

# In Touch

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE  
JEWISH MUSEUM HOHENEMS, INC.

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## Letter from the President

TIMOTHY L. HANFORD

Dear Friends and Supporters of AFJMH:

I am pleased to share this Spring newsletter with you. I hope it provides some enjoyment during these trying times.

In this issue, Museum Director **Hanno Loewy** provides an update on the vibrant activities of the Jewish Museum Hohenems and reflects on the impact of the current Ukraine crisis. While the COVID pandemic is not yet over, the Museum is welcoming back significant numbers of visitors and is looking forward to a further growth in attendance. Hanno also offers our readers an important thought piece on what it means to be a Jewish museum.

**Raphael Einetter, MA**, the head of the Museum's archives and collections, has written an absorbing piece on the escape of the Pilpel family from Hohenems at the outbreak of the Second World War. The exodus of family members to Shanghai, Vienna, Budapest, Bombay, England, and the United States is a microcosm of the *Hohenems diaspora*. The newsletter also discusses the inauguration later this year of a 100-kilometer audio trail of the escape routes used by Hohenems Jewish families.

**Howard Goldstein** has given us an interesting piece on his genealogical research, jumping off from his great, great grandfather **Daniel Mendelsohn** who was born in Hohenems in 1806. I hope Howard's research will inspire other Hohenems descendants to write up their own family histories (of any length) that we can use in a future newsletter.

As you are no doubt aware, the mission of the AFJMH is to provide additional financial support for the Jewish Museum Hohenems. The AFJMH also provides financial assistance for maintaining the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery (*see discussion in the newsletter*). Your support for the Museum's exhibitions, its publications, its research, and its events remains indispensable. **If you are able, I want to encourage you to continue your financial support.**

The AFJMH is proud to have so many American Hohenems descendants as members. We are always pleased to welcome more members! Please send a note your siblings and offspring and cousins urging them to take a look at the AFJMH website ([www.AFJMH.org](http://www.AFJMH.org)) and consider joining AFJMH.

**Best wishes for 2022 and beyond.**

Sincerely,

**Tim Hanford**

**President**



# A Letter from the Director to Friends

DR. HANNO LOEWY

Dear friends of the Jewish Museum!

When I wrote the last letter from the museum last fall we were still stuck in the pandemic, waiting for just the next wave to come. We expected economic and social hardships and increasing tensions, due to a polarization of our societies in the light of spreading conspiracy “theories,” nationalism, and xenophobia.

But we had no idea about what was waiting for us around the corner. The Russian war, a new dimension of aggression inside of Europe after decades, most of us were too naïve to expect. Today we know that the writing was on the wall.

The European Union, so dear to us against all odds and defects, now has to confront its litmus test. And whether this violent breach of all limits of international law will lead to a reaffirmation of human rights, solidarity and the validity of international law that so many are speaking about today, is far from sure. Large parts of our “western” societies are drifting in a disturbing direction of fake realities as well.

Our museum is taking a clear stance in the wake of this turmoil. While thousands and thousands of refugees from the Ukraine arrive in Austria we both support their cause and that of other refugees today, and also remind ourselves of the long history of escape and of refugees in our region. We create a hundred kilometer long audio trail along the border to Switzerland and Liechtenstein that commemorates the fate of so many, who tried to cross the border between 1938 and 1945, Jews and political resistance fighters, deserters from a criminal war, slave workers and prisoners of war.

Our exhibition “On the edge,” now coming to an end, engaged the local public in a discussion about how a city can grow, and how this growth creates social tensions to be resolved. Our show “The Last Europeans” successfully engaged audiences at the Volkskundemuseum, Vienna in a discourse about how to defend

peace, and how to prevent international law and human rights from deteriorating from the inside of our societies. Starting in the fall the show will be seen in the Jewish Museum of Munich. And definitely will react to the disastrous events of this year.

And our exhibition “End of Testimony?” about the history and the possible future of eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust is continuing to travel, after being shown in Hohenems, Flossenbürg, Munich and Augsburg, now opening again on July 6 in the “Centrum Judaicum” museum in Berlin.

Our next exhibition in Hohenems, ready to be opened on June 26, will ask provoking questions about our own “genre” of institutions: the “Jewish Museums”. How did they come into being, quite in accordance with a wave of ethnic nationalisms (and the impact of colonialism) that were informing Europe in the late 19th century already? And how did they become part of an attempt to “heal” after something that could not be reconciled with in the 20th century? And finally how their collections tried to create a kind of canon of what is “Jewish”?

Stay tuned for another thought-provoking exhibition.

In July our summer university—organized in collaboration with seven Jewish studies—departments of universities in Austria, Germany and Switzerland—will open its doors again after two years of break due to the pandemic. The subject—“*Fake. About god-fearing and less god-fearing lies*”—couldn’t be more timely.

We hope for your continuing support—and even more so to enjoy your company again in person if the pandemic finally allows traveling and visiting our place again more easily.

See you!



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## News from the Museum: Crossing the border.

### 100 kilometers – 52 stories

DR. HANNO LOEWY

A mobile audio trail to points of escape from 1938 to 1945 from Lake Constance to the Silvretta mountains along Cycle Route No. 1.

