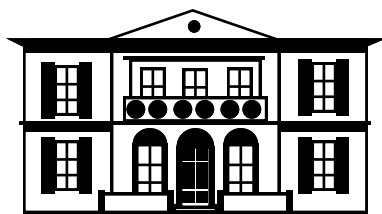


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SEPTEMBER 2010



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## “YOU NEVER KNOW” - A STORY ABOUT THE LIFE AND ANCESTRY OF CANTOR JACOB HOHENEMSER

LEROY E. HOFFBERGER

“You never know,” a colloquialism often used to express uncertainty about the outcome (good or bad) of an event or situation, is quite apropos to the “Kleine Geschichte” I am about to unfold.

Feeling (at age 83) the desire to return to Zurich, Switzerland, the city where I began my “love affair” with Europe, over 50 years ago, I took a BA flight out of Baltimore-Washington Airport to London and a connecting BA flight to Zurich in April, 2008. Before leaving, however, I contacted an old expatriate friend of mine (whom I had met in Frankfurt, Germany, through another friend, many years ago) who was now living in Vaduz, Liechtenstein. Since Vaduz is only 1 1/2 hours away from Zurich, we arranged that at the end of my 3-day stay; he would pick me up and drive me to Vaduz for a 4-day stay

at a charming Chalet overlooking the Swiss and Austrian Alps.

After spending 3 lovely days at the Hotel Bauer Au Lac, visiting the Zurich Kunsthaus, one of my favorite museums, and seeing other places of interest, I was picked up by my friend and driven to Vaduz as planned. He was, of course, desirous of showing me the unbelievably beautiful countryside in Liechtenstein, particularly, the surrounding Alps and medieval towns. However, knowing that for my entire adult life I had been actively involved with numerous Jewish national and international organizations, my friend, who is a devout Catholic, was particularly anxious to take me to a Jewish Museum he had discovered in a small nearby town in Austria called “Hohenems.” He told me that the Museum, Hohenems, housed the permanent

collection of artifacts and documents that depict the 300 year history of the Jews of that community that began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Early the next day, he drove me to the Jewish Museum, Hohenems, where I met the director, Dr. Hanno Loewy. Dr. Loewy gave us a personal tour of the Museum, which was located in the former palatial home of one of Hohenems very successful Jewish families, the Rosenthals, who had made a great fortune in the textile business. But in 1991, with funds from the municipality of Hohenems and the State of Vorarlberg and donations from numerous others, it was restored to much of its former splendor to be used as a museum that would memorialize the birth and passing of a Jewish community that had achieved significant

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## “YOU NEVER KNOW” - A STORY ABOUT THE LIFE AND ANCESTRY OF CANTOR JACOB HOHENEMSER

*(Continued from page 1)*

prominence during its existence.

What is amazing about the history of the Jews of Hohenems is that while some perished in the Nazi death camps, most of the descendants of the early settlers had left Hohenems (during the Period of European Enlightenment in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) for many countries throughout the world, and had thus escaped the genocidal ravages of the Holocaust. Yet, so strong was their attachment to Hohenems, that succeeding generations have periodically held reunions by returning to Hohenems to renew their Jewish roots even though not all of the once Jewish families have remained Jewish.

This experience fascinated and moved me so when I returned to Baltimore, a week later, I did two things. One, I joined The American Friends of the Jewish Museum, Hohenems, Inc., a non-profit organization formed in 1999, and, two, I told my “shul buddies” about what I had seen on my vacation and, particularly,

about the Jewish Museum, Hohenems. It was in my recounting the story about my discovery of this unique Museum and about the history of the Jewish community of Hohenems, both previously unknown to me, that a series of coincidences occurred leading me to conclude that “You never know” when an event (i.e. my trip to Zurich), which was intended to be purely a personal nostalgic journey, takes on an unexpected significance that embarks you on a totally different path.

