



Unveiling of the Plaque of Honour for  
Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn

and

Presentation of the Book  
*The Legacy of Max Raphael Hahn*

8th November 2014

Merkelstraße 3, Göttingen (Hogrefe Verlag)



Cordula Tollmien - Presentation 11/08/2014

Dear Ms. Schlapheit Beck, Mr Hogrefe, dear members of the Barton, Hayden & Kanter families, Sharon Meen, and sponsors of our book.

We are here today for two reasons: first, for the unveiling of the plaque for Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn; and secondly, for the presentation of the German edition of the book, *The Legacy of Max Raphael Hahn*. Both events are connected by the space in which we find ourselves, by this house, which was the Hahns' home for over twenty years and is now the 'home' of the Hogrefe Publishing Company. Four grandchildren of Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn and nine grandchildren — from Canada, South Africa, Belgium and the USA — have traveled to Göttingen for this occasion and are here today in the home of their grandparents and great-grandparents to honour their memory. In light of the crimes of the National Socialists, of which Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn were victims, I find this a special gift.

The plaque of honour/*Gedenktafel*, which is being attached to the house today, is a traditional means by which the City of Göttingen honors its significant citizens. Since 1874 — that is, for 130 years — the City has placed more than 300 such plaques throughout the city, building a constantly growing, living monument through which the people who lived at the specific address are remembered. The plaque at Merkelstraße 3 brings Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn — at least symbolically — back into our city and into our collective memory, even if their murder is a pain never to be erased. It honors them as they were, namely, important Göttingen citizens who shaped our city and its social life.

Max Raphael Hahn was born on April 22, 1880 in Göttingen, the son of Jewish businessman Raphael Hahn from Rhina in Hesse; in 1858, Raphael Hahn founded a branch of the family's specialized trade in skins and intestines and became a citizen of Göttingen. An ambitious and able merchant, Raphael Hahn's success allowed him to buy the large house in the Weender Straße 63 (now 70) in 1864. The house became

the headquarters/*Stammsitz* of the family and is remembered by an inscription placed there by the son of Nathan Hahn, Raphael Hahn's eldest son, in the 1960s. Nathan Hahn entered his father's business in 1887, and his younger brother, Max Raphael Hahn, followed him in 1896 at the age of 16 years. The brothers made the company one of the largest and most respected companies in Göttingen, the reputation of its skins and intestines was known internationally, and it also produced shoes. Nathan Hahn was considered the more quiet and reserved of the two brothers; Max Raphael in contrast, impressed his contemporaries as agile, astute and particularly prescient. Owing to the company's international connections, Max Raphael Hahn was always extremely well informed about economic issues; his opinions were valued and he was highly respected by, and popular among, his business colleagues. In Göttingen, the Hahns enjoyed a reputation as decent, industrious merchants of the Jewish faith who understood how to improve their economic status but never at the expense of the rights of others.

In 1917, Max Raphael Hahn married Gertrud Lasch, born 1893 in Halberstadt and a child of a Halberstadt glove dynasty, with whom the Hahns may have had business relationships. After Max Raphael Hahn completed his First World War service in the War Raw Materials Department, first in Leipzig and then in Vienna and Budapest, the family returned to Göttingen in February 1919 and in early September bought this villa at Merkelstraße 3. Here, on December 3, 1919, a son, Rudolf, was born and then a daughter, Hanni, on March 22, 1922. Since both Hanni and Rudolf succeeded in reaching England in 1939, we are able to remember with their families today their murdered grandparents and great-grandparents.

Both Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn grew up in Orthodox Judaism, and religion was for both an integral part of their lives. The life of the family therefore followed quite naturally the rhythm of the Jewish holidays, including of course the Jewish Sabbath, even if the entire Christian community worked on that day. But, in contrast to their parents, Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn accepted Reform Judaism as did the majority of Jews in Göttingen. Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn attended the synagogue on Waageplatz, built in the 1890s; today a memorial at the corner of Obere and Untere

Masch, built in the 1970s, stands at the site of where the synagogue was destroyed on 9/10 November 1938.