"We made it! Hope you are all healthy! And everything is in order. Now my report!" (Willy Geber from St. Gallen to his Wife in Vienna, August 1938)

Thousands of refugees tried to reach Switzerland via Vorarlberg between March 1938 and May 1945. Most of them, as Jews in the German Reich in 1938, faced not only discrimination, persecution and terror, but also dispossession and the end of any possibility of economic existence. Unbeknownst to them, their physical extermination awaited them, the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," as the National Socialists called the mass murder that began in 1939. But also political opponents of the Nazis, intellectuals, deserters, later also prisoners of war, forced laborers and foreign workers from occupied countries in Europe sought to cross the border to Switzerland or Liechtenstein in Vorarlberg. As early as the summer of 1938, Switzerland began to seal off its borders to the refugees. Escape helpers on both sides of the border were still able to help individuals. But for all of them, there were now only illegal routes to freedom.

Along Cycle Route No. 1, "Crossing the Border" tells of courage and despair, of persecution and bureaucratic zeal, of cruelty, humanity, and solidarity.

Many of these stories of refugees are now well researched. The experiences of the refugees are reflected in a wide variety of documents: personal letters from the time of persecution, surviving documents from German and Swiss authorities, memories of contemporary witnesses, and photographs of the scenes at the time. Out of them emerges a picture of the events of that time from many perspectives—to be heard, to be read, to be looked at. And all this on the route in the landscape between lake and mountains, on both sides of the Rhine, both sides of a border that separates and connects.

Fifty-two of these escape stories are told in "Crossing the Border" near the historical sites along Cycle Route No. 1 from Bregenz via Lustenau, Hohenems, Feldkirch and Bludenz to Partenen, in the villages in between and in the center of Dornbirn, at the train stations in Hohenems and Feldkirch, but also on the other side of the border in

Switzerland and Liechtenstein, from St. Margrethen via Widnau and Diepoldsau, to Buchs.

We learn about courageous helpers like the Swiss police commander Paul Grüninger and about desperate refugees stumbling for their lives through the Old Rhine at Hohenems, after experiencing "Crystal Night" in Vienna, we learn about policemen and officials executing their job with no mercy, and Austrians risking their lives, of Swiss schoolgirls who dared to protest the Asylum policies of their country and of deserters and resistance activists shot right next to the border, even in the last weeks of the war, about Greek prisoners of war who crossed the mountain passes into Grisons, or about a Czech patriot who crosses the Rhine on his long way to Gibraltar, where he successfully joined the Czech Exile Army under British command, or a Jewish girl that passes the mountains, to become a song writer after the war, performing with a heavy metal band in the Swiss selection for the Eurovision Song Contest, in her 90s in 2015, but also about a Swiss Nazi who made it illegally into Vorarlberg in order to join the SS. The border became a crossroads of very different individuals.

The platform for this exploration of the border, today mostly a pastoral place, and the memory landscape of the Rhine Valley and the mountains is a website with stories to listen to, photographs, documents and interactive maps. Along the bike route, symbolic border stones at stopovers mark the Audio Trail and, with a QR code, invite visitors to engage with the history of the place, to pause and reflect, to be attentive to the surroundings.

The Audio Trail will be promoted through folders with maps, through diverse public relations work in the media, and through joint advertising in bicycle-enthusiast networks, and the agencies promoting cultural tourism.

A documentation of the stories and locations will be published in book form, with historical and contemporary photographs. Hohenems photographer Dietmar Walser may win awards for the visual documentation of the border landscape.

In addition, intensive cross-border cooperation is planned with the towns and communities on both sides of the Rhine Valley, in the Walgau and Montafon valley, as well as with educational and extracurricular





## News from the Museum: Crossing the Border (Cont'd)

### 100 kilometers— 52 stories (Cont'd)

institutions. In this way, the Audio Trail and Cycle Route No. 1 will become a place of heightened sensitivity to the interactions between history and the present.

The inauguration of this 100-kilometer Audio Trail will be celebrated on July 3, 2022, with a bicycle rally and a thought-provoking afternoon on the Schlossplatz in Hohenems.

All this you will find on our new website that is going online in June (initially in German, with English translation to follow): [www.ueber-die-grenze.at](http://www.ueber-die-grenze.at)



Drusentor in the Montafon

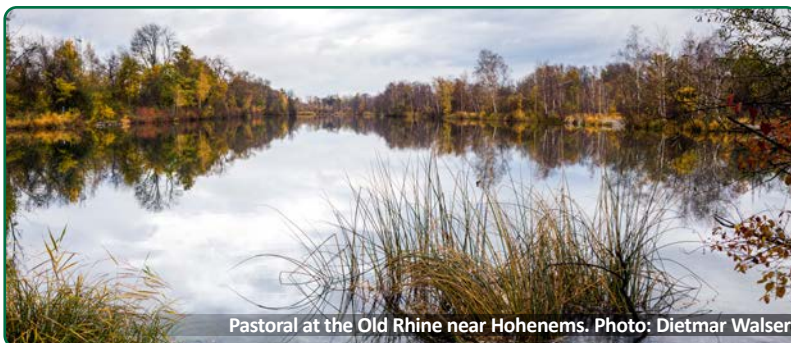


Grenzschutz Nähe Rohr 1 HistA Lustenau N-00012 Foto: Robert Schlachter



A canal next to the border at Lustenau

Here deserter Josef Hagen was shot to death, when he tried to escape into Switzerland.



