

ABSTRACT

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This study investigates how mainstream German Jews in the first half of the nineteenth century moved from the edges of society into the German economic middle class, as their marginal occupations, especially petty commerce and peddling, inadvertently positioned them to be at the forefront of German industrialization. The narratives of Jewish businessmen, combined with articles in two Jewish newspapers, indicate that Jewish entrepreneurs of that period continued to focus on commerce and were well positioned to take advantage of niche opportunities that the German gentile population overlooked. The study also showed how these Jewish businessmen publicly supported artisanry and the German guild system, as they simultaneously used their master certifications to start their own businesses. It reveals how Jewish businessmen's thinking changed, as they moved from marginal to mainstream and impacted the way they conducted business, as they moved from selling rags to wearing riches.

FROM SELLING RAGS TO WEARING RICHES: GERMAN JEWS' ECONOMIC
PROGRESS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By

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Chapter I: Introduction

At the end of the eighteenth century, the German economy was dominated by tenant farms on nobles' estates and artisan crafts controlled by guilds, which had excluded Jews from membership since the Middle Ages. Jewish participation in the economy was limited to areas not occupied by the majority Christian population.¹ Because they could never be certain of their income, Jews in this period pursued diverse occupations, including slaughtering and selling meat, trading in cattle, hides, and agricultural products, manufacturing brandy, and brewing and selling hops. More than half of these Jews lived on the edge of abject poverty and earned their living from *Händel* and *Nothändel* (petty trade and peddling).²

Historians have commented on the juxtaposition of nineteenth century developments and capitalism's ascendancy that impacted this artisan/agricultural-based economy and enabled Jews to become early participants in Germany's nascent industrialization, moving from the historically marginal "Jewish" occupations of hawking and selling small goods (e.g., ribbons, mirrors, mirrors, and jewelry), second-hand merchandise and clothing, rags, and other rubbish known as *Händel* (petty commerce) and *Trödel* (junk sales) together with pawnbrokering, into new areas of commerce and that spawned new endeavors and the establishment of profitable businesses.

Many of the Jewish businessmen who were active wrote memoirs of their experiences. These accounts, autobiographical or written by close family members, offer insight into how the Jewish businessmen who were active in this period understood these shifts as they experienced them and how German officials and

Germans with whom they interacted treated these early Jewish entrepreneurs. Focusing on this period will reveal what motivated these denigrated Jewish businessmen to push themselves to continue to engage in their marginal businesses, incidents that alerted them to opportunities, and roadblocks they surmounted. Thus, an analysis of these memoirs will provide insight into the shifting perspectives of those who were active during this first half of the nineteenth century and the implications of those shifts.

This essay will focus on the memoirs of Jews who were born in this period and whose commercial careers occurred then as well. Their memoirs have, fortunately, been collected and published by historian, Monika Richarz.³ In addition, this paper will focus on two German-Jewish newspapers. *Sulamith*, the first German language Jewish newspaper, was founded in 1806 to further a secular, worldly and tolerant Judaism. The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums (AZJ)*, which began publishing in 1837, emphasized Jewish enfranchisement and included articles of general Jewish interest. Neither paper had a regular business/economics column or an advertising section. Because both papers had a shared purpose and were acutely sensitive to how ordinary Germans perceived the Jews, they covered economic issues that could bear on Jewish enfranchisement. These newspapers urged Jews to change occupations to artisanry and farming. The evidence from the memoirs, however, reveals that Jews rarely pursued such careers, much preferring the world of commerce. Thus, there was much distance between governments' official pronouncements and the lives of those Jews whose business practices enabled them to participate in nineteenth century German middle-class life.

The memoirs, which reveal the real world of commerce and not the idealized world of artisanry and agriculture, add an important element to historians' understanding of how individual Jews responded to shifts in the economy as they were occurring. Linking these early nineteenth century narratives with the changing economic environment helps deepen our understanding of how individual Jewish businessmen perceived business opportunities, responded to them, and succeeded to become the earliest capitalists on the forefront of that century's coming age of industrialization.

Chapter II: 1780-1800: Late Enlightenment

Since the Middle Ages, Europeans had regarded Jews as outsiders with unique customs, laws, habits, and language—people inexorably separated from their surrounding communities by inimical religious beliefs. Jews living in Europe often were referred to as the “Jewish nation” or “corporation,” and Jacob Katz comments that the Jews of this period also considered themselves a separate nation.⁴ Consistent with the way they dealt with other undesirable foreign groups, governments restricted Jews as to where they could live and required Jews to pay special taxes for the privilege of residing within or traveling through a regime's borders. The general population, which for centuries had been imbued with hatred for the “Christ killers,” also ostracized Jews, excluding them from participation in economic life which centered on farming or guild-dominated artisanry. Artisanry was the way that the majority society's upstanding members earned their living, but eighteenth century Western European Jews could not become artisans, nor could they join guilds.