After the construction of the synagogue, a small Orthodox congregation, called the “Exit Congregation,” quit their seats in the new synagogue. Initially not only Raphael Hahn but also his sons, Nathan and Max Raphael, belonged to this congregation. They were also involved in the construction of a mikveh, which has recently been discovered in the house of the Löwensteins in the Rote Straße 28. But, after the First World War and his return to Göttingen, Max Raphael joined the Reformist Jewish congregation and by 1921 was chairman. He held this office for nearly twenty years until his expulsion from Göttingen in April 1940. (The dates on the plaque do not indicate birth/death but rather the time in which Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn lived at Merkelstraße 3.)

Max Raphael Hahn was — in the words of Göttingen Rabbi Hermann Ostfeld — the dominant personality of the Göttingen Jewish community and shaped its fortunes internally and externally. In addition, he was involved with Gertrud in the Göttingen chapter of the Jewish *Moritz Lazarus Loge*. The name of the lodge itself represents a program: the Göttingen lodge was named after left-liberal Jewish philosopher Moritz Lazarus, who died in 1903; in his writings, Lazarus had tried to connect religious with national identity and had become, by the end of the 19th century, the most prominent lay leader of liberal Judaism. The influence of the lodges, which included all wealthy and educated men of the Jewish community, exceeded the comparably small membership. Of particular significance was the contribution of the Jewish lodges to establishing a modern network of Jewish welfare assistance in Germany. According to the organization’s statutes, each member was required to provide proof at any time “that Judaism is synonymous with righteous behavior, exercise of the highest principles of ethics and humanity, and commitment to service to the Jewish religion.” (*Statuten der Göttinger Loge*, 1921, p. 4). The members elected a president of the lodge for a two-year term and Max Raphael Hahn held this office at least once. Women were excluded from membership in the lodges, but affiliated sororities were allowed after 1886. Gertrud Hahn led the Göttingen sorority in 1933 (and perhaps even earlier, but unfortunately there is no documentation).

Without Gertrud Hahn, Max Raphael's career as an entrepreneur and his exceptional involvement in the Jewish community is impossible to imagine. She was a clever, intelligent woman who unconditionally supported him in all his undertakings, and the plaque symbolizes their partnership in all endeavors.

In the times of persecution Max Raphael Hahn was the calming influence in the community, who personally took care, despite large private worries, of distressed community members, helping many to emigrate and comforting others with a kind word. Young Rabbi Hermann Ostfeld, appointed in 1935 at age 23 to Göttingen (Max Raphael Hahn had participated in his appointment of course), wrote later of his memories of Göttingen; to him, we owe thanks for an impressive picture of the caring and discreet activities of Max Raphael Hahn within the Jewish community. Shortly after taking up his rabbinate, Ostfeld reported, Max Raphael came to him before the service with a special request: "A member of the community, Mr. Isi Nußbaum, had just told him that his son, whom he had sent to relatives in America because of the increasing threats to the boy at school, would be doing his Barmitzva on this very day in America. Mr. Hahn asked me to speak about the Barmitzva of young Nußbaum." (Barmitzva is the celebration of a 13-year-old Jewish boy's religious maturity. The word refers both to the day and the celebration as well as the status: a boy becomes Barmitzva.)

"Influenced by the tragedy of this hour," Ostfeld added, "because the boy's parents, whom I myself had never met, could not be with their child, as he was admitted into the Jewish community of the adults in a synagogue somewhere far away, I stepped to the pulpit to give expression to the pain of the parents and of all of us. From somewhere within me the words [and] the sentences arose that captured the deep symbolic significance of the times in which we lived; a time in which the books of God were being trampled, in which the new Bible of the German people, *Mein Kampf*, had been written infused with hatred of the Jews. From my heart came words of love, and warm sympathy for the fate of the family, who were unable to embrace their son proudly and happily. A sob broke soon from the parents, the whole congregation wept with them, and tears choked my own final words."

Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn were soon to experience their own pain when they sent their children to safety in England.

In October 1938, only about 220 of an earlier population of 500 Jewish inhabitants still lived in Göttingen. Almost without exception, they were victims of brutal attacks by the SS and SA, who invaded homes or business premises not only in the night from 9 to 10 November 1938, but also on the two following days. Their homes and businesses were demolished, the furnishings destroyed, and the residents abused and arrested indiscriminately — men, women and children. As wealthy Jews, the Hahns received special harassment: in the middle of the night of November 10, about two o'clock in the morning, SS-men charged into the house at Merkelstraße 3 with an ax, awoke the Hahns from sleep and devastated their home. They smashed the doors and windows and destroyed furniture, works of art and antiques, and drove the family naked into the street. Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn, his brother Nathan and his wife Betty, whose apartment was also vandalized at Baurat Gerber Straße 19, were arrested. The two women were released the next day, and Nathan Hahn was released on November 19; Max Raphael Hahn was the only one to stay arrested until 15 July 1939.

Max and Gertrud Hahn were therefore unable to emigrate according to the plans of their relatives in the United States and England. In 1940, Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn moved to Hamburg, in the hope that they might be able to emigrate from there. But this hope was in vain. On 6 December 1941, they were deported from Hamburg to Riga. Gertrud Hahn, who was diabetic, possibly died in transit. Max Raphael Hahn was murdered at the latest in March 1942 in the so-called Dünamünde action, a major 'Killing Action' in a forest near Riga.

Not only the plaque reminds us of the life of Max Raphael Hahn but so too does the book, *The Legacy of Max Raphael Hahn*, which provides us with a glimpse into a hitherto unknown facet of the rich life of Max Raphael Hahn and his family. Even I, who have for years explored the history of the Jews of Göttingen including the Hahn family, was unaware that Max Raphael Hahn was not only a successful entrepreneur, and certainly the most important leader of Göttingen's Jewish community, but was also a

major collector, notably but not only of, Judaica/Jewish religious objects. His Judaica collection was not particularly large but of such high quality that a contemporary encyclopedia spoke of it in the same breath as the collections of the Rothschilds and Sassoons (the Sassoons, also called the "Rothschilds of the East," were major Jewish collectors especially in Baghdad, Persia, India and Hong Kong and Shanghai.) Max Raphael's father, Raphael Hahn, had started the collection with Judaica, his son and then his two grandsons carried on. And this is what this book is about: *The Legacy of Max Raphael Hahn — Göttingen Citizen and Collector*. And the subtitle focusses on the various aspects of his life: "A Story of Life and Death", that means: the life of the Hahn family in Göttingen and the murder of Max Raphael and Gertrud Hahn and Rudolf's and Hanni's emigration into safety; "of Courageous Perseverance", that means: Max Raphael's futile struggle to preserve his collection and also for his and his wife's life; and "the Continuing Force of the Family Tradition", that means: the continuation of collecting through the son and grandsons.

A few words about the background to the publication of this book. For me, this story began with an email I received from Canada on May 2, 2011: "My name," it said in the email, "is Michael Hayden and I am the grandson of Max Raphael Hahn." Although I knew that the children of Max Raphael Hahn, Rudolf and Hanni, had survived the Holocaust, the message struck a deep chord and still does. Despite all the years I have worked on the history of National Socialism in Göttingen and the Hahn family I never expected to read such simple words: "I am the grandson of Max Raphael Hahn." The email was from Michael Hayden, the son of Rudolf Hahn, who had changed his name to Roger Hayden in England during the war. He wrote to say, firstly, that he was collecting material for a history of the Hahn family and thereby hoped to benefit from my research; and secondly, that he, together with his daughters and his cousin Diana Kanter, the daughter of Rudolf's sister Hanni Hahn, would visit Göttingen in June 2011. This visit became an intense and moving experience to all of us.