Pastoral at the Old Rhine near Hohenems. Photo: Dietmar Walser



Symbolic border stone. Photo: Dietmar Walser



Exploring refugee trails along the Old Rhine with Hohenems descendants during the Reunion 2017. Photo: Dietmar Walser



## ESCAPE STORY OF THE PILPEL FAMILY

RAPHAEL EINETTER, MA

On October 10, 1932 Nina Pilpel was the last person of Jewish faith to be born in Hohenems before the Second World War. Her father, Franz Josef Pilpel, who graduated in 1928 at the University of Vienna in the field of chemical technology, had moved to Hohenems in October of the same year to join the company Neumann & Söhne as a chemist. He had probably been friends for some time with his future wife Marion Stern, who was born in Vienna in 1905 too. She attended a graphic school in Vienna from 1919 to 1922 and took courses in the department of photography. Shortly after their wedding on June 27, 1929 Marion Pilpel moved to Vorarlberg as well. The couple lived in an apartment at Kaiser-Franz-Josef-Strasse 74, just a few hundred meters from his workplace at the former Rosenthal factory.<sup>1</sup>

### Chess Club Hohenems

Franz Pilpel quickly gained attention in Hohenems society, performing as pianist between concerts of the choral society of the Arbeitergesangsverein "Liebesfreiheit" Feldkirch and the Hohenems "Nibelungenhort" in May 1929.<sup>2</sup> He also joined the chess club, of which Harry Weil was one of the founding members in 1926, in January 1929 and immediately won first place in the club's internal championship tournament one year later. In the 1930s, Dr. Pilpel also took part in tournaments throughout Vorarlberg and beyond. In 1934, he reached 4th place in the regional championship, which qualified him for the "Austrian Chess Olympics." In 1935, he and his colleagues even managed to defeat the Bregenz Chess Club for the first time. He soon became involved in the board of the chess club and finally served as treasurer.

After the "Anschluss" in March 1938, Jews were banned from membership in clubs. According

to the minutes of the annual general meeting on April 22, 1938, Pilpel had "resigned from the chess club" and the club approved his actions, since "the treasury was found in perfect order."<sup>3</sup> Like all members of the Jewish community who remained in Hohenems, Franz, Marion, and Nina Pilpel also had to apply for new identification cards at the end of the year. Only a few weeks later they left Vorarlberg. While Franz Pilpel managed to leave for Shanghai via Italy, his wife and daughter moved back to Marion's parents in Vienna in February 1939.

### Vienna-Budapest-Bombay

Marion Pilpel and her daughter Nina prepared to follow Franz, who had arrived in India in the meantime. In her memoirs, Nina reports about the last summer in Austria and mentions how she and her mother tried to learn the English language with great difficulties. She also vividly recalls extensive prohibitions on Jews, which she and her aunt Gerda (Marion's sister) tried to circumvent to some extent. Furthermore, she gave a very detailed description about the farewell she had to say to her grandparents, who, like her Aunt Gerda, were murdered in the Izbica concentration camp in 1942. On August 12, 1939, she and her mother first flew from Vienna to Budapest, and on the same day boarded a plane operated by the Dutch airline KLM, which was supposed to take them to Bombay, now known as Mumbai.<sup>4</sup>

### Four Christian on the "Stratheden"

In the now called Indian port city of Mumbai, the family decided to change their faith. Franz Pilpel was baptized a Roman Catholic in February 1942. Marion Pilpel was already in joyful expectation at this time and gave birth to her second child Ronald George on May 12. Six years later, the Pilpels left India aboard

the steamship Stratheden, which sailed from Australia to England and arrived at Tilbury harbor on the north bank of the Thames on October 11, 1948. While Franz and Marion soon made efforts to emigrate to the USA with their son Ronald and reached the port of New York on the steamship "Queen Elizabeth" in February 1950, Nina remained in England for the time being. In Croydon, south of London, she married Roy Henry George Turner on April 7, 1951, and henceforth appears as Nina Turner in the records. The young couple also intended to emigrate to the United States, and a year and a half later they boarded the passenger liner Veendam, which arrived in New York on October 19, 1952. The Turners' marriage, however, didn't end up lasting long. A date of the divorce could not be determined, but it is known that Roy Turner married again in April 1963 in California. In the documents for Nina's naturalization, which took place in August 1962, she also stated that she was no longer married to her husband.<sup>5</sup>

### New home in Chicago

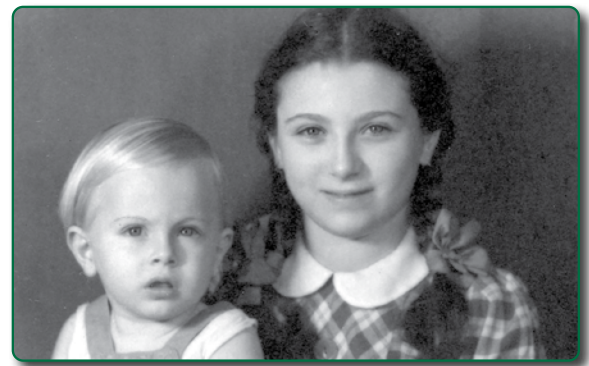
Franz and Marion Pilpel received U.S. citizenship in February 1956. At that time, they lived in Chicago with their son Ronald, who did not officially become an American citizen until 1963 at the age of 21. Receiving full citizenship also resulted in a change of name: Franz Josef Pilpel became Frank Joseph Pell, and Marion and Ronald also took the same surname. Apparently Frank Pell worked in Chicago as a colorist and was, by then, also able to pursue his passion for music again. This is indicated by his composition "Metadodekadion," which he dedicated to the organist and organ teacher Robert Lodine in 1959, as well as by an article in the Chicago Tribune from October 1963. The newspaper reported that at a concert of the Vienna-founded



© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, "Pilpel family papers," Gift of the Estate of Nina Pell Turner, Series 3, Photographs, Pilpel, Marion (Stern), Photo Nr. 11, March 1938.  
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>



© Jewish Museum Hohenems, Photo on the application for an identity card of Franz Josef Pilpel, A 1647, December 1938.



© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, "Pilpel family papers," Gift of the Estate of Nina Pell Turner, Series 3, Photographs, Pilpel, family (general), Photo Nr. 1, December 1943.  
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>

## ESCAPE STORY OF THE PILPEL FAMILY (Cont'd)

"International Society for Contemporary Music," on November 2, a work by Frank Pell had also been performed.<sup>6</sup> This was probably the last time the composer experienced this himself, as he died only four weeks later at the age of 58 and was buried in Chicago. Marion Pell worked as a seamstress in 1956 at least. While Ronald Pell<sup>7</sup> was still attending high school at the beginning of the 1960s and was involved not only in the school newspaper but also (following his father's interest) in the chess club there, Nina Turner<sup>8</sup> was working as an art teacher and commercial artist in Chicago in 1962.

### Murder-Suicide

In 1973, the American newspapers reported on a Pell family member again. This time the focus was on Ronald Pell, whose lifeless body had been found in a house on the campus of the Nevada Mental Health Institute where psychology professor Dr. Francis Lamb had lived. Lamb's corpse was also found with a bullet wound in the head area. According to the media reports, the professor had stated he was Pell's adoptive father when he started work in July 1971. At that time, Lamb had also claimed that his family had died in a car accident "about five years ago" and that Pell's parents, who were previously believed to have been missionaries in Burma, also were deceased. After several newspapers printed this version of the story on July 9, the Reno Gazette-

Journal expressed doubts about its correctness the next day. According to the Gazette, Lamb's wife claimed that she had been living separately from him since 1966. In addition, Ronald Pell's mother and sister could be located in Chicago. On July 12, they published an obituary for Ronald in the same newspaper.<sup>9</sup> The "close relationship" of the two, repeatedly mentioned in the media, which in the America of the 1970s still required the "camouflage" as an adoptive connection, thus rather seems to have been a love affair. At the end of the month, the Nevada State Journal of July 29 stated that, according to forensic evidence, Pell had died several hours before Lamb. Moreover, the evidence suggested that both shots were fired from Lamb's Derringer pistol.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the life of Ronald Pell—who initially enrolled at the University of Chicago beginning in 1961, and (according to the Nevada State Journal) served as Francis Lamb's secretary from 1966 on—ended at just 31 years of age. His grave is located at Mountain View Cemetery in Reno, Nevada.

### End of life in Chicago

While Nina Turner does not say anything about the death of her brother in the existing records, it is possible to draw more conclusions about the life of her mother. Marion Pell had increasingly intensive contact with her sister-in-law Helen Gort, the older sister of her husband, who was also widowed from 1970 on. Marion and Helen

actually even lived together in an apartment in Chicago. Marion died there on July 30, 1990, and the funeral took place three days later. Nina Turner, who had no children, remained the last living family member with a connection to Hohenems, which she subsequently visited at least three more times. In her papers we find some correspondence with people from Hohenems who had remained in contact with her over the years. Two trips to her native town, once as early as July 1997 and then at the end of May 2005, can also be reconstructed from the correspondence. In 2002, she was furthermore accompanied by a camera crew during another "Heimatbesuch." The report, created by a descendant of her friend Anni Ruault for the Swiss private TV station TVO, shows the two elderly ladies meeting in a retirement home and also accompanies Nina Turner to the Jewish cemetery. In May 2005, Nina Turner and her partner who is referred to as "Bill" in her letters probably went on her last trip to Hohenems. Ten years later, on June 4, 2015, she died in Chicago.

The research on this family has only been possible thanks to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and their extensive online database, in which the "Pilpel papers" is accessible since November 2021

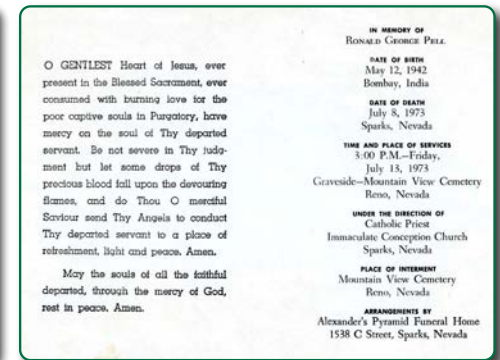
(<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>).



© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, "Pilpel family papers," Gift of the Estate of Nina Pell Turner, Series 3, Photographs, Turner, Nina Pilpel, and husband Roy and family, Photo Nr. 1, April 1951.  
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>



© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, "Pilpel family papers," Gift of the Estate of Nina Pell Turner, Series 4, Writings, Pilpel, Franz (Frank Pell): Musical composition, 1959.  
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>



© United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, "Pilpel family papers," Gift of the Estate of Nina Pell Turner, Series 1, Biographical, Pilpel (Pell), Ronald, death, 1973.  
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>

<sup>1</sup> Jewish Museum Hohenems, Hohenems Genealogy: Franz Josef Pilpel ([www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/getperson.php?personID=I3427](http://www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/getperson.php?personID=I3427))  
Marion Stern ([www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/getperson.php?personID=I3428](http://www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/getperson.php?personID=I3428))  
Nina Pilpel ([www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/getperson.php?personID=I3429](http://www.hohenemsgenealogie.at/gen/getperson.php?personID=I3429)).

