted to Chief Medical Officer. Celebrated in the mess with a small circle of men. Starting with the next course, I will be giving a talk about the nature and treatment of war gas poisoning.*

*7.XII. Sent home ½ pound Butter 2.50 [the cost of the butter..?] with paymaster from Cologne Hanna [a friend of Clara's, or perhaps Clara's sister, Johanna] for Clara's birthday in Magdeburg!*

*19.XII. Departure to Magdeburg. Arrived about lunch time, met by Olli and the children. Lovely, glorious days, not a lot of work in the surgery. Kurt and Rudi have bad school marks, I worry a lot about them.*

*27.I. [1918 .. wds] Kaiser's birthday celebration, glorious meal, in the evening cold buffet.*

*28.I. These evenings anti-aircraft fire, bombs on Longwy and Athus yesterday.(3 Landsturm soldiers, 1 Belgium dead). The noise of the aircraft motors can be heard ominously from above.*

*13.II. There are rumours that the mine-launching school will be disbanded when the offensive starts.*

*14.II. Allegedly no holidays for 50 days, offensive in the west after war has ended*

*with Russia and peace with Ukraine is to be expected soon.*

*14.III. Aircraft above Rehon, massive defense, splinters and unexploded duds where all over the place, no bombs dropped.*

*15.III. Aircraft shelters are being built everywhere.*

*18.III. Aircraft attack on Longuyon. Bomb drops into the car of an aircraft transport, many dead. For the first time we go into the cellar under Hildebrandt's house.*

*19.III. Aircraft attack. Trains are being re-directed via Longwy, D-trains, too.*

*22.III. Aircraft attack Saulnes, heavily wounded in the streets, one throat-lung shot and one shot right through the chest wall.*

*1.IV Have been commandeered to war hospital department for service in Stenay.*

*4.IV. I departed for Stenay. Reported to Head Doctor Dr. Koehler. Very busy as they had just received a transport of heavily wounded soldiers from Montdidier – Noyon (500 in one week). Work from early in the morning until late at night. We amputate, repair, drain knee joints because of many shots in the knee. We are pinning fractures caused by shots every day. Can't get any groceries in Stenay, like the end of the world, nothing to be had.*

*11. and 12.V. Aircraft above Mt. St. Martin, no bombs dropped. Since the offensive started the planes have not been seen here.*

*24.V. I'm doing a bit of trading with my hostess, Mme Gerard, who gives me condensed milk for bread.*

*27.V. A few days ago the captain commended me for running matters at work in such an efficient way.*

*7.VI. During the night the anti-aircraft guns were busy against enemy aircraft flying over Mt. St. Martin. This morning 9 o'clock two squadrons of 5 aircraft each, on their return from Germany, heavy gun fire, thick clouds of shrapnel in the air. A dud device used by the defense crashes into one of the houses up the road from my house, detonates and partly demolishes the house. Nobody hurt.*

*12.VI. Visited the theatre in Couraincourt. The following comedy was shown: "An Impossible Woman", stupid comedy, but good acting.*

*22.VI. The whole thing is starting to slowly disband.*

*25.VIII. Air combat above our heads between 15 enemy units on a bombing*

*mission to Germany, being chased towards the front by German combat aircraft. Shooting at each other with machine guns.*

*8.IX. Mauthner going on holidays with Muz 75. Will take a big box with the following content:*

*3 loaves of bread, 22 eggs, 8 tins of sardines, 1 package sugar, 3 parcels with cakes, 1 pound bacon, 2 ¾ pound Cacao, 5 tins herring, 100 stock cubes, 6 pound coffee, 200 gr. rice, 4 glasses of mustard, 2 ½ pound pearl barley, 2 pound grits, 5 pound beef, 2 pound butter.*

*16.IX. Austrian peace offer. Anti-aircraft fire. A plane shot down near Aubagne. The pilot and observer fled.*

*27.IX. Four planes of an American squadron are shot down by our fighter pilots above Pierrepont, aerial combat visible from here*

*1.X Mauthner is back, everything went well. The boys have received good marks, Kurt is going to Mengerlinghausen by himself during the autumn holidays. Mengerlinghausen also sent 3 packets of tobacco.*

*13.X. Wilson's demands have been accepted, we are leaving! It is all finished!!*

*18.X. Sergeant Kuehne's rudeness increases every day, everyone is demoralised.*

*28.X. Commander Holzgraeffe has gone to the spa at Kissingen to recuperate. Massive anti-aircraft fire, aircraft very low down above our heads, we are expecting bombs to be dropped any minute.*

*30.X. Daily funerals for soldiers who died at the camp, mostly gas poisoning.*

*2.XI. Longuyon is experiencing heavy long-range fire, many dead, cleared hospital. Trains are only running as far as La Roche. No holidays.*

*5.XI. Baggert is gone! I have sent home two insured parcels with medical officer Sergeant Schollmeyer, whose wife is gravely ill: 2 tins cacao. 1 tin condensed milk, 1 pound unroasted coffee, 1 bag roasted coffee, 3 tins eel in oil, 1 bag starch, 2 little sachets [starch], 4 pieces curd soap, 4 pieces glycerol soap, 1 pound smoked bacon, 2 pound sausages, 3 bottles stock extract, 22 eggs, 1 ½ pound butter, 4 ½ pound lard, 1 packet sugar, 100 stock cubes, 7 pound soap powder.*

*7.XI. Have loaded my non-essential things into two suitcases at Rodingen, insured for 1500 Mark.*

*There are fantastic rumours going around, abdication of the Kaiser etc.*

*9.XI. There is hardly any shooting to be heard from the front now, cease fire negotiations. Stenay and Mouzon are occupied by the enemy, west of Sedan. Decampment order for the 11.XI.*



11.XI. Decampment from Mt. St. Martin – march through Luxembourg, myself on a horse. At home there are soldiers councils everywhere, the Kaiser has abdicated and has fled. The other leaders of the states have abdicated. Republic Germany. What might it be like at home now? Mail can't be received, nor sent!

12.XI. Second day of marching until Fettingen. I have to march on foot, too, as my horse has to be yoked to pull the luggage. We are passing the city of Luxembourg, French flags everywhere. Troops of freed prisoners of war, surrounded by the people of Luxembourg, carrying the French flag, dressed in festive costume, singing the Marseillaise. We march past each other, singing "Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles". The discipline is very lax. People throw away their unnecessary luggage, trenching tools etc. and sell blankets, lace-up shoes to the people of Luxembourg. Arrival in Fettingen in the afternoon at 2 o'clock. Lodgings with a tailor, nice people.

13.XI. Rest day in Fettingen. The French hang flags up everywhere. After our decampment they stormed the jam factory, where we had stored all we couldn't take with us. Nightly shootings, all sorts of things going on! Company 4 had to stay back in Rehon to guard the storehouse, because our troops tried to plunder it and throw the stores to the civilian population.

14.XI. Marching 25 km until Wormeldingen on the Mosel. On the other bank of the river is Germany. Happily, so far we have been able to save the luggage by hiring horses from Luxembourg farmers for 60 Mark per horse up to the next stop.

15.XI. Aiming to march to Saarburg, crossing the Mosel, on German soil. From Saarburg the soldiers council commands us to go to Wawern, where I share lodgings with a brother in the faith (Berhard Bonen).

17.XI. Early in the morning decampment to the Roemerbruecke [Roman Bridge] where the ferry Koblenz is waiting for us. We have orders to build a bridge for the returning divisions in Treis upon the Mosel. The Workers and Soldiers Council refuses to give us the necessary pontoon barges for our luggage and tools carts. Only after much effort, we are able to get everything necessary. Glorious journey through the Mosel valley. The bridge will be built by Company 1 only, the others will go to Kreuznach to guard a storehouse, later on we are supposed to all meet up again. All troops stationed to the left of the Rhine have been discharged already today.