In August 2011 I got an email from Michael Hayden headed "The Story Continues" and I learned that Michael had asked the historian Sharon Meen to look through and work with the documents of his family history, which his grandparents had managed to ship

out of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenforties, since Max Raphael and Gertrud had succeeded in sending out possessions and documents in two containers to Sweden and Switzerland. In May 2013, Sharon Meen, on one of her regular research trips to Germany, brought with her the book relating the story of the Hahn Collection that contained fascinating images of the Jewish ritual objects in the Hahn Collection. The hatred of the Nazi Regime means that many of these items are lost irretrievably but they live on in this book and represent an important part of Jewish cultural heritage, and thus of German cultural heritage. Lisette Ferera, a cousin of Michael Hayden's wife and herself the daughter of Holocaust survivors, wrote the family book with the assistance of both Michael Hayden and Sharon Meen.

Already when first skimming through the pages I knew for sure that this outstanding and exceptional document of the most important Jewish family of Göttingen should reach a wider audience. It was nice to learn later that also Lisette Ferera, Michael Hayden and Sharon Meen had already thought about having the book translated into German, and thus Michael Hayden was delighted when I asked him for his consent to make this book available to the German public. After the Göttingen City Archives and the Municipal Museum Director, Ernst Böhme, had also approved of presenting the book about the Hahn family to the Göttingen public, the next step was to find a publisher.

As the Hogrefe Publishing Company now finds its home in the former home of the Hahn family, it seemed natural, but could not be taken for granted to publish the book on the Hahn-Hayden family in this publishing house, since Hogrefe specializes in psychology not historical contents. Nevertheless, publishing director and owner Jürgen Hogrefe was immediately excited by this project. In an email of November 2013, he called the Hahn book an "exciting document" that brings us close to Max Raphael Hahn as a collector and, through the example of the Hahn family, reminds us of "the unfathomable inhumanity and the terrible injustice visited upon them as upon so many other Jews." By having his company publish the German edition of the book, Jürgen Hogrefe thus demonstrated not only his interest in the history of the Merkelstraße 3 house, and in particular for the fate of its former inhabitants, but also a sense of the high symbolic value it has for the Hahn family (but also for me, too) to have the book published in the

former Hahn house. We are all greatly indebted to his commitment and to the impeccable work of his staff: particularly noteworthy are Mr. Kleimenhagen's cover design and the work of Mr. Stefan Reins, with whom I spent many hours and exchanged many emails, talking matters of design and publishing details over in a highly productive manner; I would also like to thank ARThür in Weimar, who made the book ready to print and who had to integrate all my wishes for corrections and improvement, and I am also very grateful for Ms. Meiner's extraordinary organizational skills, especially for this event. Many thanks as well to the many private and institutional sponsors who enabled the project to go forward. I am glad to see many of these sponsors here among us.

In order to make the narrative accessible to a German, usually non-Jewish reader, I added more background information on the history of Jews in Göttingen, the nature of Jewish holidays and the importance of ritual objects. Some paragraphs in this book are completely new: namely those on the development of the Hahn enterprises and a chapter dealing with the fate of the family until the emigration of Rudolf and Hanni. Material from the memoirs of former Göttingen Rabbi Hermann Ostfeld, from which I quoted above, contributed texture to the portrait of the Hahn family. In my work Sharon Meen was a great help to me by indefatigably answering my numerous questions and providing more photographs and documents to enhance the text. Angelika Deese completed the final review of the manuscript and saved us from some previously overlooked errors.

The result of these common endeavors is something we all can be proud of – as I believe

Tomorrow night after the memorial hour recollecting the destruction of the Jewish synagogues in 1938 I will present our book in detail: This will take place here in Göttingen in the Bistro Löwenstein, Rote Straße 28, at 7.30 p.m. – this is exactly the house where the above mentioned mikveh can be found.

I thank you all again.

Translation: Sharon Meen and Angelika Deese