My “shul buddies” are a group of men who are regular attendees at Shabbat Services at my Synagogue (Chizuk Amuno Congregation). They usually arrive early (i.e. about a half hour before services begin) to “schmooze” (i.e. make small talk) before praying. On the particular Sabbath following my return, the group consisted of the Executive Director of the Synagogue, the Cantor of the Synagogue, several other friends, near whom I sit, and me. As I indicated above, I told my story about the Jewish

community of Hohenems. Immediately thereafter, the Executive Director said: “You know, Roy, I come from Providence, Rhode Island and I had a Hebrew teacher who was the Cantor of my shul whose name was Jacob Hohenemser. His nickname was “Honie.” I had no idea what the derivation of his name was, but hearing that there is a town in Austria called “Hohenems”, I feel that there must be a connection.”

No sooner had he informed me of that fact, then the Cantor of my Synagogue spoke up: “Roy, you’re not going to believe this, but the Cantor Hohenemser died, unexpectedly, at a young age, on a vacation trip to California so the synagogue (Temple Emanu-El), where he chanted, needed to find a replacement. My father, who is a baritone like Cantor Hohenemser, applied for the job and got it.”

This second fact was for me another link that I felt connected my trip, the purpose of which was to reconnect me to a past place and friend, to a Diaspora community of Jews whose place of origin was a remote Austrian town from which the

ancestors of a renowned individual known to my “shul buddies” came. It was a coincidence that I decided to take this trip for the purposes indicated, it was a coincidence that my expatriate friend knew of the Jewish Museum, Hohenems, and it was a further coincidence that two of my “shul buddies” had a connection with a renowned cantor whose ancestors had, hundreds of years ago, settled in this remote rural town. What I didn’t know then, but know now, is that the former Chief Rabbi of my Synagogue was also formerly the Chief Rabbi at Temple Emanu-El when the Chazzan Hohenemser served as cantor.

As a result of these so-called coincidences, I felt that I, too, had a connection with the “Chazzan Jacob Hohenemser” and I was therefore determined to find out more about his life in America and Europe as well as about his forbearers. What follows is the result of a year of research by several genealogists, Dr. Hanno Loewy and Hannes Sulzenbacher to all of whom I am deeply grateful. ❖

## CANTOR JACOB HOHENEMSER: A LIFE FOR JEWISH MUSIC

HANNES SULZENBACHER (VIENNA)

Jacob Hohenemser was born on 12 August 1911 in Haigerloch near Tübingen. His parents, Sigmund Hohenemser and Frieda Einstein, had a manufactured goods business on the main street in Haigerloch. In the 1920s, his father was also on the managing board of the Jewish community, which then consisted of approximately 200 people. As was the case in many Jewish rural communities, the number of members in the Haigerloch district constantly decreased during this time, mainly as a result of the migration to the cities, from a 32% share of the population in 1858 to approximately 14% in 1933.

His surname is derived from the town of Hohenems in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg, from where his great-grandfather Abraham Wolf migrated to the small town of Haigerloch in 1812 in the Kingdom of Württemberg, which had then existed for six years. When he migrated, Abraham Wolf's father, Jakob, was already deceased. Jakob Wolf had been a cattle dealer in Hohenems and his mother Judith was, according to Hohenems sources, born a Mendelsohn. According to the family register of Haigerloch, she came from the Haigerloch family Weil, married in Hohenems and returned to Haigerloch with her son

after the death of her husband. In Haigerloch she married Maier Ullman, bringing her son from Hohenems into the marriage.

In accordance with the laws that required Jews to assume German surnames (but were not always enacted at the same time in all regions) the branch of the family remaining in Hohenems was called Wohlgenannt and Abraham, who was now married in Haigerloch, assumed the name of Hohenemser, after his town of origin. Jacob Hohenemser's grandfather, after whom his grandson was to be named, was the son of Abraham who had married Judith, born Einstein, from Buchau. Jakob's son, Sigmund, born in 1869, married Mathilde Einstein from Laupheim. With a period of two years between them, she had her sons Jacob in 1911 and Manfred in 1913.

