

Acknowledgments

In spite of our reliance on technology, a project of any kind takes people to succeed, and a project that deals with the fate of human beings and requires a detailed understanding of how a particular local system functions, even more so. Most important for the success of this kind of project are those people who have intimate knowledge of the sources—people who direct and work in archives and libraries in a variety of lands. They are the true heroes of studies such as this, for without their cooperation and help there would be no project. While it is true that research often takes place in isolation, the work prior to sitting in a cubicle with a bunch of dusty folders or newspapers is not the researcher's, but the expert's, who first locates the sources. And as this project has taught me, eyewitnesses are also indispensable. They, too, are heroes, though of a different kind from archivists and librarians—adding a voice of humanity. Eyewitnesses are the clothes that dress the skeleton of documents that are so essential, yet not sufficient.

Nearly fifty years ago I emigrated to the United States, much as a number of Süßen citizens had done since the nineteenth century, some of whom attained success. The credit for maintaining contact for nearly half a century belongs to my classmate from elementary school Gerda Schwenger, née Stahl, who doggedly wrote and called many times over the years. Another classmate and good childhood friend, Beate Lehle, née Ziegler, also sent signs of life periodically. In this way, contact was not entirely broken even after my parents died in 1977 and 1978.

Although I envisioned this study about thirty-five years ago, it began in earnest with a find in a used bookstore in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the spring of 1993. While in Knoxville, interviewing for the newly created Endowed Chair of Judaic Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, one of my future colleagues, Dr. Rosalind Gwynne, took me to McKay's, a used bookstore, to show me their *Judaica* collection. Among the books I found a volume in English with a blue cover

that bore a gold *chai* (Hebrew letters *yud* and *chet*, meaning *life* as well as the number 18) on the front that dealt with the Jews of Württemberg.¹ In it I found confirmation for the seeming mirage I had carried in my head since my childhood in Süssen, Germany, that there had been Jews living in Süssen until the Holocaust. I recall my mother's telling me so when I was a child. When, after living in the United States for fifteen years, I returned to Süssen for a visit, my mother showed me a historical study of Süssen, published on the occasion of the 900th anniversary of the town in 1971. Alas, there was no sign of any Jewish presence in it. Nor was I able to elicit any clear answers from anyone on anything related to Jews in Süssen. Today I understand that it would not have been possible in 1971 to publish information on the Jewish citizens of Süssen, it was barely possible in most of Germany to speak about things connected with the Holocaust. The teaching of the Holocaust in German schools did not begin until the 1970s. As my mother died after my visit, finding this book in Knoxville was the first evidence I had that I had not been hallucinating. Now, for the first time, I had a few names, though not yet any faces to put with the vague memory of whispers about the Jewish families and the euthanasia victims who had lived in Süssen. It nevertheless took five more years and the completion of several other projects before I could seriously look into the reality behind this lingering mystery. Much to my surprise, I was neither the first nor the only person interested in the subject.

The village of Süssen, now under the leadership of an enlightened mayor who was born after the Holocaust, had taken the initiative in 1983 to create an exhibition and accompanying *Dokumentation* for the citizens to revisit the fifty years since Süssen was unified in 1933. Assembled by the Volkshochschule (adult education institute), a section of these documents was recycled and expanded in 1989, when Mayor Bauch invited the surviving former Jewish citizens to a reunion, much in the manner of similar official reunions all over Germany.² The bottom line was not a pretty picture—twelve members of one family, the Lang family, as well as three other Jews not on the Nazis' official list, were deported for the purpose of ethnic cleansing.³ The triumphant bottom line of the Nazi-era municipal secretary's list of deported Jews reads, "Süssen is now free of Jews [*judenfrei*]."⁴

I was most interested to learn what this statement meant for the victims. I was also curious to learn how Jewish life could have existed at all in a village that had no Jewish community, no synagogue, no rabbi, and no cemetery. What would it have been like to move to a town with

clear divisions along religious lines, where Catholics and Lutherans were strictly segregated not into two parts of town, but literally into two separate towns? Where in this pattern would two Jewish families fit? And how could they survive as Jews with the closest Jewish community ten kilometers away, at a time before the automobile was a common mode of transportation?