18.XI. Arrival in Lieser 11 o'clock in the morning, took over bridge materials. Staying at the castle of the Baron of Schorlemer-Lieser. The Workers and Soldiers Council from Trier wanted to search the castle. Many photographs with handwritten signatures of the royal family (Kaiserin, Prince Eitel

*Friedrich, Cecilie and Baby Wilhelm, Karl Eduard, etc. in the salon).  
We have the use of the billiard room and the wonderful Bechstein grandpiano,  
lovely beds.*

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*19.XI. Departure from Lieser with huge train of bridge material to Trier.*

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*20.XI. Building of the bridge, Lieutenant Jeschke arrives in the car of the general of the combat engineers, I ask him to enquire with the army doctor if I can go home after crossing the Rhein. In the evening with Warth, Dettmers and my host Government Baumeister Trewert, Excellent lodging in the 'Gasthof zur Wildburg' inn, trying the „Federweissen“ [new wine].*

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*21.XI. Many platoons of the 5th army have been passing over our bridge. A truck driven into the Mosel near the ferry landing is being pulled out by a huge tractor without difficulty.*

The family have preserved his campaign medals:

*Left: Iron Cross: The Iron Cross, more prestigious than the Cross of Merit, was founded on 10 March 1813 in Breslau and reauthorized by Emperor Wilhelm II on 5 August 1914, at the start of the First World War.*



*Right: Cross of Merit: "In the name of the Leader and Reich Chancellor<sup>19</sup> according to the decree of 13 July 1934 to commemorate the World War 1914-1918, the medical doctor Dr. med. Dagobert Silberstein in Magdeburg is awarded the Cross of Merit for Combatants (Ehrenkreuz für Frontkämpfer) by the Reich President, Field Marshal von Hindenburg."*

These awards were made to Dr Silberstein for his medical service on the German/French frontline. According to Dagobert's son Rudolf, after his return home at the end of WW1 Dagobert hardly ever stepped foot into a house of worship or synagogue again, having completely lost his faith as a result of what he had to deal with on the front.

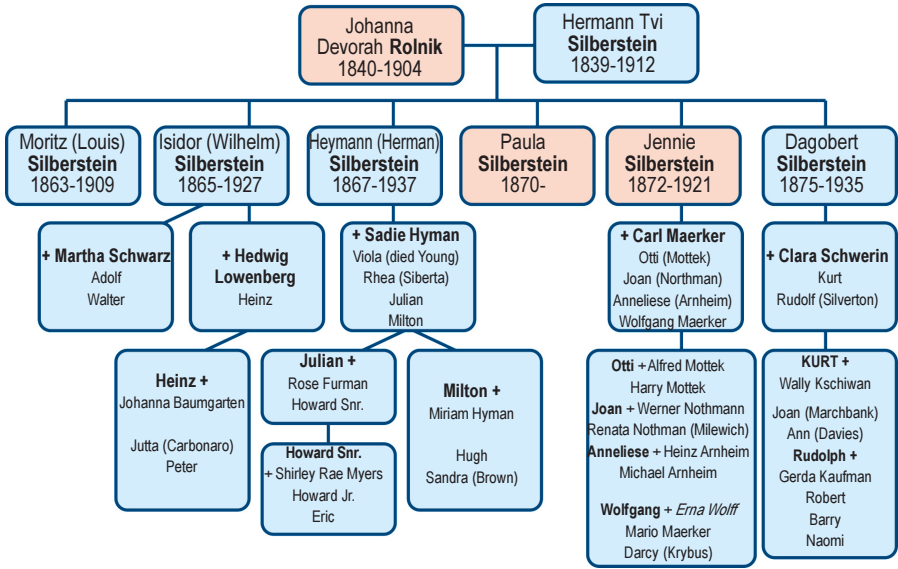
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<sup>19</sup> Ironically, the Chancellor at that time was Adolf Hitler, so his orders resulted in this Jew (and many others) being awarded the Cross of Merit. The Jews had already been banned from being Public Servants.

# Life in post-war Germany

(It might be helpful to refer to this Family Tree from here on)

## Silberstein Family Tree



After the war came the Weimar Republic, the rebuilding, the war reparations, the Great Inflation, the 1929 Depression. The Silberstein and Maerker (nee Jennie Silberstein) children finished school, began earning their living, married. Jennie Maerker had died in 1925. After she died, the Maerker family made do with a housekeeper until her husband Carl married Minna Tuchler. That second marriage produced another child, Robert, born in 1933, a stepbrother to the other four Maerker children. Oattie had taken a job as an au pair in Berlin, and Joan followed her to Berlin to work in a similar job. While still in Thale, Joan had been introduced to Werner Nothmann, her future husband. Joan and



Werner and Joan (Maerker) Nothmann, Oattie (Maerker) and Alfred Mottek, early 30's

Werner dated for a long while and then were secretly engaged for two years, until Werner, who worked in a bank, made enough money for them to marry (in May 1929). Wilhelm Silberstein died in 1927, his son Adolf having pre-deceased him.

The remaining Silbersteins and Maerkers lived on in Germany while the period of the Weimar Republic was drawing to its close. The Nazi fury was soon to be unleashed.

### **Herman Silberstein establishes himself in the USA**

We saw that Herman, the third Silberstein son, had left home in 1888 and had made his way to the United States, seeking a freer life as a writer and an artist than would be found in Prussian Germany<sup>20</sup>.

As was not uncommon at the time, Herman entered the U.S. through Baltimore, and went south-west. Somehow he found his way to a coal-mining town, Pocahontas, Virginia, in the mountains, literally on the border between Virginia and West Virginia. In the town were a number of Jewish-owned shops,<sup>21</sup> including Joseph Hyman's dry goods store (on next page) and his son Sol Hyman's liquor shop<sup>22</sup>. The Hymans would become Herman's American family<sup>23</sup>.

The story goes that Herman met Sadie, one of Joseph Hyman's daughters, who said that she would marry him if he got her out of Pocahontas. He did so and they were married in 1891; he became a naturalized U.S. citizen on 20 August 1895 in Tazewell County, Virginia.

In 1900, he and Sadie were living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with two children, (the census lists Herman as a tailor), along with four of Sadie's siblings. Two of her sisters were listed as milliners; family lore has it that they had opened a millinery shop.

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<sup>20</sup> A granddaughter has provided much of the information in this section.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, Jack M. *Early Coal Mining in Pocahontas Virginia*. J.M. Jones (publisher) Lynchburg, Va. 1983

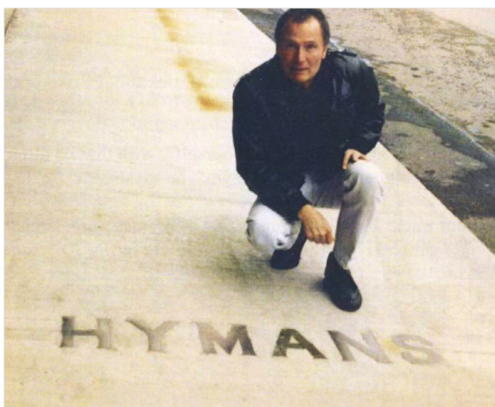
<sup>22</sup> From the website, [smallsynagogues.com](http://smallsynagogues.com) that well captures the context in the coal fields: 'Jews, who traditionally were mainstay merchants of a town, were challenged here not only by the hardscrabble culture of the miners, but by the coal companies themselves. Miners were expected to shop the company store, which usually featured easy credit, a huge array of merchandise at inflated prices, and the implied admonition that shopping elsewhere could risk a man his job. And yet, Jews opened independent stores that offered a competitive alternative where they could.'

<sup>23</sup> Like Herman, the Hymans had disembarked in Baltimore (the mother and the first three children, including Sadie who would marry Herman, in 1891). The other six children were born in Maryland.