Jacob Hohenemser left Haigerloch at a young age. He moved to Höchberg, a market town located east of Würzburg, in which a Jewish community had existed since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. He is presumed to have lived in Höchberg and to have begun his apprenticeship in the city from there. He received his cantorial training in the Jewish Teachers Seminary in Würzburg, which was at

this time a centre of Orthodox Judaism in Germany. However, its importance was waning: very few young Jews wanted jobs that were directly associated with the religion and those who did went to the liberal Academy for the Science of Judaism in Berlin, to the Breslau Conservative Rabbinical Seminary or the Orthodox Academy of Esriel Hildesheimer in Berlin. Increasingly fewer parents wanted to send their children to a Jewish school; for them, the common non-denominational upbringing of the Weimar Republic was considered preferable. Slightly more than a third of Jewish children attended Jewish primary schools, with only the eastern Jewish immigrants considering it necessary to send their children to a Jewish school. The number of graduates in the Jewish Seminary of Teachers in Würzburg also decreased. When Jacob Hohenemser completed his studies in 1931, only 29 students were still at the institute.

During this time, the young cantor joined the "Blau-Weiss" (blue-white) organization. The hiking group, *Wanderbund Blau-Weiss*, founded in 1913, was the first Zionist youth movement in Germany and, at times, had 3,000 members. Decades later a Mr. Erlebacher told people in the Detroit Abraham Beth-Hillel community that

in his youth he joined the Zionist youth movement *Blau-Weiss* together with Jakob Hohenemser.

As regards his music, his time at the Jewish Seminary of Teachers in Würzburg influenced him in many ways. Studying there until the Seminary closed, Jakob was particularly influenced by classic Viennese music. The Israeli composer Tzipora Jochsberger, who studied as Hilde Jochsberger between 1934 and 1938, remembers the seminary as an "ideal world" in the midst of the start of the destruction of everything Jewish in Germany, an island of "Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart" in which the students lived "as if there had been no surroundings." Even in the 1960s, when Jacob Hohenemser sang the Schacharit religious service in Rhode Island, he used the "Se vuol ballare" melody from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro" for his interpretations of "El Adon."

At that time, liturgical music found itself in a state of change and new departures. The German musicologist Hugo Leichtentritt stated: "What one needs at present is music that has its own strong Jewish sound, religious consecration, but in doing so meets the demands of the ear that has been considerably influenced by the

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## CANTOR JACOB HOHENEMSER: A LIFE FOR JEWISH MUSIC

(Continued from page 3)  
newer music... In simple terms: the new Jewish music should be Jewish yet new, traditional yet modern." Although it had still been common a few decades ago to base the synagogue singing on opera or even operetta melodies, this tradition was often questioned. For, in the course of the nationalization of the European music tradition throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish musicology developed that posed questions regarding the existence of genuine Jewish music and that viewed the influence of the Christian musical life on the Jewish one as dubious and negative. People were searching for the genuine Jewish music in Eastern Europe as well as in Palestine and investigated the speech of Ashkenazi and Oriental *chazans*, as the cantors were still called in Eastern Europe. The aim was to create traditions that contained more than simply medieval melodies and scales adapted from the non-Jewish environment. Jacob Hohenemser's well-founded cantorial education can perhaps therefore be described as old fashioned.

After his education was complete, he went to Worms where he worked at the famous Raschi synagogue. His time in Worms saw the National Socialists take over Germany, which, according to a statement from his childhood friend Erle-

bacher, did not frighten Jacob Hohenemser; it only made him courageous and proud. When Hohenemser moved to Munich in 1936 to study at the Trapp Academy of Music, founded in 1927, the anti Jewish politics practiced there came as a particular shock to him. Because the National Socialist movement started in the city of Munich, it distinguished itself during those years in terms of the discrimination and gradual deprivation of rights of Jews; some of the anti-Jewish measures that were implemented in Munich were imposed before they became law across the whole of Germany. Jewish Germans were to be suppressed quicker and more systematically in the "capital of the movement" than in the rest of the *Reich*.