<sup>2</sup> Article on the concert with mention of "Mr. Pilpel" in the Vorarlberger Wacht, 25.05.1929, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Chronicle of the Hohenems Chess Club and protocol of the annual general meeting on 22.04.1938.

<sup>4</sup> Nina Turner, memoirs in the "Pilpel family papers", United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn526666>).

<sup>5</sup> Ancestry.com: India, Births and Baptisms, 1786-1947. Salt Lake City, Utah; The National Archives of the UK, Commercial and Statistical Department and successors: Reference number: Series BT27-166290.

<sup>6</sup> Article about the concert on November 2, 1963 at Wheaton College in the Chicago Tribune, 27.10.1962, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Article about Ronald Pell's nomination for school award in the Chicago Tribune, 21.05.1961, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ancestry.com. National Archives; Chicago, Illinois; Petitions for Naturalization 1906-1991; Nr.: 418991.

<sup>9</sup> Articles in the Reno Gazette-Journal on 09.07.1973, p. 1f; 10.07.1973 p. 15 and 12.07.1973, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Article on the result of the forensic investigation in the Nevada State Journal, 29.07.1973, p. 9.



## News from the Museum: Upcoming Exhibition

# Taxidermied Jews?

## History, Present, and Future of Jewish Museums

An exhibition project of the Jewish Museum Hohenems, in cooperation with the  
Saxon State Collections of Ethnography Leipzig, Dresden, and Herrnhut

June 26, 2022 until March 19, 2023

Curated by: *Felicita Heimann-Jelinek and Hannes Sulzenbacher*

When asked about his opinion about founding a Jewish museum, a former head of the Jewish community in Vienna asked back with bitter irony: *“What do you want to show in a Jewish museum? Taxidermied Indians?”*

Worldwide, there are over 120 Jewish museums—whereby the definition of their designating adjective is by no means uniform. There are those to whom the institution itself is a Jewish one, to others the institution’s topic is Judaism—from the most varied perspectives. For some, the adjective “Jewish” is unambiguous, for others, it is not just ambiguous but even full of contradictions. The quest for this adjective’s definition provides information both about the contents ensuing as a result as well as about the definatory power thus exerted. Based on eleven thematic blocs presenting inquiries into the various meanings and constructions of meaning of the adjective “Jewish,” this exhibition endeavors to cast light on these museums’ history and present and ask the urgent question of their societal role in the future. And, with these questions, to draw near to the core of these museums’ existence: their collections. To that “which remains.”

From today’s vantage point, Jewish museums seem to be a relatively recent type of museum. Yet, the foundation of the first Jewish museums is not too far removed in time from the “invention” of the museums of arts and crafts, the municipal and local history museums, and is even closer to the foundation of folk art museums. This makes their establishment chronologically coincide with the mass ideological spread of nationalistic thinking. In the context of these nationalisms, the first Jewish museums wanted to assume a role as simultaneously identity-discovering and identity-forging institutions. In the midst of the antisemitism that was spreading at a tearing pace, they pondered on the nature of “genuine Judaism”—and searched, at the same time, for an expression of their belonging to the societies in which they existed. While the religious aspect was decreasing in significance, they searched for an anchoring in a notion of “Jewish culture”—and found answers whose normative and stereotyping character was anchored in the midst of a mainstream discourse inspired by Eurocentrism, anthropology, and Völkerpsychologie of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Unlike the numerous—partially more, partially less scientifically sound—research papers on the question of what is Jewish and what is something Jewish, Jewish museums found (and find) themselves faced with the challenge of having to reify and visualize their possible answers. Thus, the first subject area of this exhibition, namely **“What is Jewish?”** will be equipped with installations that were offered as a reply such as, for instance, the 1899 furnishing of the so-called *“Gute Stube”* (parlor) at the Jewish Museum Vienna by Isidor Kaufmann and David Kohn—an installation that occupies the imagination of curators, exhibition organizers, and artists to this day.

For many Jewish museums, the topic of a mythical origin in the Orient was and still is of importance. Antique objects from the Syro-Palestinian area are expected to help substantiate one’s own origins and prove one’s embeddedness in the world of Ancient Israel. For instance, arrowheads from the Gaza area from the 6th—5th century, which are exhibited at the Jewish Museum New York, illustrate this **“Seat in Antiquity”** as does the masterful connection of past and present as created in the Biblically-themed pictures in which Zionist Art Nouveau



A “Jewish” puppet from the early collection of the Jewish Museum Hohenems.  
Photo: Dietmar Walser



This mug does show a Star of David but a hexagram, the traditional symbol of beer brewers. Photo: Christian Chizzola



A Chuppa (Wedding canopy) from Bukarest, from the early collection of the Jewish Museum Hohenems. Photo: Dietmar Walser

## News from the Museum: Upcoming Exhibition (Cont'd)

### Taxidermied Jews?

#### *History, Present, and Future of Jewish Museums*

graphic artist Ephraim Moses Lilien provides one of the angels who assisted God at the creation of Adam, the first human, with the face of Theodor Herzl.

