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# THE AFJMH NEWSLETTER

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## NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

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***The Setting Up of a New Governing Body*** Since autumn 2000, the organization of the JMH has been subject to a review undertaken by an external consultant (Samy Bill of the Society for Museology of Basle University). A first step in this direction was the drawing up of new job profiles for individual staff members and of a new overall strategic plan. This plan was completed a few weeks ago and will now be translated into English and sent to all members of the Association. This text forms the starting point for the setting up of a new governing body. A committee consisting of representatives of the Association Board, the Hohenems municipality, and the Vorarlberg province is conducting preparatory work. It is proposed that a foundation-like body be set up which will give the Museum the status of an independent institution whose viability is safeguarded by long-term financing contracts with the municipality, the province, and the Austrian state. The new governing body should be in place by summer 2002 at the latest.

***The Personnel Situation*** A settlement has now been reached in the dispute between the Hohenems municipality, the Association Board, and the former director of the Museum, Dr. Thomas Krapf, who was given notice in August 2000. Dr. Krapf will receive a compensation sum to be raised by the Hohenems municipality, and the Association Board. This settlement will adversely affect the budget until 2003, making it impossible to refill the vacancy until then. Since August 2000, Dr. Johannes Inama has been entrusted with the management of the Museum. The other members of staff are Eva-Maria Hesche (part-time), who is in charge of archives and research, Helmut Schlatter, who is principally responsible for looking after visitors and school groups, and Renate Kleiser, who is responsible for administration. In addition there are external members of staff who can be called upon for guiding as well as assistants, who are mainly students, for supervision and project work.

***The Former Synagogue*** The fire brigade, which modified and occupied the old synagogue since 1955, has finally moved out of the building. The synagogue, in use until the time of the Nazis, was built between 1770 and 1772, and renovated between 1863 and 1867. Actually, all that is left of the synagogue is the foundation and the outer wall. To determine what to do with the old synagogue is the focus of a number of exhibits and discussions. The current consensus appears to support usage of the building for a Cultural Municipal Hall.

***Exhibits*** Since June 2001 several exhibits have been displayed in the empty garage-hall of the building. The first one was an installation by Arno Gisinger, in which he transformed the garage into an oversized dark-chamber with a large photograph of a ritual object in the middle. During one week in August, the Museum displayed films, which gave a glimpse into Jewish life. This was followed by a video installation by the Israel artist Naomi Tereza Salmon. Other exhibits continued later in 2001 and will continue into 2002. The projects are attended by an exhibition, which sets out the history

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of the building, with old plans and photographs of the synagogue, as well as the inventory list of the contents of the synagogue prepared on 17 November 1938 when the Nazis took it over.

***Jewish Life in Germany Today*** From February 17 through April 1, 2002, the museum's special exhibit will be devoted to Jewish Life in Germany Today. In view of the scarce financial and human resources at the museum's disposal, it has become necessary to curtail the frequency of exhibitions. Thus, the Rosenthal exhibition had to be postponed from the fall of 2001 in order to allow adequate time for conscientious preparation.

***Jewish Families from Hohenems: The Rosenthals*** The Rosenthal exhibition is now scheduled to open on June 7, 2002 and run until October 6, 2002. Preparations and research for the Rosenthal exhibition are currently in progress. The museum states that it is particularly interested in receiving information, objects and documents (including copies) concerning the history of the families, in order to be able to select materials for the final presentation from as wide a collection as possible. If you are in possession of interesting documents or have stories to tell please get in touch with the Jewish Museum Hohenems.

It is intended that projects on other families should follow the Rosenthal exhibition in future years.

## A FAMILY CHRONICLE

### ***The Brentano Family in the United States***

Our knowledge of this family is limited, and we hope that one of our members can add to the following, which was printed in the Blue Card Calendar for the year 5758 (1997/98) with the Theme: *Jewish Pioneers in America*. The Blue Card is a charitable organization, founded in 1940, dedicated to the support of European Jewish survivors in this country who still suffer from the after effects of Nazi persecution.