Jacob Hohenemser met one of the great mentors of his life in Munich, Prof. Emanuel Kirschner, the chief cantor of Munich's Great Synagogue. Both he and Hohenemser shared a love of the classic European music traditions as they were presented in the majority of the Western and Middle European synagogues based on the synagogue music reform by Salomon Sulzer from Hohenems. Kirschner had written the entry about Solomon Sulzer for the "Jewish lexicon" published in 1930, something that was both a personal and family



*Jacob Hohenemser in Munich*

obligation for Kirschner since his nephew Bruno Kirschner was the driving force behind the lexicon - an encyclopedia of Jewish knowledge that appeared in the Berlin *Jüdischer Verlag* (Jewish publishing house) from 1927 to 1931. Kirschner found himself in the cantorial tradition of Louis Lewandowski, who wanted to reform the music in the German synagogues in line with Salomon Sulzer. Kirschner had retired in 1926, but after that he assumed numerous voluntary cantorial roles.

Kirschner himself wrote about the discussion surrounding the influence of

secular (i.e. non-Jewish) music on synagogue music: "It is as difficult to ascertain the origin of the synagogue song as it is to determine the origin of many old German songs. The background of neither can be determined with absolute certainty. In both cases assumptions, which are more or less the truth, play an important role. If I tried to prove the existence of international influences on these melodies, which have remained almost identical in the various regions for centuries as core parts of our synagogue singing, despite the tradition which is only oral, then we still believe that it was

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## CANTOR JACOB HOHENEMSER: A LIFE FOR JEWISH MUSIC

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also talented sons of our folk who enriched our liturgy with magnificent melodies both in the past and today and that Jewish spirit and Jewish emotion pulsated just as strongly in our synagogue singing as the spirit of any songs which have been transferred from other peoples to our culture."

In the summer of 1934 Hohenemser visited cantor Kirschner in Munich for the first time and asked him to assess his vocal skills. Kirschner remembered the visit: "The pleasant timbre of his lyrical baritone, the understandable, artistic performance made me sit up and listen and gave rise to the remark: if you continue to seriously strive for perfection, you will not end your days in Worms." When Emanuel Kirschner's successor left the Great Synagogue in Munich, Kirschner directed the attention of the community to the young cantor in Worms. His assessment of Hohenemser's trial performance proved to be accordingly approving: "His presentations, both in recitations as well as songs with cohesive, rhythmic melody reveal the elegantly phrasing *chazzan*, who, supported by good breathing and articulation, is able to inspire and sustain devotion." Jacob Hohenemser got the position and in the period that followed,

enjoyed the constant support of the great Munich cantor. In the summer of 1936, Kirschner taught him the vocal liturgy that was a tradition on the *Hohe Feiertage* (high holy days) in Munich. "Just as before, on this occasion too, his cantorial performances awakened devotion, inspired from the heart to the heart, and were praised by the entire community."

According to one source, Jacob Hohenemser was said to have become engaged to Kirschner's granddaughter, Eva, in June 1938, but neither Kirschner nor his son Max, Eva's uncle, mention such a bond in their memoirs. In June 1938, the Munich Jews received an unexpected blow of deprivation of rights and indignity. When Adolf Hitler was set to open the "large German art exhibition" at the beginning of June 1938 in Munich, the Chancellor of the *Reich* found it unacceptable that the Great Synagogue of Munich was located directly next to the *Künstlerhaus* (artists' house) and commanded that it be demolished.

The Jews of the Bavarian capital had celebrated the 50-year anniversary of the Great Synagogue the year before. At the annual meeting of the General Rabbis Association in Munich on 8 June 1938, the local Jewish community received the command to cede the synagogue next to the parish hall to the state and to vacate it within 24 hours. The

Jewish community had to bear the costs of the demolition. In the night from 8 to 9 June, they removed the Torah scrolls and the ritual items from the building. The demolition began on the morning of 9 June 1938. Cantor Emmanuel Kirschner was closely connected with these symbolic dates of the Bavarian Jewish history. As a young cantor he had sung at the opening of the synagogue in 1887, as an old man at its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and finally at the last religious service on the evening before the demolition.