*The Hyman family lived above the store.*



*Edwin Hyman, a grandson, shows the family name in bronze on the sidewalk in front of the store.*



*Herman and Sadie, 1891*

By 1910 Herman and family had moved to New York City, where the oldest Hyman sibling (Jack) was already established. Within a few years all seven of the remaining Hyman siblings had left Pocahontas and were reunited in Huntington, West Virginia (after the difficult mountain terrain, they said that when they saw the Ohio Valley, they thought it was Paradise).

Two of Sadie's brothers, Abe and Sol Hyman, did very well in the movie theater business, eventually setting up the Greater Huntington

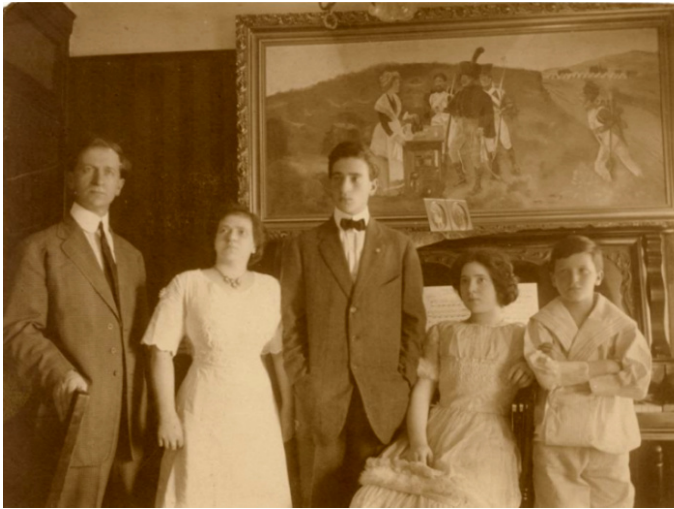


Movie Theatre Company, which had begun as a string of vaudeville and, later, movie houses in the area. The most famous of these was the Keith-Albee Theatre, whose 1920's opulence has put it on the National Register of Historic Places<sup>24</sup> (right).



(Huntington remains the Hyman family center although only one of Abe Hyman's grandchildren lives there full time. A Hyman descendant is still active in the company.)

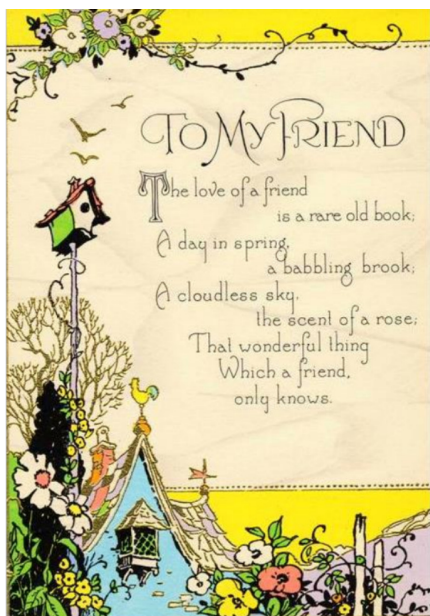
In New York, Herman became a manager with Beekman Paper and Cards<sup>25</sup>, and later with the Dreyfuss Art Company.



*Herman, (his painting on wall) Sadie, Julian, Rhea, and Milton in New York, early 1910's*

<sup>24</sup> The Keith-Albee Theatre in downtown Huntington, West Virginia opened to the public on May 8, 1928. Brothers A. B. and S. J. Hyman built the Keith and added it to their list of theaters along with the State, Orpheum and Huntington. The new theater, constructed under the supervision of vaudeville tycoons B. F. Keith and Edward Albee, became part of the Keith-Albee circuit, the premier vaudeville tour on the East Coast of the United States. At the time, the Keith-Albee was the second biggest theater in the United States, after the Roxy Theater in New York City. It now serves as a performing arts center for Marshall University. (Edward Albee the playwright is the adopted son of the theatre magnate's son Reed A. Albee [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_Albee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Albee)).

<sup>25</sup> The Beekman Paper & Card Co. was originally located at 56 Beekman St. in New York City. They were wholesale paper dealers, stocking all types of paper products for retailers. Founded in 1907 as the family business of Max and Alma Greenbaum, they opened a second location at 318 W. 39th St. in 1918. For the still preserved shop sign of this store see: <http://www.waltergrutchfield.net/beekman2.htm>



Two of Herman's Greeting Cards

It was in New York that the Silbersteins were visited by Herman's South African cousin, Abe Rollnick, then a movie theatre proprietor in New York City. This was the visit that united the two branches of the Rolnik family fifty years after they had separated from each other in Upyna. Abe (perhaps in his alias of Arthur at the time) must have made a great impression on the Silbersteins, since the story of his visit was handed down to succeeding generations. Another story from that time, also with movie connections, is that Herman, whose English style was exemplary, wrote a school competition speech for Jack Hyman's son Bernard. The man that "Bernie" beat in the contest was Irving Thalberg who went on to become a founder of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Recognising Bernie from that school contest, Thalberg had him recruited for the company and Bernie went on to produce many Hollywood movies, including *San Francisco* with Clark Gable<sup>26</sup>.

Herman and Sadie's oldest son, Julian, eventually joined the Hyman family business in Huntington, and lived there for many years. Their other children remained in New York. Of the Silbersteins' three children (Rhea, Julian, and Milton), Rhea was apparently a musical prodigy, studying at the Julliard School. Years later, her brother Milton encountered one of her teachers from that period, who still remembered her as a "genius on the piano"; he had never seen such

26 <http://www.fandango.com/bernardhyman/filmography/p95321>

talent. She was also a composer<sup>27</sup>. For the first talking movie, *The Jazz Singer*, she wrote the music for a song called "Yahrzeit Licht (Memorial Candle)<sup>28</sup>," and Herman (as H.B. Silberstein) wrote the words. It begins with the first line of Kaddish, and then moves into Yiddish lyrics. Rhea had a triumphant Carnegie Hall opening in the 1920s, but lost her singing voice after botched surgery. Thus, instead of developing her own musical career Rhea, as "Madame Silberta," gave voice lessons to others.



*Rhea and parents July 1930.*

Milton, whose bookishness was not appreciated by his family, was forced to leave school after 8th grade to work as a clerk in a cloaks and suits business. He was self-taught, a voracious reader, and wrote one unpublished novel a year for more than 40 years. In 1941 he married his first cousin, Miriam Francis Hyman<sup>29</sup>, further strengthening the Silberstein-Hyman connection<sup>30</sup>.

It was Herman, who had fled stuffy Germany and had become a U.S. citizen, fully established in the United States, to whom the Silberstein and Maerker families turned when it became necessary for them to flee from Hitler's now life-threatening Germany.

<sup>27</sup> listing herself as such ("composer working at home") in the 1920 US census

<sup>28</sup> In the movie, the song "Yahrzeit Licht," is sung by Yosselle Rosenblatt in concert. Both words and music form an elegy for a lost world, the Yiddish world of Eastern Europe, transplanted to the Lower East Side and now bypassed by the fast-paced American generation. On a visit to Chicago, the hero, Jack Robin, is drawn to the sentimental Yiddishkeit that both song and singer evoke, and also to memories of his father. But he is as out of place in that concert hall as he is in his old neighborhood, and as he will be later in his father's kittel. Even as Jack muses on what he has left behind, Cantor Rosenblatt chants the Kaddish for his father's dead world. <http://courses.umass.edu/comm340/saposnik.html> For a recording of Cantor Rosenblatt singing this song: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D01hxSr5UCI>

<sup>29</sup> Miriam was born in Pocahontas, raised in Huntington, and her father had lived with Herman and Sadie in Pittsburgh when still a teenager. It is her daughter, Sandra Silberstein, who contributed much of this section.