In the German states, the economic activity of most Jews was limited to those occupations which members of German society did not pursue and which provided the Jews a marginal subsistence. In the early 1800s, more than half of Germany's Jews earned their livelihood in Händel and Trödel— the degrading and financially unreliable petty commerce of acquiring and selling assortments of discarded rags, second-hand goods, or “Kramwaren” (rummage, rubbish merchandise), which together with pawnbrokering, were known as the Jewish businesses.⁵

Jewish peddler merchants normally offered their wares door-to-door or hawked them at town markets. Many of the Händler/Trödler moved through established routes during the week, returning home on Friday night, when possible.⁶ They regarded their “Medine”, or specific districts, which they understood “belonged” to them exclusively, as valuable assets, and it was not unusual for fathers to bequeath them to their sons. Jewish peddlers operated as middlemen between town and country, bringing the farmers' crops to sell at town markets for a commission and returning with flour, sugar, and other staples to sell to those same farmers.⁷ It is possible that in his narrative Ascher Lehmann, referring to his first attempts at Händel with his father's “acquaintances” could be implying that his father had such a district where he plied his wares to his repeat customers.⁸

In this same period that the Jews were constrained to engage in Händel, the intellectual community was examining the relationship of the individual to the state and religious institutions. Enlightenment thinkers approached the human condition from the perspective that freedom, democracy, and reason were fundamental for all members of society. This new age, in contrast to the corporate-feudal order, would

be based on individual property rights combined with the ideals of liberty and equality. Although this ideal was first realized politically later in Europe, Enlightenment philosophy, based on reason to determine action and the assertion that all men have that capacity, asserted that “reasonableness” should be the criterion for evaluating actions. When Enlightenment thinkers conceived that the state and religion could be separated, it became possible for these thinkers to envision a role for the Jews in their midst and to consider what that role might be.⁹ In his book, *Jerusalem*, Moses Mendelssohn described how such a state, in which churches were separated from politics, could operate.

Although Mendelssohn personally was welcomed in Germany’s enlightened cultural and philosophical circles as a glowing example of this Jewish potential, official Prussia never recognized him. In 1771, King Frederick II rejected his application for membership in the prestigious Prussian Academy and the freemasons refused him membership in spite of support from his freemason friends, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Christian Wilhelm von Dohm.¹⁰ It was in this setting that Moses Mendelssohn recommended that Jews should try to comply as best they could with their citizenship duties and their obligations to their religion.¹¹ And it was in this context that “enlightened” thinkers and rulers began to consider the “reasonableness” of the Jews’ current political and economic status and the future of that status.

In 1781, Austrian emperor Joseph II issued his Patent of Toleration.¹² The Patent indicated a softening of official Austrian attitude regarding the status of its Jews when Joseph II, in his desire to increase the participation of all Austrian subjects in Austrian society, included the Jews. The edict revoked the requirement that outer

clothing of Jews show identifying emblems; rescinded the tax on Jewish movement from one location to another; and permitted Jews to open factories, learn crafts, and seek apprenticeships from Christian masters, although the masters could refuse the application. These provisions, including freedom of movement and permission to open factories, were designed to encourage Jewish businessmen to travel for business purposes and establish factories, both of which would benefit the Austrian economy. While this edict evidenced a shift in thinking, which some scholars believe was because Joseph II wanted to take advantage of the potential economic profitability Jews could bring the state, the Patent did indicate acceptance of the idea that the Jews potentially could make a contribution to the Austrian economy. However, the edict was unencumbered by any legal requirements that would upset Austria's powerful Catholic Church or its existing economic structures, especially the guilds.

According to the historian Michael Brenner, the Patent had minimal impact precisely because of the guilds' opposition.¹³ Many Jews also did not view this edict as economic encouragement. In his narrative Ascher Lehmann indicated that many Jews reacted to the Emperor's announcement that while his mother, Maria Theresa, had hindered Jews, he now wanted to improve their situation and make them equal to all other nations. Lehmann, who, like the surrounding majority population, accepted the Jews' separate national status, positively assessed the Patent's potential new opportunities for the Jews: to live where they wanted, marry when they wanted, and pursue occupations from which they had been excluded. But Lehmann also immediately noted that Austria's Jews now had to join the army.¹⁴ Contrary to the expectations of Enlightenment thinkers, he commented that Jews did not rejoice over

the would-be privileges that Joseph II offered them but viewed the Patent as a way for the Kaiser to raise additional troops for his impending war with Turkey. Lehmann described the Jewish response, “There was an uproar among the Jews. They began crying and wailing. In the big new prayer houses they said *tillim*, they fasted, and held vigil until midnight.”¹⁵