Whether Jacob Hohenemser participated in both of the latter events as chief cantor of the synagogue is unknown to us; Emmanuel Kirschner does not mention him in his description of the last days of the Munich synagogue, which was written shortly before his death in the same year, 1938. Just like many Jewish officials from the Bavarian capital, Hohenemser was arrested before the November pogrom (crystal night) in Munich and brought to the Dachau concentration camp, from which he is supposed to have been freed after a short period. We know nothing about the following months but in September 1939 cantor Jacob Hohenemser immigrated to the United States.

Philipp Miller, an American Middle-East expert and later librarian in the

Klau Library of the New York Hebrew Union College, published an article with memories of cantor Jacob Hohenemser in the "notes" of the "Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association," to which we owe great thanks for the detailed information on the life of Jacob Hohenemser. Miller grew up in the Jewish community of Providence, his family knew the cantor, who had been influential in Providence since 1941, and was able to give an account of what Hohenemser had told them about his life.

One of the stories is the young cantor's crossing to America, where he participated in the entertainment program of the ship cabaret in order to finance his journey to New York. One of the fellow passengers was Ted Mack, a talent scout of a legendary popular radio program in the USA. He liked Hohenemser's rich baritone voice and employed him for one of his broadcasts.

In 1940, deputies of the Jewish community from Providence held interviews in New York with various candidates for the role of cantor, one of whom was Jacob Hohenemser, who was, as a result, invited to Rhode Island during Passover. Even though the staff committee discussed his lack of access to "traditional melodies,"

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## CANTOR JACOB HOHENEMSER: A LIFE FOR JEWISH MUSIC

*(Continued from page 5)*

he still got the job. During the next two decades, he became a fixed part of the community, as a cantor in the temple and as a popular friend and colleague. He had married and was in many respects in the prime of his life. It was only his surname which no-one could pronounce correctly: everyone called his wife "Frieda" by her first name while the unpronounceable cantor became known as "uncle Honi". In 1943 in the exile newspaper "Aufbau", Hohenemser wrote the obituary for Emmanuel Kirschner, who had died five years earlier. He played an important role in the founding of

"Cantor's Assembly of America" and was associate editor of the "Cantor's voice."

However, a secure and complete life could not prevent Jacob Hohenemser from learning. He was far too closely associated with the European traditions and his mentor Kirschner. In 1952 he visited the Cantors Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, where he again became involved with the roots and seeds of the "Jewish music" in Europe. Together with Frederic Ewen, he studied for a PhD at the Cantors Institute with his thesis being the topic "The Jews in

German Musical Thought (1830 - 1880)" - the first investigation into the anti-Jewish history of reception of "Jewish music" in Germany. Ewen and Hohenemser discovered that, in the time frame investigated, Christian contemporaries' value judgments on Jewish synagogue music had been relatively unprejudiced. From today's perspective one may add that even the attribute of the "oriental" - a description of synagogue music passed on through the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - goes beyond emphasizing religious differences and thus anticipates "national" (i.e. racist) attributes. On the other hand, the Jews in Germany at this time were by no means fighting back against a "national" attribution of certain customs and characteristics. They often searched themselves for national reasons for their religious and social differences.