<sup>30</sup> Milton Silberstein and Miriam Hyman Silberstein had two children. Hugh was an attorney. Sandra is an applied linguist and professor of English. She and her husband, Douglas Mason Brown, have one daughter, Maia Surrel Silberstein Brown. It was planning around Maia's fellowship to South Africa that occasioned another face-to-face reunion of the Silbersteins and Rollnicks.

## **The Persecuted: The Silbersteins in Nazi Germany**

For hundreds of years, anti-Semitism had been endemic in Germany. It increased in intensity after the Army's defeat in 1918, ascribed in part to Jewish defeatists, traitors, and profiteers. This anti-Semitism was, of course, an important part of Hitler's political platform and his appeal to the German people. The Nazis became the majority party in July 1932, with Hitler becoming German Chancellor and thus ruler of Germany on 30 January 1933. Within months, anti-Jewish laws were passed and the persecution of the Jews, threatening their livelihoods and lives, began. At that time the Silbersteins of Schoenebeck (the late Wilhelm's family) comprised the mother Hedvig, her stepson Walter and son Heinz. Walter had married but was childless. Heinz had married, completed his medical studies, and set up in a practice in the little town of Calbe, 16 km south of Schoenebeck. In Magdeburg was Dagobert Silberstein (he would die in 1935) and with him his wife Clara and their two grown sons, Kurt and Rudi. Finally, in Thale lived the Silberstein sister, Jennie Maerker, her husband Carl and their four children, each married with a family: the Nothmanns (Johanna and Werner), the Motteks (Otti and Alfred), the Arnheims (Anneliese and Heinz), and Wolfgang and Erne Maerker. All were in grave danger. Their only hope lay in obtaining visas to immigrate to the USA or to any country that would accept them.

There is full documentation of the Nazi persecutions in each of these three towns. The story of the Jews of Thale, a little community of perhaps a dozen Jewish families, will have to stand for all three towns.

(The following material consists of excerpts from "Thale zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus", an eighty page essay written by Heiko Golla and found by one of Dagobert's grandchildren in the Thale archives).

The first formal action against Jews in Thale came in 1934, when the Mayor Dr. Richter affixed a sign on the swimming complex stating "Jews not allowed". Carl Maerker, the Jewish owner of the Department Store in the Huettenchaussee, complained not only to the mayor but also to the district president in Magdeburg, his letter ending: "having lived here for 23 years as a generally respected citizen, and a war soldier who always followed his duty and who also never hesitated when it came to voluntary contributions, I hope you will take into account my request."

The mayor's letter of justification, written in a deep racial and anti-Semitic manner, read:



*The Mayor 21. September 1934*

*To the Magistrate of Thale..... Copy to the office of the district president in Quedlinburg*

*Re: Prohibitory sign of swimming pool - decree of 1. September 1934 - No. 6594*

*I allowed the erection of the prohibitory sign because the Jews staying at the Pension Dessauer and visiting the swimming pool were behaving very insolently, ... (in a) typically Jewish (way) ..... Consistent with my racial dislike of Judaism I cannot agree with them swimming in the same water as our own people: this opinion is not only my own but also that of many of my friends who are also keen visitors of the summer pool. I have therefore so far not removed the sign in the hope that in our case – to prevent the frequent use of the summer pool by the Jews from the Pension Dessauer - the prohibitory sign is acknowledged as justified.*

Another official act came from the state tourist office. A letter written to the Quedlinburger district officer dated 24.7.1935 by the government law clerk Jung: *that the pamphlets distributed by the tourist office of Thale should state "Jews not desired"*.

In another incident in 1935, Liebscher, the branch commander of the NSDAP<sup>31</sup>, took photos of customers of the Jewish Store Maerker, to stop them from buying from Jews. An article in the local National Socialistic newspaper read:

*Taken into Police Custody: The businessman C. Maerker was taken into custody on Thursday evening after offending the local branch commander of the NSDAP, Liebscher, and was brought before the Quedlinburger court on Friday. It appears that on Thursday, to check which party members are still buying at Jewish stores, Liebscher stationed a few henchmen close to the Maerker's store. All those who went into or came out of his store were to be photographed and later stigmatized by displaying their names on a list "buyers from Jews". While members of the party and the branch commander Liebscher were doing this, Maerker came out to the street and grossly insulted the branch commander Liebscher by saying to him: "who knows from where you descended". Branch commander Liebscher, an honoured party comrade, has brought criminal charges against Maerker. It is understood that passersby felt great resentment towards these gross insults.*

The criminal charges mentioned above resulted in Carl Maerker being taken into custody on orders from the State police in Magdeburg in July 1935.

After Krystallnacht (November 10th 1938)<sup>32</sup>, the Thalenser Daily of 11.11.1938 reported:

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<sup>31</sup> National Socialist German Workers Party

<sup>32</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht>



### ***Spontaneous Demonstrations also in Thale Against Jews***

*Also in Thale the mean sudden attack on a German diplomat evoked animosity during the night hours of yesterday, culminating in an outbreak of demonstrations against Jewish businesses. A large number of people demonstrated around 6pm in front of the store of the Jew Maerker, and the store windows and business sign were smashed. In spite of the huge animosity the people contained themselves, so that no piece of display in the Jewish store was damaged. The Jew Maerker was taken into protective custody as was the Jew Dessauer, where demonstrations were also taking place in front of his unit.*

*The demonstrating procession walked along the streets of the town and expressed their animosity in chorus against the Jewish scoundrels. Similar demonstrations were also held in nearby towns like Halberstad. From all these demonstrations one understands clearly the will of the people: away with the Jews from Germany! This world plague has not even earned the right to be guests in Germany!*

That the store of Carl Maerker was the object of the rioting was evident for a number of reasons. For one, he did not allow himself to be intimidated by the National Socialist baiting, as seen by the complaints that he had made, and for another he was very well liked by the non-Party people, as he had fair prices, allowed charging onto an account and was also happy with small repayments.

The store of Carl Maerker was totally destroyed, the displays smeared, destroyed or taken. There is also no evidence that the demonstration was contained, nor (in contrast to the newspaper report) that “no piece of display in the Jewish store was damaged.” And the German “nationalists” had no problems with dividing the few undamaged goods between themselves while the owner was being “protected” in custody. [All this from Heiko Golla’s essay.]

### **The Struggle for US Visas**

Anti-immigration feelings in the USA had been steadily intensifying all through the first half of the 20th Century. Immigrants from Eastern Europe and Hungary had been blamed (unjustly) for the two cholera epidemics of the early 1890’s that had caused panic in New York and the US Eastern seaboard. Immigration was stopped almost entirely for many months<sup>33</sup>. By the early twenties, abetted by books on eugenics and fears of unemployment and especially of

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<sup>33</sup> See Howard Merkel’s fine book *Quarantine!: East European Jewish immigrants and the New York City epidemics of 1892*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

competition by hard-working, low-paid immigrants from Asia, the US Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924<sup>34</sup> (the Johnson–Reed Act) that limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of that country's proportion of the population in 1890. Ironically, the quota for Germany was greater than that for any other nation and almost equal to that for the UK and Ireland combined. But total immigration was capped in 1929 to a total of 150,000 people in any one year and cut even further during the depression years.

In addition to this absolute numerical barrier, there were huge administrative barriers to immigration<sup>35</sup>. Each visa application had to be supported by two sponsors, who had to be close relatives of the prospective immigrant and U.S. citizens or with permanent resident status, and they were required to have completed and notarized six copies of an Affidavit of Support and Sponsorship. The Silbersteins and Maerkers still living in Germany had to find sponsors for their US visa applications and then they and their sponsors had to struggle through the bureaucratic procedures.