Professionally and personally, I was fortunate to meet some truly exceptional people who, from the very beginning, showed an interest in my project and offered their unconditional support. First among these are Bärbel and Werner Runschke, who not only once, but repeatedly, have shared their beautiful and comfortable home in Süssen with me for extended periods, and have become not only valued colleagues, but cherished friends. It is fortunate for me that Werner is also interested in *altem Glomp* (old stuff), though in his case this refers to actual local artifacts such as tools and pottery as well as documents and pictures that tell how it once was. He is a scholar in his own right. Werner sees it as his mission to make sure that Süssen's local history is preserved.⁵ I am happy to say that, since we began working on this project together, teaching about the Jews of Süssen has become a regular part of his local history lessons to school classes and visitors. In his capacity since 1993 as *Stadtarchivar* (director of the newly relocated and reopened City Archive in Süssen at the time I began this research), Werner became an invaluable colleague, facilitator, source of information, and friend. He introduced me to officials and colleagues who were able to lend support in various ways. He became my wheels to out-of-the-way places and trusted comrade-in-arms for photographic and technical adventures. His generous, diligent, and painstaking efforts in helping me locate needed materials, explaining technical terms, and deciphering the Sütterlin handwriting make this book also his book. Together with his wife, Bärbel, they constituted my research team. Bärbel and I enjoyed long hikes and interesting conversations in the beautiful countryside, and she graciously gave of her time to help me decipher tombstone inscriptions and track down buildings. We all benefited from and enjoyed Werner's excellent cooking and Bärbel's delicious baking. In a place where most meals contain pork, Werner creatively resorted to delicious vegetarian meals for my benefit. Thank you so much, Bärbel and Werner, for all your support. Any existing shortcomings are mine alone.

On November 24, 2006, the municipality of Süssen recognized Werner Runschke's achievements in educating the local population on their history and customs, when Mayor Lützner awarded him the *Johann-Georg-*

Fischer-Bürgermedaille mit Bürgerbrief, the highest honor the city can bestow on its citizens and a rarely awarded distinction for truly deserving residents of Süssen.⁶

Walter Ziegler, director of the Göppingen District Archive, is another valuable colleague. Years of experience with local matters have molded him into a real power. Born in Süssen, Mr. Ziegler served his apprenticeship in the City Hall of Süssen and thus has decades of knowledge about local and regional documentation. I owe him thanks not only for access to all the materials in the Göppingen District Archive, but also for valuable hints regarding sources and materials in other collections and for access to his personal collection. The archive is located in the castle of Filseck, which is a grand historical location in beautiful surroundings.

Walter Lang (no relation to the Lang family in this study) was district archaeologist for Göppingen when I started this research. He had already been an interested party in Holocaust research and published several pieces of his own, including some on *Kristallnacht* in Göppingen. He was one of Hugo and Inge Lang's hosts during their visits to Süssen in 1989 and 1991 and became the keeper of materials and pictures that Hugo left for the Süssen City Archive.

An individual who has truly distinguished himself not only in historical scholarship but also in Jewish scholarship is Dr. Karl-Heinz Ruess, director of the Göppingen City Archive. Dr. Ruess has single-handedly revived a lost community. Göppingen had a vibrant Jewish community that was completely destroyed by the Nazis. Today only one Jewish man who returned from Israel in the 1970s lives in the city. The Jews of Süssen belonged to the Göppingen Jewish community with its brilliant rabbi of thirty years, Aron Tänzer. Dr. Ruess was instrumental in the creation of the Göppingen Jewish Museum, located in the old Lutheran church in *Jebenhausen*.⁷ The church houses the benches and the chandelier from the *Jebenhausen* synagogue, which was torn down in 1905 after the community was disbanded.

Much of the postwar information for both the Lang and the Ottenheimer families came from the Ludwigsburg State Archive. This study would not be nearly as complete without the help of Mrs. Michaela Mingoia and her colleagues, who cheerfully responded to the many queries over the past decade. Mrs. Mingoia was a tremendous help in locating information not only in Ludwigsburg but throughout Germany.