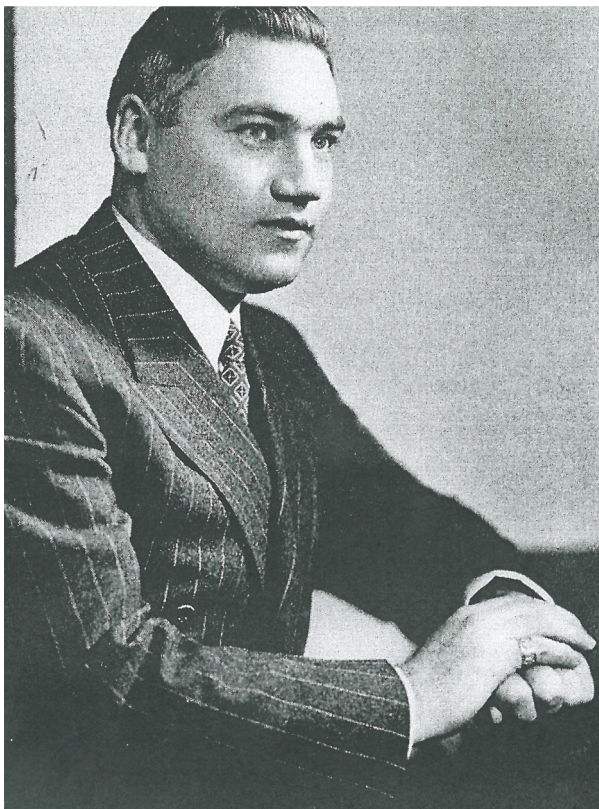
Jacob Hohenemser received his doctorate in sacred music and the title "Dr. Sacred Music" in 1960. As an adored and admired cantor in Rhode Island and as an official of the American Cantors Association and the Cantor's Newspaper, Jacob Hohenemser, for one last time, followed in the footsteps of Salomon Sulzer, one of the most famous Hohenemsers, who himself had been unfailing in the organization and improvement of the status of cantors.

Unfortunately, Jacob Hohenemser was not to enjoy this life much longer. He died near San Francisco on 6 August 1964, on his way to a holiday in California. Four years later, the temple Emanu-EL endowed the "Cantor Jacob Hohenemser Memorial Fund" for school graduates with great musical talent. And so, the memory of Cantor Jacob Hohenemser remains alive even if, to this day, not many can pronounce his name correctly in the USA. ❖

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*Many memories of him have remained, as well as a recording that has preserved his voice. The community in Providence, Rhode Island, which he had served for almost 25 years, was shocked by his unexpected death in 1964. The recordings, which amateurs have made of him and his accompanists, primarily the organist Arthur Einstein, are today a valuable document. We are delighted to make this voice audible again today in a CD edition. Our thanks go to LeRoy Hoffberger, who drew our attention to Jacob Hohenemser and who generously supported our new edition and the research for this article, also to the community of the Temple Emanu-EL in Providence, which provided us with the rights for the recordings.*

*Translation from the German by William Dirk Warren*



*Jacob Hohenemser in Providence*

## PRESERVING HISTORY

DR. HANNO LOEWY

Next year we will celebrate the 20th birthday of the Museum. More than ever the Jewish Museum needs your support for a new and most important project. Since the opening of the Museum in 1991 we have been taking care of a rapidly growing collection of documents, photographs, artifacts and audiovisual testimonies. It's those memories and memorabilia that must be preserved; they are the documentation of a cosmopolitan community that does not forget its roots, the glorious and the bitter aspects, the achievements and the hardships.

Eva-Maria Hesche and our new colleague Christian Herbst are now getting the archives on the new track and preserving them for generations to come. A year ago in the old Ski factory of Kaestle, we found the proper space for the new archive storage room, and started renovation. Proper security, climate control and the necessary archival structures are now being implemented, in order to be able to preserve the heritage of the original Jewish families of Hohenems and European Jewry for future generations.



*Christian Herbst and Eva-Maria Hesche in the new archival depot*

In the fall the archives of the Museum will move from their present location in the old Kitzinger house to its new venue. This major step in the development of the Museum will make a great difference. Creating the new archival facilities, climate control and security required to preserve documents, photographs and artifacts professionally for future generations is a task that exceeds our regular budget. We were able to secure substantial funds from the Austrian federal government for this enterprise, and substantial financial support came from the Museumsverein (the Museum's Association), in addition to six thousand Euros contributed by various local private donors in Hohenems and the region.