The first to get through was Heinz (soon to become Henry) Silberstein who, as we have seen, was by 1933 a qualified doctor with a medical practice in the little town of Calbe (which had just 23 Jews in 1933), and married to Johanna, with their daughter Jutta. Heinz must have met up with his uncle Herman who had visited Germany in the summer of 1934, since on January 7th 1936 Heinz arrived in New York, his visa dated October 1935, being met by

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<sup>34</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_Act\\_of\\_1924](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_Act_of_1924)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.usimm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007455>: The bureaucratic hurdles facing German Jews attempting to emigrate in the late 1930s were overwhelming. Nations required extensive documentation that was often virtually impossible to obtain. The following is a list of the documents required by the United States to obtain a visa: Five copies of the visa application. Two copies of the applicant's birth certificate Quota number (establishing the applicant's place on the waiting list). Two sponsors: Close relatives of the prospective immigrant were preferred. The sponsors were required to be U.S. citizens or to have permanent resident status, and they were required to have completed and notarized six copies of an Affidavit of Support and Sponsorship. Supporting documents: Certified copy of most recent federal tax return; Affidavit from a bank regarding applicant's accounts; Affidavit from any other responsible person regarding other assets (affidavit from sponsor's employer or statement of commercial rating); Certificate of Good Conduct from German Police authorities, including two copies of each; Police dossier; Prison record; Military record; Other government records about individual; Affidavits of Good Conduct (after September 1940) from several responsible disinterested persons; Physical examination at U.S. consulate; Proof of permission to leave Germany (imposed September 30, 1939); Proof that prospective immigrant had booked passage to the Western hemisphere (imposed September 1939)

“H.B.Silberstein”<sup>36</sup>. Heinz was naturalized on February 13th, ready to meet Johanna and Jutta when they arrived on the 16th July, with visas issued just the month before. Their destination was given on the shipping manifest as Sloatsburg, NY, where Heinz had already, it would appear, begun to work as a medical practitioner. This was also the destination of Hedwig Silberstein (Heinz's mother) when she arrived on a tourist visa in August 1937. Sadly, the tourist visa was not enough to ensure Hedwig's permanent stay in the USA. Shortly before the Pearl Harbor attack that brought the USA into WW2, she was deported back to Germany. Frantic efforts by Heinz to bring her back to the USA failed. Living in Berlin, Hedwig was rounded up by the Gestapo and sent, on transport Da31, to be murdered in Riga<sup>37</sup>, with many other Berlin Jews.

But before the war actually started, there was still time for the Maerker children (Jennie Silberstein's family, who had grown up in Thale) to try to get their visas. Werner Nothmann, the husband of Johanna Maerker, arrived in the USA in April 1937, also on a tourist visa, hoping to meet with Johanna's uncle, our Herman Silberstein, and to arrange the immigrations. However, Uncle Herman became sick and died. When Werner arrived, it was for the funeral. Herman's West Virginia relatives, the Hymans, were also there and either Abe or Sol said, "What Herman began, we will finish."

Werner Nothmann returned to Germany and, after many exchanges of letters, Sol Hyman was able to provide papers for the emigration to the USA of Werner and Joan and their daughter Renate. The Nothmanns arrived in September 1937 and were met by Abe Hyman. Anneliese (Maerker) and her husband Heinz (later Harry) Arnheim, also sponsored by Sol Hyman, arrived on November 10th 1938 which was Krystallnacht back in Germany<sup>38</sup>.

Sol Hyman also deposited funds in England to make possible the

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<sup>36</sup> The shipping manifest for the SS Washington lists Heinz's "friend" as H.B.Silberstein . In this and other cases I interpret "friend" as "met by", but this does not mean that the "friend" was necessarily on the docks, waiting for the boat to arrive.

[http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715\\_57510322&fn=Heinz&ln=Silberstein&st=r&ssrc=pt\\_t21549956\\_p1173142970\\_kpid0q3d1173142970z0q26pgz0q3d32768z0q26pgPLz0q3dpid&pid=20300285](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715_57510322&fn=Heinz&ln=Silberstein&st=r&ssrc=pt_t21549956_p1173142970_kpid0q3d1173142970z0q26pgz0q3d32768z0q26pgPLz0q3dpid&pid=20300285)

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/!ut/p/\\_s.7\\_0\\_A/7\\_0\\_FL.cmd/acd/.ar/sa.portlet.VictimDetailsSubmitAction/.c/6\\_0\\_9Dl.ce/7\\_0\\_V9f.p/5\\_0\\_P1f.d/0?victim\\_details\\_id=4133701&victim\\_details\\_name=Silberstein+Hedwig&q1=daFpfDxraHs%3D&q2=Zp27HldZ0aC%2B4M829iSlkvAp1TPWJUK7&q3=0DsEZixLMeE%3D&q4=0DsEZixLMeE%3D&q5=d0m9O93wxs1%3D&q6=walsKQ5cN%2FU%3D&q7=aNpazLK8uPWJdt69a%2F9Z557mYNdN%2Bjl&frm1\\_npage=1](http://www.yadvashem.org/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_FL.cmd/acd/.ar/sa.portlet.VictimDetailsSubmitAction/.c/6_0_9Dl.ce/7_0_V9f.p/5_0_P1f.d/0?victim_details_id=4133701&victim_details_name=Silberstein+Hedwig&q1=daFpfDxraHs%3D&q2=Zp27HldZ0aC%2B4M829iSlkvAp1TPWJUK7&q3=0DsEZixLMeE%3D&q4=0DsEZixLMeE%3D&q5=d0m9O93wxs1%3D&q6=walsKQ5cN%2FU%3D&q7=aNpazLK8uPWJdt69a%2F9Z557mYNdN%2Bjl&frm1_npage=1)

<sup>38</sup> Sandra Silberstein wrote: "My Dad met the Arnheim's boat. At the wedding (Sandra's wedding..wds), Anneliese told the story that when they landed in NYC and she was on deck, she saw a man walking back and forth carrying roses, and thought that whoever was being met by him was a very lucky person. It turned out that it was my Dad welcoming the German relatives, whom he had never before met." And also "My understanding is that they gave each emigrating family \$1000, which some repaid, but it was not required."

emigration to England of Ottie (Maerker) and her husband Alfred Mottek and their child Harry, just as the war broke out in 1939. Sol also secured the release of Wolfgang Maerker from Buchenwald, and arranged for the departure of Wolfgang and his wife Erne from Germany. While they were at sea, war broke out and the ship was diverted to Brazil. Their furniture and most possessions had already been sent to the USA, accompanying Wolfgang's sisters. There the furniture remained for the duration of the war. Erne and Wolfgang entered Brazil with just a suitcase, but they managed. Wolfgang had owned a department store in Germany before they were forced to leave. In Brazil, he established a number of different businesses in Sao Paulo.

The four children of Jennie and Carl Maerker were now out of harm's way, but Carl, his (second) wife Minna nee Tuchler, and their son Robert were trapped in Germany. The immigration quota for the USA was heavily over-subscribed<sup>39</sup>, and all attempts to obtain the release of the remaining Maerkers failed. The names of Carl and Robert are listed in Yad Vashem's Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names<sup>40</sup>. Carl Maerker, the store owner from Thale, was the doughty fighter for his rights that we read about some pages back. Sadly, this pattern of the older generation remaining behind, to be swallowed up in the Holocaust, was typical<sup>41</sup>. Anneliese and Heinz Arnheim struggled, but failed, to get Heinz's father and mother, Michaelis and Cecilie, out of harm's way. They, and Werner Nothmann's father, Martin, are listed as Holocaust victims.

Walter Silberstein, Wilhelm's son by his first wife, Martha, had tremendous difficulties in obtaining his permanent immigration visa. He and his wife, Erika Mueller, first reached the US on a three-week tourist visa in October 1935 and were met in New York by his uncle Herman. In February 1937, they arrived again as tourists, allowed in for three (Walter) and six (Erika) weeks, with uncle Herman again as their contact person in New York, and leaving Hedwig, Walter's stepmother, still in Berlin.