Thanks are also due to Mayor Marc Kersting, who took on the leadership of the city in 2010, and to the City of Süssen for their hospitality

during my research stays. Thanks also go to former Mayor Wolfgang Lützner and to the employees at the city hall for their kindness in supplying me with technical support during the 2002 stay. I would like to extend a special thank you to former Mayor Rolf Karrer for his personal interest, initial encouragement and endorsement of this project in 1999. Not until 2007 did I meet yet another former mayor, Martin Bauch. I am grateful to Mr. Bauch for reaching out to the Langs when the opportunity arose; otherwise, I might never have found Hugo Lang.

Hugo Lang is the only surviving descendant of his family with whom I established extensive contact, because he was the only Lang family member accessible to me; his sister Ruth died at the very beginning of this research, in 2000. Hugo and his wife, Inge, an Auschwitz survivor from Berlin, have become wonderful friends and have given me tremendous support and help. They have allowed me to photograph the entire family album and shared with me stories, letters, documents, and memories. After we met in 2000, my colleague in the History Department at the University of Tennessee, Dr. Kurt Piehler, who hails from the same town as Hugo and Inge in New Jersey, interviewed Hugo for his oral history project. I would like to thank Kurt for sharing his materials with me.⁸ Inge also wrote down her powerful and sad story to include in this book. The Langs have been gracious hosts during a number of visits to their home for a series of interviews, the most recent in 2010.

A few years ago I also had the opportunity to meet a son of Rabbi Tänzer's, Erwin Tänzer, who was around ninety and, with his wife, Ruth, lived in Pennsylvania. Sadly, Erwin Tänzer died on May 19, 2007. May his memory be for a blessing. A very emotional moment occurred for me in May 2007, after the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* published a story about this research. Through the generosity of a German tourist who knew Werner Ottenheimer, a phone call while in Germany connected me with ninety-one-year-old Werner Ottenheimer in Havana, Cuba. Finally, there was a living witness to the Ottenheimer story. In December 2007, I traveled to Cuba to talk with Mr. Ottenheimer about his childhood in Göppingen. Unfortunately, Werner Ottenheimer has also died since our visit, on December 19, 2008. And yet another connection was established as a result of the newspaper article. A German friend of Liese Lotte (Lilo) Guggenheim Levine's, formerly from Göppingen, told Lilo about this research. On August 5, 2007, I visited Lilo and her husband, Mel, in Saranac Lake, New York, where we were joined by one of Lilo's childhood friends, Isolde Lilli Netter Vandermeulen, and her daughter Debbie. And then, in 2008, Rivka

Ribak from Haifa came to Knoxville with her family and, upon their return, her husband Yair made the connection for me with Shavei Zion in Israel which led to a surprising meeting with Alisa Klafter, born in Rexingen, Germany, and a cousin-by-marriage to Hugo Lang. These are rare and special moments that will remain with me forever.

A thank you is also due to my classmates from elementary school in Süssen, first and foremost to Inge Honold, née Vetter, who arranged a class reunion in 1999, after I had been in contact with only Gerda Stahl Schwenger and Beate Ziegler Lehle for nearly forty years. It was a memorable experience and rekindled childhood friendships.