August Brentano (1831-1886), born in Austria, emigrated to the U.S. in 1853. For two years he sold newspapers in the streets of New York before setting up a stand, which carried local and foreign newspapers and magazines. In 1858 he opened a book and stationery store, and in 1870 the large Brentano's Literary Emporium. It became New York's leading bookstore and served as a meeting place for New York's literati. In the 1870's August's nephews, August, Arthur and Simon, joined the firm, which they acquired in 1877. They further expanded the business with bookstores in many cities of the U.S., as well as in London and Paris. Simon, head of the firm after his uncle's retirement, wrote a number of books on fire control. He was succeeded by his brother, Arthur, who founded the American Canoe Association and published its magazine. His son, Lowell (1895-1950), became head of Brentano's editorial department and wrote a number of novels and plays, some of which were made into motion pictures.

We have heard from a Brentano descendant living in France, Claire Stancu. She and her mother, Micheline Delerue, attended the 1998 Descendants' meeting. After the meeting, her mother, who had for some 20 years undertaken genealogical research regarding her family gave considerable information to the museum about Regina Brentano (born in Hohenems, but died in Paris where her son had settled down). Unfortunately, Mrs. Delerue has passed away. Nevertheless, Ms. Stancu kindly writes to us that she now has all her mother's files and notebooks pertaining to her genealogical research and that in time she will do her best to try to retrieve some information about the Brentanos from her mother's notebooks.

### ***RABBI ARON TANZER***

We all owe a considerable debt to Rabbi Tänzer, the author of the book [Die Geschichte der Juden in Hohenems](#). That book provides us with an image of our ancestors' lives in Hohenems and also family trees

going back far further than we could ever research to construct on our own. Rabbi Tänzer's influence and importance extends significantly beyond Hohenems. He served as Rabbi of Goeppingen and Jebenhausen in Wurttemberg from September 1, 1907 until his death on February 26, 1937. The Goppingen Jewish Museum has a great deal of information about him. For those who can read German with Internet access, we refer to <http://www.edjewnet.de>. At a later date, we hope to translate some of that voluminous information for our Newsletter readers. Assistance in that regard would be welcome. However, already translated for us by Erwin Taenzer, his son and AFJMH member, is the obituary delivered at the time of Dr. Tänzer's death:

Dr. Aron Tänzer by Rabbi Dr. Auerbach, Stuttgart.

Published in: " Gemeinde-Zeitung für die Israelitischen Gemeinden Württembergs" on April 1, 1937. (Periodical for the Jewish Congregations of Württemberg).

German Jewry has suffered a severe loss a few weeks ago by the death of Rabbi Dr. Aron Tänzer. Probably the most capable scholarly mind was torn from Germany's rabbinical profession.

He was born in 1871 in Pressburg and came from an illustrious line of rabbis. He was introduced to Jewish texts in earliest childhood. Barely beyond boyhood, he entered the famous rabbinical seminary in Pressburg. Whoever wanted to succeed there had to already have a considerable amount of Jewish knowledge. In this institution were young scholars, who were to be admired for their knowledge and ability to think. There was little modern education, to be sure. But those trained there had no trouble acquiring it. That is demonstrated by the example of the 18 year-old Aron Tänzer. Rabbi Dr. Neuwirth, Stuttgart, a former fellow student told me: "Only few Jews lived in a small town near Pressburg. They invited three students of the rabbinical seminary for the high holidays in order to have a minyan. One of them was Aron Tänzer. Prior to the final prayer on Yom Kippur, Tänzer stood before the congregation and addressed it with a sermon written in perfect High German. It was well organized, thoughtful and spirited. The audience was amazed at this youth and received the sermon enthusiastically. Where did he learn that?"

He was one of the most industrious students. His agile mind did not rest. He searched deeply for the truth. It is almost unbelievable how much effort he put into that. Eventually he became an important historian. The distinguished Jewish Philosopher Moritz Lazarus exerted the greatest influence on him. Tänzer looked up to him with the utmost admiration. The communication with Moritz Lazarus was a most significant experience. The 32-year old says in the preamble to his paper "Jewry and the theory of evolution" with which he entered the acrimonious Bible and Babel controversy: "I vowed in the cherished masters hand to work in his sense to the best of my ability for the honor of Judaism, to enter without fear for its progressive development, deepened understanding and general approval."