They tried again in November 1938, being met now by half-brother Henry Silberstein. Apparently this time they had not returned to

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<sup>39</sup> By the end of June 1939, 309,000 German, Austrian, and Czech Jews had applied for the 27,000 places available under the quota. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468>

<sup>40</sup> From the Yad Vashem records: Carl Maerker was born in 1873. Prior to WWII he lived in Berlin, Germany. Carl was murdered in Lodz, Poland. Robert Maerker was born in Thale in 1933. Prior to WWII he lived in Berlin, Germany. During the war he was in Berlin. Deported with transport from Berlin to Auschwitz Birkenau, Camp on 19/02/1943.

<sup>41</sup> At the end of 1939, about 202,000 Jews remained in Germany (of a pre-war number of 530,000) and 57,000 in annexed Austria, many of them elderly.

<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468>



*Walter Silberstein, Erika Mueller-Silberstein, and Herman Silberstein  
New York 1937*

Germany, their transit visas having been made out in Paris, with Walter's last place of residence being recorded as Farnham, England and Erica's as Paris. Things were still not smooth for them. They were detained by the immigration agent, Mr Wall, who entered the cause of detention as "doubtful transit", requiring them to leave a bond assuring that they would leave the US by January 9th. There is no further record of any border crossing but they must have succeeded in arranging to stay in the USA, since by 1945 Walter was living as a photographer in Baltimore<sup>42</sup>.

### **Kurt Silberstein flees to the UK, Rudi to Australia**

By the 23rd March 1933, the Nazis had effectively seized power in Germany, with the passing of the Enabling Act<sup>43</sup>, their response to the Reichstag fire. On the 7th April, the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service was passed, banning Jews from being employed in government<sup>44</sup>. Kurt Silberstein was by then finishing his training in Internal Medicine under Professors Ehrmann and Kuttner in Berlin, having completed his initial medical studies in Leipzig, four years before. He was working as a surgeon in Berlin and had only 6 months to go before becoming fully qualified. His daughter tells that "he went to a lecture by one of his professors. The professor held up a picture of an ape-like-skull and said that Jews had skulls like that. Kurt stood up and in front of all said that it 'was unfounded scientifically and untrue' and walked out." He had had enough of the situation in Germany and with no future there, he made plans to leave

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from Henry Silberstein to Rudi Silverton February 1945

<sup>43</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf\\_Hitler#Reichstag\\_fire\\_and\\_the\\_March\\_elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler#Reichstag_fire_and_the_March_elections)

<sup>44</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Jews\\_in\\_Germany#Jews\\_under\\_the\\_Nazis\\_281933.E2.80.931939.29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Germany#Jews_under_the_Nazis_281933.E2.80.931939.29)



Germany for Britain. Crucial to the success of his emigration was the following letter from Albert Einstein, then in Ostend, Belgium:

*Le Coq, bei Ostende, 30. III. 33.*

*Herrn Kurt Silberstein, Dr. Med., der bei meinem Freunde  
dem hervorragenden Internisten und bisherigen Direktor des  
Krankenhaus Berlin-Neukölln <sup>Prof. Ehrmann</sup> zwei Jahre lang als Assistent  
thätig war, wird mir von diesem als ausgezeichnetem Fachmann  
und Arzt aufs Wärmste empfohlen. Da ich das Verantwortungs-  
gefühl und die kritische Natur meines Freundes genau kenne,  
hätte ich mich für berechtigt, Herrn Dr. Silberstein mannesrecht  
die Forderung <sup>ausdrücklicher</sup> Ausländischer Rechte und Notizen für würdig  
zu erklären, abgesehen dass er als Arzt und als Persönlichkeit  
voller Vertrauen verdient. Ich möchte noch erwähnen, dass  
Herr Silberstein noch bei seiner zweiten anerkannten Antritt auf  
dem Gebiete der inneren Medizin, Herrn Prof. Kuttner in Berlin  
mit bestem Erfolge zwei Jahre lang als Assistent thätig  
gewesen ist.*

*Albert Einstein.*

which was translated as:

*Le Coq near Ostende 30. 1V. 33*

*Mr. Kurt Silberstein, Doctor of Medicine, who was active for two years as an assistant to my friend Professor Ehrmann, the excellent Internist and serving Director of the Berlin-Neukolln Hospital, was recommended to me highly by the latter as an excellent expert and Physician. As I am well aware about the sense of responsibility and critical nature of my friend, I feel justified to declare Dr Silberstein to be worthy for promotion by foreign physicians and Institutes, being convinced that he deserves full trust as Physician and personally. . I would still like to mention that Mr Silberstein was also active for two years with best results as assistant to a second recognised authority in the field of Internal medicine, namely Professor Kuttner in Berlin.*

*Albert Einstein*

Translated from the German on August 3, 1997 by Frank Weiss, Australia.

Einstein must have been inundated with requests for such letters at that fearful time, but clearly he felt that Kurt Silberstein was worth his support.

In the event, Kurt was allowed into the UK but had to spend two years (in Belfast), re-qualifying as a medical practitioner and learning English. He became a GP and never regretted it<sup>45</sup>. In Belfast, in

<sup>45</sup> According to his daughter, Joan.

December 1933, he married Wally "Schaeffi" Kschiwan<sup>46</sup> who had also been living in Berlin. Kurt first worked as a medical officer for a Friendly Society<sup>47</sup>, living in Cambridge. Later, the couple moved across town to Coleridge Rd in Cherry Hinton, a suburb of Cambridge, where Kurt set up a medical practice, and where the Silberstein family lived for much of the remainder of Kurt and Schaeffi's lives.

In general, life was not all that easy for the refugees. As far as we know, however, Kurt and Wally were not interned after the outbreak of the War in September 1939, as apposed to 27,000<sup>48</sup> of the 40,000<sup>49</sup> or so German and Austrian Jewish refugees who were accepted into the UK. In spite of such war-time anti-German suspicions, Kurt's reputation as a doctor led to his appointment as the Police Surgeon of Cambridge when the post fell vacant during the war, and he remained there until his retirement in 1973. Kurt was fortunate in being able to work at his profession, unlike so many of the refugees, who had to take menial jobs to support themselves for the early years of their exile. But was it only fortune? Kurt was clearly a very talented doctor. Indeed, in the funeral oration for Kurt, his long-standing friend and fellow refugee, John Goldsmith, said: "His academic potential was recognized after the war by the German Government who realized that in different political circumstances, he would have received a Chair in Medicine" adding, prophetically: "Now we will have to leave this to one or more of his grandchildren". In fact, two of Kurt's grandsons have gone on to careers in medicine. One is a cardiothoracic surgeon in Plymouth, the other a consultant radiologist at the Medical School in Brighton and also Medical Director of Cancer Services for Sussex.

It was in Cambridge, as we saw before, that the two branches of the Rolnik tree were once again reunited when Dr Silberstein, whose grandmother (Johanna Rolnik) had left Upyna in about 1866, attended the brit (circumcision) of the son of Wilfred Stein, whose grandfather, Johanna's brother Wolf Rollnick, had stayed on in Lithuania until 1894.

Kurt and Schaeffi Silberstein had two daughters, Joan and Ann, who live in England with their husbands and children<sup>50</sup>. Kurt's mother, Clara (Schwerin) Silberstein managed to leave Germany in 1937, and came to live with her son in Cambridge.

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<sup>46</sup> The name is of East Prussian origin and means: "crooked, curved, bent, wrong", not the impression that Schaeffi made.