Besides Judaica collections, local Jewish history constituted the focus of all these institutions. Research into the history of the respective Jewish communities from their beginnings, partially in Late Antiquity, but mainly in the Middle Ages, Early Modern Age, and in Modernity with their ruptures, brought about the assembly of relevant documents. In their exhibition rooms, they proved the Jews' inscription into regional history as well as their experience of violence. In the permanent exhibitions of most Jewish museums, there are to this day two presentation threads, history and religion. In their self-description, this two-pronged manner of presentation, that is, the active separation of history and religion, was termed **"The Jewish System."** It glossed over the problem that with the adjective "Jewish" alone, unambiguity could not be achieved: Jewish history was only a history of experience in a specific historic/nation-state context that had nothing in common with any other history of experience (an incisive example here would be, for instance, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, which was experienced and is still commemorated solely by this group). In this system, Jewish religion was deemed a uniform religion: any distinctions regarding origin or denomination were (and are) omitted. This "Jewish system" already becomes apparent, for instance, in the table of contents of the catalog of the Anglo-Jewish Historical Exhibition of 1887, the legendary exhibition that preceded the first museum foundations around 1900.

Backers of prewar Jewish museums were societies and heterogeneously composed associations or associations of art lovers, artists, scholars, and activists without any museological experience. The curators who had been raised in the science-trusting

spirit of the 19th century aspired like their colleagues at natural history, ethnology, and folklore museums to collect serially—as much as possible, as encyclopedically as possible. Hereby, they had to rely on self-proclaimed experts, on dealers, collectors, and fieldworkers who declared many an object a Judaica object that was not one. And who invented many a ritual object that had not even existed until then. In this period, the foundation stone for a Judaica canon, which in reality, often lacks any substantive basis, was invented.

Yet, the establishment of Jewish museums is also a history of standardizations. The question **"How is Jewish?"** was and is answered by all museums one way or the other. The answers are varied, but Jewish museums are not really aware of this since they—depending on where they are located and by whom and on whose behalf they are operated—and their audience partially harbor illusions of representing a homogenous Jewry. In the model of a Seder eve at the Jewish Museum of Bouxwiller, not only the supposed homogeneity, in this case enrooted in Alsace, is given expression; here, Jewish history and culture—as happens so often with the foundation of Jewish museums—is translocated to another place and to a context different from that of society as a whole, in part even into another, into an ideal respectively idealized time.

After all, Jewish museums were and are also institutions of exclusions. Again: depending on these museums' geographic location, depending on who their operators and engines were and are, by whom and for whom they were and are run, they exclude Jewish others, **"The Canon Here and the Canon There"** is in each case different. Initiated, consulted, and run by men, for a long time, the historic Jewish museums failed to collect women's history, at best, they collected little woman dolls as done by the Jewish Museum Vienna.

Initiated, consulted, and run by members of the bourgeoisie, they also failed to collect any history of the socially deprived; rather, they actively created images of an upper—to aristocratic class of their own that was not just able to afford many servants in the Sukkah but even servants of color. Most sites were initiated, consulted, and run by Ashkenazi Jews and did not collect Sephardic or Oriental history. In part, the racism implicitly contained in these collections has not been adequately countered to this day. Thus, the earliest Yemenite objects entered the Israel Museum as late as in the 1990s:

The history of the early Jewish museums in Europe largely ends with their liquidation in the first years of National Socialist rule. The collections get widely dispersed among new owners or are altogether destroyed, the museums' operators are expelled or murdered. After 1945, hardly anyone bothered about the whereabouts of the collection items; initially, the rebuilding of the museums was—as were reparations—on no one's mind.

In consequence, the building boom in European Jewish museums—for the first time or anew—from the 1980s onward was characterized by cultural-political reparation attempts primarily meant to soothe the conscience of the postwar generations. It was at this time that the intended or unintended acquisition of objects nobody wanted shortly thereafter or was able to exhibit any longer occurred. The thematic bloc **"What Doesn't Get Exhibited"** is dedicated to these objects. An example here would be a pair of footlets at the Jewish Museum Vienna, which can also be found in a Nazi circular addressing the commandants of all concentration camps: **"Subject: Reuse of cut hair."** In it, hair is designated as an important raw material: spun to yarn, footlets would be made for submarine crews and railroaders. But also testimonies of Jewish social misery belong in this context, such as the photograph series by Bruno Frei about 1920s Vienna.



## News from the Museum: Upcoming Exhibition (Cont'd)

### Taxidermied Jews?

#### *History, Present, and Future of Jewish Museums*

The “core competence” ascribed to new Jewish museums included, on the one hand, Jewish-religious contents, but on the other hand, contemporary-historical or directly Holocaust-specific and, not least, frequently regional-historical contents that rendered them in certain respects interchangeable across the globe. **“The Jewish Experience,”** which prewar museums had already presented using examples especially from the Middle Ages but also from the Modern Era, obtained a new dimension in the second half of the 20th century. For all Jewish museums, on whichever continent they might be, the topic of the annihilation, the Shoah, became the burning lens that concentrated Jewish history. The collecting box in the shape of a cattle wagon from the collection of the Joods Historisch Museum Amsterdam testifies to this in a disconcerting manner.

The positioning of Jewish museums of the second half of the 20th century initially created, inwardly as well as outwardly, a space largely free of criticism that was to serve in Europe mainly the knowledge of non-Jews about Jews, then again, outside of Europe, the self-assurance and self-validation of Jews. Only by breaking through museological as well as thematic one-dimensionality, some Jewish museums became places of sociopolitical relevance—especially when putting up for discussion “identity blueprints” instead of cementing them. Contributing to this in many countries was the rather hesitant new discovery of museums as not just bourgeois-esthetical but also as sociopolitically relevant agents.