Over the years, I have benefited from reading papers and giving lectures on issues related to this project at professional conferences and in academic settings. These include, in 2000, “The Recovery of Small-Town German Jewish Life: An Example,” Association for Jewish Studies; in 2001, “From Cattle-Dealing to Riga: A German Jewish Family Before and During the Holocaust,” Southeast Conference for the Study of Religion; in 2006, “Recovering Lost Jewish Communities,” East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville; in 2007, “Das Schicksal der Süssener Juden,” Jewish Museum, Jebenhausen, Germany; “Can Grand Larceny and Good Neighboring Exist Side by Side?” “The Case of Two Jewish Families in Rural Swabia during the Nazi Era,” and “Requisitions-Restitution-Reparations: The Story of the ‘*Judenhaus*’ in Süssen,” all at the University of Tennessee; in 2009 “Süssen is Now Free of Jews,” International Humanities and Arts Conference; “Return to the Black Forest,” Association of Writers and Writing Programs; “Friend or Foe: A Tale of One Family’s Journey into the Holocaust,” Southeast Commission for the Study of Religion; “The ‘Other’ Victims: In a German Village, Perpetrators and Survivors Battle Over Their Victimhood,” Association for Jewish Studies; in 2010 “Suezza—No Grazing Land for Jews,” International Association for the History of Religions, and in 2011 “Stolpersteine—The Mark of Cain or Redemption?” International Humanities and Arts Conference. My thanks to all the colleagues who commented on my work and made valuable suggestions for improvement and expansion.

During the past six years I have derived great benefit and encouragement from my colleagues in the German Research Seminar here at the University of Tennessee, funded by the Humanities Initiative of the College of Arts and Sciences. Professors Daniel Magilow, David Lee, Vejas Liulevicius, David Thompkins, Stephanie Ohnesorg, Maria Stehle, and Denise Phillips not only afforded me the opportunity to present my work for their com-

ments but connected me with scholars they know who work in German Studies. Thank you for this most stimulating experience. I owe a special thank you to Professors Magilow and Lee, who read and commented on the entire manuscript. Professor Andrew Bergerson, from Missouri State University–Kansas City, as well as Stephanie and Eric Bank likewise gave the manuscript a thorough reading that resulted in many excellent queries and comments. In the fall of 2007 and 2010, I used the manuscript as one of the texts for my RS/JS 385 class on German Jewry. We read and discussed the completed sections, and the students' comments were invigorating and their questions profound. My thanks to all of the students for participating in these discussions and also for catching some of my mistakes! R. Michael Booker was my 2006–10 teaching assistant and helped with the details and revisions of this project, as did Krystyn Linville, Jenny Salata, and Erika Magnuson, our work study students.

Many thanks to Fordham University Press for including this study in its World War II series: Professor Kurt Piehler, series editor; Fred Nachbaur, director of the Press; and Wil Cerbone, editorial associate. My thanks also to the two anonymous readers for their excellent and timely comments and suggestions. A very special thank-you to Michael Koch, outside editor of this book, for his interest, care, and tremendous help in making this a much more readable book, and to Eric Newman.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my employer for the past eighteen years, the University of Tennessee, including former Dean Bruce E. Bursten and the College of Arts and Sciences, and former colleagues, Professors James Fitzgerald and Charles Reynolds in the Department of Religious Studies, and Professor J. P. Dessel in the Department of History for their encouragement and support. Jim and J. P. made considerable sacrifices by taking on the leadership of the Department of Religious Studies and the Judaic Studies Program so that I could have a research leave that allowed me to advance this project. Invaluable to getting us through the day were our two departmental specialists, Debbie Binder and Joan Riedl, now also retired, who supported my work since my very first book in 1995. Many thanks to all of you!

As I make final revisions at the beginning of 2011, I am beholden to a new set of colleagues. The new head of the Department of Religious Studies is Professor Rosalind I. J. Hackett; our new department wizard is Karen Windham, and our interim dean is Dr. Hap McSween. My gratitude to all for your continued support of my work. The final big thank you goes to my current graduate assistant, Ashley Combest from the English

Department, who is a scholar in her own right. Her comments and counsel have been very insightful and helpful, her technical skills superb, and her dedication to helping me get this manuscript to press in a timely manner is exemplary. Thank you so much, Ashley!

Financial support for research in Germany in 1999, 2002, 2006, 2007, and 2010 was provided by the Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Chair Endowment in Judaic Studies, the Judaic Studies Support Fund, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School, and the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee.

The title, *Süssen Is Now Free of Jews*, is taken from the page in the *Süssen Gemeindechronik*, which lists the thirteen Jews who were deported from Süssen on November 28, 1941. This list is reprinted in the *Süssen Lang Dokumentation*, 1989, p. 97. All translations of German sources are my own unless otherwise noted.