<sup>47</sup> For his obituary in the British Medical Journal see:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1713767/pdf/brmedj00028-0070.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.ajr.org.uk/documents/cb\\_6\\_internment.pdf](http://www.ajr.org.uk/documents/cb_6_internment.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468>

<sup>50</sup> Joan's husband, Peter Marchbank is a well-known BBC music producer and orchestra conductor. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Marchbank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Marchbank)



*Annie Silberstein, Schaefi Silberstein, Dr. Kurt Silberstein, Clara Silberstein (Kurt's mother) and Joan Silberstein - November 1957 in Cambridge, England.*

Kurt's younger brother, Rudi, did not have Albert Einstein to support his entry into the UK. The difficult years of the Depression in Germany had meant that he had had to leave school without completing his education. He left Magdeburg for Berlin where he worked for a wholesale shirt company – Willy Lesser - at first as an inventory clerk and later as a salesman. Rudi boarded at a place which was owned by two aunts of Gerda Kaufmann who later became his girlfriend and then his wife. He married Gerda in 1935. Meanwhile, his brother Kurt was growing increasingly worried about the future of Jews in Germany and was urging Rudi to leave. Rudi had applied for a visa both to America and to Australia. The Australian visa came first<sup>51</sup>, and in 1937 Rudi and Gerda Silberstein left Germany, staying in England for some weeks before taking a ship to Canada. The Trans Canadian Railway took them to Vancouver from where they travelled to Australia on RMS Niagara, arriving in Sydney on the 12th February 1938.

Friends of Rudi, who were already living in Australia, had advised him to buy and bring a knitting machine, saying that they were very scarce in Australia. Rudi bought a flatbed knitting machine. A friend, still in Germany in the furniture removal business, packaged it up in a crate, labelling it 'furniture'. One couldn't take money out of Germany but could take personal effects, and furniture qualified for this. Arriving in Sydney, Rudi soon went to the East Sydney Technical

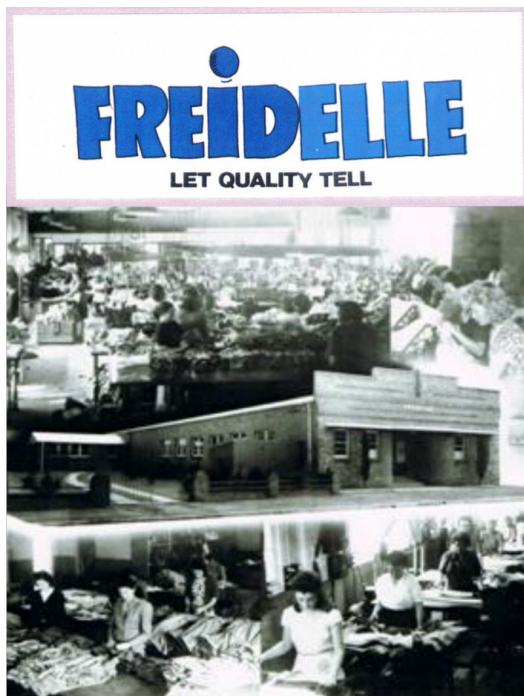
<sup>51</sup> This left their American application available to other Silbersteins still in Germany, who were then able to make use of the visa to immigrate to America and escape Nazi Germany.

College to learn how to use his new machine. Rudi Silverton was always streetwise and resourceful and he was able to speak English quite well when he arrived in Sydney, having spent a year working in retail in England in 1927 as a 20 year-old.

It happened that Rudi and Gerda had two good friends from Magdeburg, Hans and Friedel Fliece, who had arrived in Sydney in 1937. Friedel was an experienced dressmaker, able to make patterns and sew the garments. So Rudi and Friedel went into business. Renting a small place in Sydney's Royal Arcade, they set up the knitting machine and started knitting dresses for their specialty: 'big women'. Once the war started, wool was in short supply as so much was being used for making soldier's uniforms. As a result Rudi and Friedel decided to make knitted garments for children, using less wool, and "Freidelle Children's Wear" was born. During the war Freidelle manufactured military uniforms for the Armed Forces as well as children's wear.

The business started to grow. Friedel left to pursue her dream to make ladies' wear, but a new partner - Paul Becker- arrived from Germany. Not only did Paul put up capital, but he was a technical expert and could make patterns. After 25 years they had built up a large business employing over 200 people, with a factory in Wollongong, some 100 kms south of Sydney. Further expansion followed, with Freidelle manufacturing children's and teenage garments, now from textile materials.

Gerda also helped in the business, being very gifted at needle work, crocheting, embroidery and cross stitching. She did embroidery on the cardigans that had been made on the knitting machine, doing her work in the evenings at home. Even Gerda's mother, Sara Kaufmann, also gifted in handwork, was in the 1960's pressed into



*First section of the 'Freidelle' Wollongong Factory about 1949*

working, crocheting collars and cuffs for children's and teenage garments<sup>52</sup>.

Rudi's two sons, Robert and Barry Silverton,<sup>53</sup> joined Freidelle after completing their schooling and further studies at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). Robert specialized in management, Barry in fashion design. With Rudi and his sons travelling extensively to Europe and the US to keep abreast of fashion trends, Freidelle at its prime was exporting throughout the world, and in the late 1970's was one of the leading children's fashion manufacturers in Australia.

In the mid 1970's, Computer Technology was becoming essential in the fashion industry. Barry Silverton spearheaded its introduction into Freidelle, establishing a separate organisation that provided IT services to Freidelle and to other manufacturers.

In the 1980's, when cheap Asian imports began to flood the markets, Freidelle was forced to downsize. Some manufacturing was moved offshore to Asia, and the Wollongong factory was sold.

Rudi retired in 1980 and died in 1986. Gerda continued to manage the Company's retail outlet in downtown Sydney well into her late 70's and early 80's. On Robert's retirement in 2000, Freidelle was sold to the Australian licensee of OshKosh, the world famous garment manufacturer.

Barry progressed with building the computer business – Computer Applications Pty Ltd., and in later years focused his endeavours entirely on the expansion of that company. He retired from the business in 2009.

But in the early years, life had not been so easy for the new immigrants. When the war started they were considered 'Friendly Enemy Aliens' and were obliged to abide by numerous rules and regulations. Refugees were not permitted to have a radio and had to register with the Police every week. Rudi had to obtain a permit each time he travelled out of Sydney to visit country towns – Bathurst, Orange, Dubbo, Forbes and Parkes - in connection with his business. There was one occasion when Rudi changed his plans and didn't report that he was making other arrangements. He was strongly reprimanded for this and his trespass was documented in his 'Alien Refugee File'.

When Rudi and Gerda applied for Naturalisation in October 1943, their application was closely scrutinised. In Rudi's dossier, several

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<sup>52</sup> Gerda's parents, Salo and Sarah Kaufmann, had immigrated before the war to Sao Paulo together with Gerda's sister, Ellen Jungermann. In 1954 Salo and Sarah came to visit Gerda and Gerda's brother, Gunter Kaufmann, who was also in Australia. The parents went back to Sao Paulo but eventually returned to Australia in 1958, living happily in Sydney for their remaining years.

<sup>53</sup> The family name had, early on, been Anglicised to Silverton.



small charges had been recorded against him, one for travelling without a permit and two minor traffic offences. Also a breach of the 'change of name regulations': on the Freidelle Business Sign outside the firm's office, Rudi's 'original name – Silberstein' and the 'changed name – Silverton' were both required and this had not been done. All this delayed the acceptance of the application for Australian Naturalisation.

Refugees were closely watched by everyone, including neighbours. Rudi and Gerda Silverton originally lived in Bondi, in the Eastern Suburbs, in a flat near the Ocean. One evening in late December 1942, neighbours reported seeing 'flashing lights' coming from their balcony.