Yet, precisely with this, Jewish museums have attracted criticism and still do today: not least, from philosemitic side and from some European political elites who are turning to new nationalisms—but also from a conservative Jewish side. Of particular sensitivity in the external perception is the Jewish museums’ relationship with the State

of Israel. **“Reference Point Israel”** is the section that deals with the question of why, for instance, the medal commemorating the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt is part of the collection of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

**“Folklore and Patriotism”** have played an important role in Jewish museums all along. Relevant objects are meant to signal to Jews and non-Jews alike an affiliation with the respective state and its majority society, but also provide evidence of the natural embeddedness in the respective cultural landscape, which is indicated in the embroidered Yahrzeit panel from the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives in Budapest.

Today, the self-definition of most Jewish museums is ambivalent and vague. Only few increasingly approach “other others” like “Jewish others.” To them, Jewish history and experience serve as a template for other minority histories and experiences. In the process, also Jewish history and Jewish religion are universalized and homogenized. In Sidney, for instance, **“The Future of Jewish Museums”** is discussed by way of the Aborigines’ experience as pictorially told by a kippah.

Some Jewish museums also attempt to generate new stories, that is, to dynamize as it were the historic and cultural memory. However, prevailing to this day are as ever—maybe out of insecurity and in view of growing political conflicts regarding any possible direction of such repositioning—particularistic approaches, the search for unambiguousness. And this at a time of identitarian polarizations, in which, after all, precisely a self-assured cultivation of the constitutive ambiguousness of Jewish museums would offer a chance for new sociopolitical relevance.

In an **“Epilog,”** the exhibition wants to ask questions regarding the future: Will the notion and institution “Jewish Museum” become obsolete? Will collecting continue, and what will be collected? For whom will it be worked and with whom? On whose behalf do public Jewish museums work? How polyphonous must they become to persist? And what will (can) still be specifically Jewish about them altogether? A drawing from the body of work of William Kentridge shall illustrate this thematic complex: Spoils from the Temple of Jerusalem, carried by a rather mixed crowd.

With inquiries into “the past” (the foundations around 1900 and around 1980 until 2001), “the present times,” and “the futures,” the fundamental rupture in the history of the Jewish museums and their agents, the radical change in these institutions’ sociopolitical tasks, their struggle to position themselves, and, in some cases, their insistence on omitting become visible. But with these inquiries, also fears of touching on tabooed topics, resentments toward new societal concepts, and worries for the continued existence of independent cultural-political institutions will become visible. With that, this exhibition will contribute to a central discourse not only within the world of “Jewish” museums but of museums at large.

# DANIEL MENDELSON AND ZEMIRAH LÖWENBERG

BY HOWARD GOLDSTEIN



My great, great grandfather, Daniel Mendelsohn, was born in Hohenems, 1 October, 1806, the sixth of ten children of Josef Emanuel Mendelsohn and Babette Wohlgenannt. The beautifully restored oil portraits of Daniel and his wife Zemirah (Löwenberg) hung for many years in the living room of my mother's first cousin, Carolyn Bernheim Siegel, who is now 99 years old and lives in Philadelphia. If you go on the Jewish Museum Hohenems website and type in "Daniel Mendelsohn," scroll down to the Daniel with the 1806 birthdate, you can see a photo of the painting. His wife's portrait is under her name. My sister Judy, who lives in Phoenix, presently has the portraits. Her younger son is contemplating bringing them to his new home in Pittsburgh.

In late 2019, after poking around [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and other websites, I came across the Jewish Museum Hohenems (JMH) website. The director, Hanno Loewy, was extremely helpful in identifying Daniel and Zemirah. They were married in Hohenems in 1836. Between 1839 and 1854, Zemirah gave birth to 11 children, two of whom died before the age of one and one who died at the age of 7. The remaining 8 immigrated to Philadelphia. Two of the elder sons, Sigmund and Emanuel relocated to New Orleans. I don't think either of these sons had children, although one did marry.

I have not found any information on two sons Auguste (born 1851) and Josef (born 1853) who were 8 years old and 6 years old respectively when they sailed with their mother, their older brother Louis and sister, Pauline (my great grandmother, born 1850) on the ship Bavaria that departed from Hamburg 21 June, 1860 and arrived in NYC on 9 July, 1860. Interestingly, Daniel, without any of his family, departed from Hamburg on May 31, 1859 on the Saxonia. Four months later, his three eldest sons, Sigmund, Moritz and Emanuel along with his eldest daughter, Amalie, sailed from Le Havre on the ship Ariel, arriving in NYC on 17 October, 1859. So Daniel, his three eldest sons and eldest daughter lived in either New York City or Philadelphia for about 9 months until the entire family was reunited.

After more poking around on the web, I learned that Hohenems was a major textile center for several hundred years. Daniel's occupation on the JMH website lists him as a "Kaufmann," or salesman. Perhaps he was a cloth merchant. Philadelphia was also a major textile hub in the mid-19th century, all the way through the 1970s. Daniel possibly worked in the textile industry there. Another clue to a link between textiles and Daniel is the marriage of Pauline on April 27, 1872 to Théophile Bernheim, a recent immigrant from Alsace whose specialty was dressmaker and upholsterer. The union of Théophile and Pauline produced eight offspring, including my grandmother, Martha Washington Bernheim, who was the youngest. My grandmother was born on 22 February, Washington's birthday, hence her patriotic middle name. Several of Martha's brothers had historic, patriotic or date-related middle names: Julius Caesar Bernheim, Joseph Valentine Bernheim (born on Valentine's day), Benjamin Franklin Bernheim and Ely Whitney Bernheim. One great aunt, Zelma, was named for her maternal grandmother—Zemirah Mendelsohn. My middle name is Paul in honor of both of my mother's grandmothers—Pauline. My mother's middle name was Pauline.



