

Report of Stein family reunion, June 2010

Rabbi Leopold Stein was born in the year 1810. This prompted the organization of a reunion of his descendants in Franconia, Bavaria, Germany to commemorate him, on his 200th birthday, and to allow the widely dispersed family members to meet, many for the first time. *David and Sylvia Lewin* were the main organizers, and did a fantastic job of arranging meetings with mayors, museum curators, historians, and the press. The major work was done in the previous few years when David painstakingly put together a family tree, and contacted as many of the surviving members as he could. (He also has prepared an amazing website with a huge amount of information about family members.) The result was a gathering of 22 family members from Great Britain, the United States, South Africa, Israel and Germany in the 300-year-old Drei Kronen hotel in **Adelsdorf**, the town where *Abraham Loeb Stein*, the father of Leopold and the common ancestor of the participants, lived. The family tree, as completed at the time of the meeting, was printed out as a 10-meter scroll which was pasted around the walls of our meeting room. Although most of us did not know each other before this gathering, there was an immediate rapport, perhaps because we knew we were related, even though in many cases rather distantly. Each participant was given a color-coded name-tag, depending on whether the greatgreatgrandfather was Leopold Stein or one of his siblings.

A bus had been organized which took us to the various villages associated with the family. Each day we made an excursion in a different direction – north, east, west or south – and were given excellent tours by the local historian or museum director

Day 1, Monday 14th June

Our first stop was **Sulzdorf**, where *Abraham Loeb Stein* was born (in fact, he originally took the name Sulzdorfer, but later changed it to Stein). Here he married *Saine Hirsch*, and many of his children were born here. We were welcomed by the mayor of Sulzdorf, then given a tour by Reinhold Albert, who is very knowledgeable about the Jews of the region and wrote a book about them 10-15 years ago, which he plans to update. We visited the town and the local cemetery.

Our next and longest stop was **Burgpreppach**, where *Leopold Stein* was born. Here we were greeted at her palace by the Baroness Fuchs von Deuster with a champagne reception, and welcomed by the local mayor. The press was present and an article about the group appeared in the local paper. The baroness explained the importance of the so-called “Schutzjuden”, who paid a tax to the local baron, then had the freedom to live anywhere in the town. She commented how the Jews had helped convert the town from a sleepy bishop's see to a thriving town because of their intelligence and initiative in commerce, banking and other activities. It was only when most of the Jews left the town around 1890 that the local citizens appreciated what their role had been. We were given a tour of the castle, and shown the archives, which have a wealth of material, mostly written in Gothic script, a mine of information which hopefully will be deciphered and published one day

After lunch at the Gasthof Burgblick in **Manau** we returned to **Burgpreppach** to visit the museum which she and two other ladies in the town, Heidi and Gerda, have lovingly set up, with several panels about Leopold Stein and the Reform Jewish movement. There are also other exhibits of the local flora and fauna.

We then drove to **Altenstein**, the town where Leopold's sister *Adelheid/Udila Stein* married *Wolf Samson Sperberg*, and where the *eight Sperberg children* were born. This was of particular interest to her descendants, who tried to find the actual house in which the family lived – unfortunately, as so often, the house numbers had been changed. The town had a ruined castle, well preserved, which was picturesquely perched on a hill.

The next stop was the cemetery in **Ebern**, where the *Sperberg* family are buried, and here we were guided by the Reverend Ralph Utz. Over all we visited Jewish cemeteries in several towns and were pleasantly surprised that they were fairly well kept, with warning signs that vandalism is severely punishable. What a full day! But at dinner afterwards we were still very upbeat, discussing our experiences and becoming better acquainted with each other.

Day 2 – Tuesday 15th June

Today we visited the charming town of **Bamberg**, where Elenore's relatives, the *Wertheimers*, lived. We first visited the new modern synagogue and had an excellent tour by Elena Goldbaum. We were shown the mikveh (ritual bath which must be used by women before marriage, and monthly 7 days after their menstrual period ends, before they can sleep with their husbands). Also we were shown the ark with the torahs. There is a small but active Jewish population, and women are allowed to help make up the minyan (minimum of 10 people needed before a service can be held). We were also shown the synagogue memorial on Synagogenplatz, where the old synagogue had stood, and which was destroyed, like most other synagogues in Germany, on Kristallnacht

We then toured the old quarter of this delightful town, and had lunch at the Hotel Alt Ringlein

We then returned to **Adelsdorf**, where we had a tour of the town, and were shown the Shoah (Holocaust) memorial, the palace (next door to our hotel) where the Schutzjuden paid their dues, and the local agriculture museum. Then we had a fascinating illustrated lecture by Johann Fleishmann, who has made a detailed study of Jewish history and has published a book each year on this topic, handling different aspects

In the evening Doris spoke about Leopold's eldest son, *Sigismund Theodor Stein*, a renowned physician and physicist.

Day 3 – Wednesday 16th June

Today the bus took us to **Redwitz**, where the *Freunds* lived. Rainer gave us a tour of Redwitz, as well as **Kueps**, where we visited the ancient mikveh, now in a private home but still well-preserved. Then we visited **Mitwitz**, where *Elenore Wertheimer* was born, and the *Freunds* lived there. We were welcomed in the city hall by the mayor, Hans Peter Laschka, who had prepared a “golden book” which we all signed. He and Rainer then accompanied us on a tour of the charming town, and joined us for lunch at “Zum Steinernen Loewen”, formerly the house of *Salomon Wertheimer*, an uncle of Elenore's. We also saw his later home. In Mitwitz

In the late afternoon we went to **Burgkunstadt**, where Leopold and Elenore's first five children were born and where Leopold had his first synagogue (he was 25 years old when he first moved there). We also visited nearby **Altenkunstadt**, his alternative synagogue, which still stands, and is now a community center and museum. Our guide was Joseph Motschmann and Inge served as the translator

In the evening Shula and Starr spoke about their ancestors

Day 4 – Thursday 17th June

Our final day took us to **Fuerth**, the town where *Abraham Loeb Stein* had served as rabbi. We had an excellent tour of the modern and very well laid out Jewish museum, by the American-born director, Daniela Eisenstein. After lunch at the Gasthaus Schwarzes Kreuz, we wandered through the charming old town, before returning to Adelsdorf for our final evening of memoirs, this time by Thomas

Summary

Overall this was an exciting and inspiring gathering. Most of the German participants had not known that they had Jewish ancestry until David contacted them, and they found the experience interesting. Despite language differences, the German- and English-speaking contingents managed to communicate well (mainly the Germans spoke pretty good English).. Also, the German speeches by the various officials were translated efficiently by David (and occasionally by Doris) into English for the benefit of the non-German-speaking relatives. Everybody was most grateful to David and Sylvia for having done the footwork and for having coordinated this gathering, new friendships were made, photos have been exchanged since then, and we hope that we will manage to keep in contact with our new relations!