Still we are in need. We hope that with additional contributions from the American Friends, we will be able to prepare our Museum for the task that is our future: the preservation of the memory of the Hohenems families' history. **Please help us make all this possible!**

**The Trustees of the American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems have agreed that we should support this effort. We hope that you will allow us to make a significant contribution by sending a check payable to AFJMH, Inc; checks should be mailed to AFJMH, Inc. P.O. Box 237, Moorestown, NJ 08057-0237.**

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*In the next Newsletter, Dr. Loewy will tell us more about the Museum's genealogical project, which is well underway, as well as the CD of digitally remastered recordings of liturgical music performed by Cantor Hohenemser, that the Museum has produced.*

*The American Friends would like to support the Archival project and hope that you will contribute to the AFJMH, so that we can assist significantly in this respect.*

The Newsletter of the  
American Friends of the

# IN TOUCH

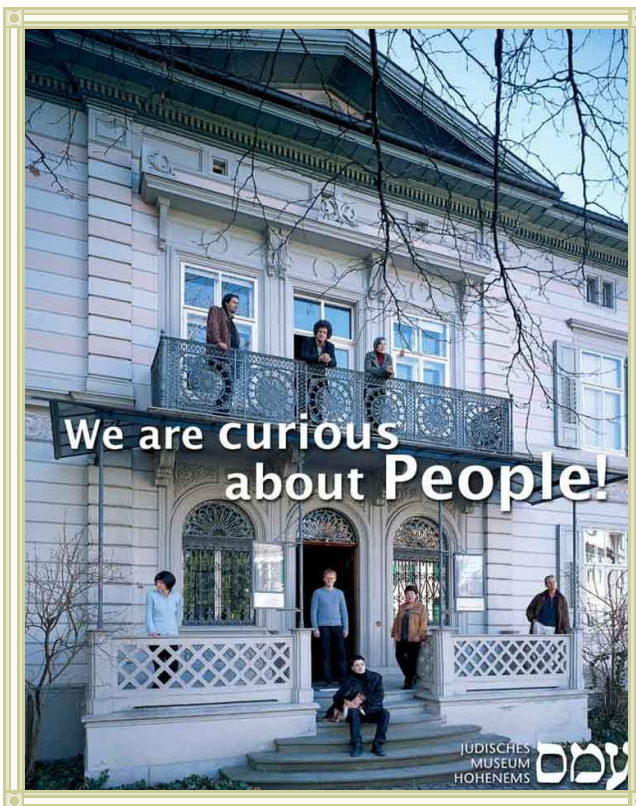
SEPTEMBER 2010



We're on the Web!

<http://www.jm-hohenems.at>

The Jewish Museum of Hohenems, as a regional museum, remembers the rural Jewish community of Hohenems and its various contributions to the development of Vorarlberg and the surrounding regions. It confronts contemporary questions of Jewish life and culture in Europe, the diaspora and Israel - questions of the future of Europe between migration and tradition. The museum also deals with the end of the community of Hohenems, the regional Nazi history, the expulsion or deportation of the last members of the community, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Along with these fragmented lines of regional and global history, it is also devoted to the people and their histories and maintains a relationship to the descendants of Jewish families in Hohenems around the world.



The permanent exhibition in the Heimann-Rosenthal Villa, which was built in 1864, documents the history of the Jewish community in Hohenems which existed for over three centuries until its destruction during the era of the Nazi regime. The museum offers annually changing exhibitions and an extensive program of events. ❖

## JOIN US . . .

BECOME A MEMBER AND LET'S KEEP *IN TOUCH*!



During the meeting of the descendants of Jewish families from Hohenems in 1998, the idea to found the American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems, Inc. emerged. The association unites the numerous descendants living in America and supports the Jewish Museum

of Hohenems in various ways. Annual dues are \$25. We hope to count on you to join today. Dues can be sent to:  
**PO Box 237**

**Moorestown, NJ 08057-0237**  
Any additional contribution you could make would be very much appreciated and thus

enable the American Friends to continue to make important contributions to the Museum at Hohenems as well as to other endeavors designed to contribute to knowledge of the Hohenems Jewish Community as it was when our ancestors lived there. ❖