From Rudi Silberstein's dossier – part of the letter from the Security Services dated 4th January 1943 reads:

*"House facing across vacant allotment occupied by refugees, showed flashing light revolving with circular movement between 10.20 pm and 10.35 pm on 29th December. Light could be seen from the sea, flashing light was the only light showing from house. When switched off the house remained in darkness."* (The concern of the neighbours was that there might have been signalling to a submarine at sea,)

Report by the Security Service after investigation of the flat - dated 6th January 1943: *'The light was a standard electric lamp temporarily taken onto the small balcony of the house, in order to locate a leak in the roof, which had occurred during the Silverton's absence. They moved the light about while the mopping up operation was going on. The investigator held the light in position and was quite satisfied it could not be seen at sea.'*

*No Further Action Necessary. 'Signed by the Security Service – Sydney 1943*

For Rudi and Gerda Silverton assimilation in Australia for themselves and their children was always their priority.



*Naomi Silverton, Robert Silverton, Rudi Silverton, Barry Silverton and Gerda Silverton - 1960 - East Lindfield, Sydney, Australia*

Overcoming these early problems, the Silvertons became fully integrated into Australian life “in this fortunate country which gave them and their children such wonderful opportunities”, as Rudi’s daughter wrote.

### **Patriots again – the Silbersteins in World War II**

By the time the USA entered WW2, Heinz, now Henry, Silberstein was well established in a medical practice in White Plains, NY. He and Johanna had had another child, Peter, born in 1938. But Henry was strongly motivated to take an effective part in the war against the Motherland that had rejected him and that had already murdered his mother<sup>54</sup>. A letter from him to his Australian cousins, written in February 1945 from “Somewhere in France”, survives. He had enclosed a photograph of himself as a Captain in the US Army.

In the letter, he says why he enlisted. His daughter Judith, he wrote, had said that she “*does not want to see the day when her children see their daddy go to the wars. This remark from a little girl has stuck in my mind, but, after all, the reason for my volunteering was that I wanted to do everything in my power to ensure a safe future for them.*” He had by the time the letter was written already taken part in the landing at the Normandy Beach. “*We were all too much emotionally stirred, as to think of any hardships...it seems sometimes impossible how human beings could stand that kind of thing without a word of complain[t]...Nobody at home can imagine how much devotion and endurance were necessary to accomplish what they did.*” But by the time the letter was written, he was safely settled in to a magnificent chateau, with French cooks taking care of their “earthly wants”. His letter is full of his worries about his mother, Johanna’s parents, and her sister (Katchen)’s parents-in-law<sup>55</sup>, none of whom had managed to escape from Europe before the war.

Henry was on a visit to then newly-liberated Paris when on May 14th he felt ill and died of a coronary thrombosis in the ambulance on his way to hospital. Henry was buried in France but reinterred a few years after the war in the Long Island National Cemetery<sup>56, 57</sup>. Sandra

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<sup>54</sup> Henry did not know this at the time the letter that follows was written.

<sup>55</sup> Hidden during the war in Holland, the parents-in-law of Katchen (Johanna’s sister), the Ehrenfreunds, did manage to survive and finally reach the USA. Kurt Ehrenfreund, formerly an outfitter in Berlin, wrote an account of his travails and eventual recovery. [http://digital.cjh.org/R/D65YXJVYJN7V6MVENT9VVVPXTX42M3GJ29GI8I4FB3D3MCNEFB-05034?func=dbin-jumpfull&object\\_id=377084&local\\_base=GEN01&pds\\_handle=GUEST](http://digital.cjh.org/R/D65YXJVYJN7V6MVENT9VVVPXTX42M3GJ29GI8I4FB3D3MCNEFB-05034?func=dbin-jumpfull&object_id=377084&local_base=GEN01&pds_handle=GUEST)

<sup>56</sup> Name: Henry A Silberstein Service Info.: CAPT US ARMY WORLD WAR II.  
Birth Date: 24 Jan 1905. Death Date: 14 May 1945. Interment Date: 24 Aug 1949  
Cemetery: Long Island National Cemetery 2040 Wellwood Avenue Farmingdale, NY 11735-1211. Buried At: Section J Site 14469

<sup>57</sup> In 1948, his children, Judith and Peter, with Johanna who had by then remarried to Abram Greenfield, went on a visit to Europe, to meet Johanna’s sister’s parents-in-law in Holland.



*Henry Silberstein (1905-1945)*



*Howard Silberstein (1919-2001)*

Silberstein writes that Henry was her father Milton's closest friend. Henry and Milton were, of course, cousins.

Milton's brother Julian Silberstein was another cousin of Henry's. Julian's son Howard was, even as a small boy, keen on planes and flying. In 1940, he joined the US Navy as an aviation cadet (photograph, above, right). By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7th 1941, he was the pilot of a catapult-launched biplane<sup>58</sup>, attached to the battleship USS Tennessee, heavily damaged but not sunk in the attack. During the Battle of Midway, Howard was shot down by an American ship as he and other U.S. pilots were chasing a disabled Japanese plane headed for the ship. The Japanese plane also crashed into the sea. Howard escaped without a scratch. In the 50's, he was assigned to the Bureau of Weapons. During the Cuban missile crisis he developed an operational plan for the Naval task force led by the aircraft carrier USS Lexington and was on the first crew to board a Soviet cargo ship as part of the U.S. quarantine of Cuba. After retiring from the Navy, Howard became president of Marquardt, an aerospace defense contractor<sup>59</sup>.

### **After the War - the families take up their lives again, some in a new land**

As soon as they could, Alfred and Otilie (Maerker) Mottek and their son Harry (who had spent the war years in England) left England

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<sup>58</sup> <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=20011031&slug=silberstein30m>

<sup>59</sup> Howard Silberstein and his wife Shirley Rae Myers had two sons: Howard Jr. and Eric. Howard became a hospital administrator and Eric works on the link between advertising and computing. At the time of Howard Sr.'s death he left five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

to join the other Maerker daughters in the USA. They settled in Baltimore where Werner and Joanna Nothmann (later Nothman) were already living. Harry completed high school in Baltimore and then went to Johns Hopkins to study engineering. He joined Motorola in 1961 becoming Director of International Operations for the Motorola Government Electronics Division, managing their office in Geneva.



*Ralph W. Eisner and Harry H. Mottek examining a range transponder<sup>60</sup>.*

Werner Nothmann (Nothman) had been in the insurance business in Berlin. Werner, Joan (who became officially Joan, but was known as Hanni to her friends) and their four year old daughter Renate first settled in New York City, then moved to Baltimore, MD and finally to St. Louis, MO, where the Arnheims (Heinz and Anneliese) joined them. Their son Michael Arnheim was named after Heinz's father, who had not survived the Holocaust. Werner worked in the office of an insurance company. Later, that office closed, and Werner transferred to the company's Baltimore office, while the Arnheims remained in St. Louis. Renate Nothman attended the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and became an occupational therapist, setting up an occupational therapy department in Tel Aviv. In Israel she met and married Leon Milewich from Argentina. They had three children.

Wolfgang and Erne Maerker in Brazil had two children, Mario and Darcy, both born in Sao Paulo. Mario married Stefi Solska. As a Mechanical and Electrical Engineer he worked for many years bringing technology to countries around the world. Later he joined his father-in-law's factory making silk stockings. Darcy married David Krybus in Sao Paulo Brazil. One of their daughters became a doctor and married a doctor in Sao Paulo.

So all these Silberstein descendants, those that survived the Holocaust, became effective citizens in their new lands. Capable and creative, they could have contributed much to their motherland had they been permitted to do so. The wider world is enriched by their efforts.

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<sup>60</sup> [http://www.motorolasolutions.com/web/Business/Corporate/About/History/\\_docs/1971\\_Motorola\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.motorolasolutions.com/web/Business/Corporate/About/History/_docs/1971_Motorola_Annual_Report.pdf)