As we know all too well from recent history, war, persecution, economics or a combination of those factors is central to the story of immigration. From a web search for the history of Jews in Hohenems, I learned they were welcomed in Hohenems after being expelled from Burgau, Bavaria in 1617 by the Margrave of Burgau who was establishing himself as a devout Christian. The leaders in Hohenems restricted the number of Jews permitted to live in the town. On the JMH website, I was able to trace the paternal line of Daniel Mendelsohn for 5 generations to Josle Levi der Ältere, who was born in 610 in Burgau and died in 1688 in Sulz, Austria, a town not very far south of Hohenems.

Here it is: a story of persecution and emigration in the 19th century. Why did Daniel and Zemirah immigrate to Philadelphia in 1859 or 1860? Imagine that you have five sons ranging in age from 6 to 19 years old and two daughters, ages 10 and 20. Your hometown is restricting the number of Jews permitted to live within its borders and the economy is not looking great, but there is a booming textile industry in Philadelphia. When researching Daniel's siblings, I noticed that his younger sister, Zemirah (the same name as his wife) died in 1860 in New York City. Daniel arrived in New York City on May 31, 1859, so he had a close relative who was 48 years old living in New York City. Connections for



## DANIEL MENDELSON AND ZEMIRAH LÖWENBERG (Cont'd)

an immigrant are crucial, and Daniel had at least one—his younger sister. From the JMH website, it appears that Daniel's other siblings all died in Hohenems. Researching each one of Daniel's siblings will be another project on another day.

In Philadelphia in 1860, there were five synagogues and about 8,000 Jews living within the city. The biggest concentration of Jews was in a five square block neighborhood about 8 blocks from the city center. One of the very early addresses for Théophile Bernheim was in this neighborhood, which was one of the garment districts in Philadelphia.

I have been living in Valencia, Spain since October 2018 and can speak passable Spanish. How did Théophile Bernheim from Niederbronn-les-Bains, Alsace and Pauline Mendelsohn from Hohenems communicate? The Alemannic/Swabian German dialects have linguistic histories in Alsace and Voralberg. Is it possible that Théophile and Pauline could understand each other by him speaking in Alsatian while she spoke in her dialect? I think it's a possibility. Of course, Pauline was 10 when she arrived in the USA and was 22 when she married, so presumably she could speak good English. Théophile, on the other hand, had only recently arrived at age 26 from Alsace and presumably spoke both French and Alsatian. Could both he and Pauline have understood and spoken Yiddish? Maybe someone has some insight on the language issue.

Interestingly, my great-grandfather was one of the many Alsations who fled due to the loss of Alsace to Germany after the Franco-Prussian war which ended January 28, 1871. The young men who remained in Alsace risked being conscripted into the German army, so the impulses that propelled my great grandfather to immigrate were the loss of his country and likely the reduced economic opportunities under German rule. Théophile was the youngest of 4 children—his older brother Jacques and two sisters, Sophie and Fanny, remained in Alsace. The latter sister married Aron Keim in Niederbronn-les-Bains and their son, Zacharias (Harry) Keim, immigrated to New York, arriving on August 8, 1904 on the ship, La Gascogne. I have cousins from the children of Harry Keim. In fact, one cousin, Caryn, contacted me through [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and we have kept in touch via email and Facebook. Perhaps there are more cousins connected to me who have yet to be discovered. No matter, it's been interesting for me to learn about my past and I hope to visit Hohenems in the near future. A very special thank you to Hanno Loewy and to Raphael Einetter for helping me with all the research, and to the staff members at the Jewish Museum Hohenems who have built such an in-depth data base.

## CALL FOR PAPERS: JEWISH CEMETERY HOHENEMS

RAPHAEL EINETTER, MA

The Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems and the Jewish Museum Hohenems are currently developing a new publication focusing on the cultural monument "Jewish Cemetery Hohenems" and its history. The book will reflect on the ongoing restoration and renovation work, accompanied with photographs by photographer Dietmar Walser from Hohenems.

Furthermore, the anthology will not only cover the history of the Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery, founded in 1954, but will also address the Jewish graveyard's connections to the nearby Islamic Cemetery as well as the role of "Displaced Persons" in the cemetery's history. The former cemetery's gardener, Adi Pleterski, who died in September 2021 after taking care of the cemetery for exactly four decades, will be honored in an obituary.

The descendants of the former residents of Hohenems play a vital role in the remembrance and historical examination of the past. Therefore, we would like to invite you, the readers of In Touch, to support us by sending your thoughts. **What is your relationship to the Jewish Cemetery? What do you remember best and what do the graves of your ancestors mean to you?** Please send us a few short lines by the end of May. We are looking forward to including your comments in this special book.

Please send your memories of the Jewish Cemetery until August 31, 2022 directly to our actuary—**Raphael Einetter**, [einetter@jm-hohenems.at](mailto:einetter@jm-hohenems.at). Also tell us if we may include your name with your quote.

The Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery and the Jewish Museum Hohenems appreciate your support.



Photos provided by Dietmar Walser (Hohenems)





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Please email us ([jennsp500@gmail.com](mailto:jennsp500@gmail.com)) and offer suggestions or even better yet, let us know that you want to write a story. We would appreciate your work!



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