His first treatise dealt with Joseph Albo (1381-1445), the well-known Jewish philosopher of religion. His importance was questioned. The author of the "Grundlehren" (basic teachings) was reproached that he took his best thoughts from the Jewish philosopher of religion Chasdai ibn Crescas (1340-1410); that he did not shrink from copying him literally. The 25 year old Tänzer proved, that this is not so. Even where the wording of both philosophers of the middle ages seems to be the same, they nevertheless talk about different thoughts. Aron Tänzer is already an independent thinker. The following work was mentioned above: He mastered completely the Bible-Babel literature, and adopted the extensive material with his innate thoroughness. The young cider is still fermenting, it storms and rages in this young scholar. Passionately, he writes down his sentences but gradually this young mind controls itself; he presents his thinking calmly, in a language of noble, exemplary beauty. His intellectual individuality, which did not change, was already evident at that time. While he treats his topics in strict scientific manner, he is hard pressed with practical Jewish topics of the time. He was never a bookworm, who is not concerned with the world around him. In a small book he calls for a convention of Jewish scholars and rabbis of the whole world.

His treatise about the history and statistics of religious mixed marriages of Jews (1913) is a masterpiece that will not become obsolete. "Countries, in which the largest number of Jews enter mixed marriages, are Germany and Hungary. In the first place, Germany." Next to its contents the form of the treatise is noteworthy. The style is remarkable. He then wrote a number of historical papers during the war in which he served as a chaplain. Among them, "Among the Jews of Brest Litowsk, Poland." Of inestimable value to Jewish history and to the descendants are his great works: "The history of the Jews in Hohenems" and "The history of the Jews in Jebenhausen and Göppingen." It is hard to surpass the conscientiousness and care this scholar devotes to his work. He collects and studies the sources with untiring patience. In spite of the erudition his books make for easy and fascinating reading. The reader experiences a wealth of history. His history of the Jews of Württemberg is a finished manuscript and will be published in a few weeks.

His biography of Moritz Lazarus has not yet been published. The widow of the philosopher bequeathed the literary estate of Moritz Lazarus - letters from and to him - to his faithful and discerning friend, A. Tänzer. He sorted and examined this lofty inheritance and made this inexhaustible intellectual treasure available to future generations.

He was still working on a gigantic task: "The Torah in the Talmud," a collection of all torah references of both Talmuds translated and explained. He wrote day and night as if he had a foreboding that his life would end soon, but he collapsed without having finished this great undertaking. He finished the first, second and fifth book, the third and fourth are missing. All the above-mentioned writings and books do not give a complete picture of his scientific pursuits. Basically all his lectures were scientific achievements and ready to be printed.

In the Talmud it is said (Horajotz 13a): "A Jewish scholar ranks higher than the Jewish king for when the former dies there is no other like him, when the latter dies every healthy Jewish man is able to assume the dignified place of a king".

German Jewry mourns the passing of Rabbi Dr. Aron Tänzer.

## ***SPECIAL FEATURE***

Several months ago, in 2001, we at AFJMH were delighted to receive the enclosed captivating article authored by our esteemed member Ann Morris who resides in Martinez, California. Accompanying the article, Ann included the following brief bio:

I'm not a direct descendant of the famous Salomon Sulzer, the 19th century cantor and composer. As far as I can determine, he was a second cousin to my great grandfather, Wilhelm Mendelsohn (Billy in the article). The cantor, Billy, and I have mutual ancestors, starting with Salomon Levi in Sulz according to Aron Tänzer's 1905 book. The "Essay on Hohenems" that appeared in your newsletter indicates that there was an even earlier ancestor named Josle Levi, the grandfather of the Josle Levi who died in 1753 who is mentioned in Tänzer's book.