German Enlightenment thinkers viewed Joseph II’s Patent positively, since they wanted Jews to overcome their economic insufficiencies and join mainstream German society.¹⁶ Within months after Joseph II issued the Patent, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm published in 1781, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*. Dohm believed that centuries of exclusion and persecution and not an innate Jewish defect was responsible for the Jews’ continuing segregation. He proposed that granting the Jews civil rights would enable them to become respectable members of the German *Bürgertum*. Like his contemporaries he agreed that Jews engaged in the more disreputable forms of *Trödel* and *Händel*, but he simultaneously recognized that official restrictions made it nearly impossible for all but a small number of the richest Jews to sustain other financially successful commercial activities. “...Taxes and many restrictions make this (*Händel*) necessary that only a few of this group have sufficient income to pursue large volume *Händel*.”¹⁷ It is possible that when Dohm referred to these rich Jews that he was thinking of Mendelssohn, who was not wealthy but managed a successful silk factory and with whom Dohm consulted and corresponded as he wrote *Verbesserung*.¹⁸

Dohm reasoned that because the majority of Jews were excluded from the guilds, they were limited to “Detail *Händel*” and pawnbrokering, which kept them

poor and despised. He believed that if Jews were permitted to join mainstream society, they would shed Händel and Trödel for the then respectable German occupations in crafts and agriculture.¹⁹ *Sulamith* supported Dohm's argument, clearly agreeing with the general cultural bias in favor of artisanry.²⁰

Baron Adolph von Knigge, like Dohm, was an Enlightenment thinker who embraced the idea of social reform.²¹ Knigge wrote *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (1788) to present what he called a factual portrayal, not a philosophical treatise, of current society and how those in society should behave to respond to this reality. Knigge accepted the majority society's responsibility for Jewish shortcomings and acknowledged that there were Jews who dealt honestly and kindly with others. Nevertheless, he emphasized that Jews on all economic levels, including the Händler and Trödler, had an ingrained devotion to commerce with an accompanying finely-tuned sense of how to turn every encounter to their financial advantage, and this "genetic" characteristic was enhanced by their international connections with other co-religionists.²² Knigge stressed the Jews' unceasing effort to secure the greatest profit, even at others' expense and warned his readers that this trait made the Jews exceptionally shrewd and canny in business dealings. He advised gentiles to complete all transactions with Jews forthrightly, because Jews' innate craftiness would give them the opportunity to take advantage of any delay to secure a better deal for themselves.

Although both Dohm and Knigge envisioned Jews ultimately becoming part of mainstream German society, neither anticipated there would be immediate movement toward that goal. In *Verbesserung*, Dohm expressed the Enlightenment

thinkers' general view when he stated that one could not expect that the improvements he was advocating would take place in the foreseeable future, "...Of course," he noted, "one should not anticipate that the improvement of the Jews would happen immediately by the next generation."²³

As Enlightenment exuberance began to wane at the start of the nineteenth century, Jewish opportunities in the German economy continued to be crippled by the constraints of guild-controlled artisanry and peasant agriculture, which also defined Germans' social relationships. Brenner notes that in 1780, when Dohm was writing, Jewish economic activity had to be approved by the authorities and tolerated by the surrounding majority as well as by the Jews of their community.²⁴ More than half of the Jews, no matter where they lived, engaged in some form of Händel, Nothändel, and money changing,²⁵ and were too poor to pay taxes.²⁶ Many Jews of this period combined trade with other occupations, depending on what was available and permitted, including animal slaughter, brandy manufacture, breweries, and hops production. For example, Jews who had their community's approval for kosher slaughter sold the non-kosher parts of animals they butchered to Christian housewives and the armies, as Ascher Lehmann described.²⁷ According to Richarz²⁸ and as Aron Hirsch Heymann related, many Jews operated as contractors, conveying the peasants' wool to markets for a share of the profit.²⁹ Jews also were engaged in manufacturing brandy and brewing beer, like Philipp Tuchmann.³⁰ Other Jews, especially spinsters and widows, maintained themselves through handicrafts and domestic service. They also could be found in drapery manufacture, tailoring, and haberdashery.³¹

Chapter III: Artisanry and the German Guilds

Through the first half of the nineteenth century, when most Germans were engaged in farming or artisanry and the majority of the Jewish population either fully or supplementally earned its livelihood from small-scale *Händler*, begging, pawnbrokering, and money changing,³² passing a *Meister* exam with its reward of guild membership was the benchmark of a good German *Bürger*.³³ Accompanying its economic importance, the German craft system was embedded in the notion that the German people, separated into dukedoms and principalities, shared a common German historical heritage. Over time, guild members with common backgrounds who lived in proximity created a collective memory and ethos that stressed respectability and solidity, discipline, peace, order, and the honor of their occupation.³⁴ From the end of the Enlightenment through the Napoleonic period (ca.1780-1815), forward thinking philosophers and rulers accepted this cultural norm, arguing that if the Jews were encouraged to pursue artisanry to become part of this culture and the guilds could be persuaded to accept Jews, then Jews ultimately would acquire the German qualities that would enable them to be accepted into this community as proper Germans.

Beginning in the 1820s and 1830s, increasing numbers of Jews left *Kleinhändler*, started increasingly profitable businesses and attracted their government's positive attention. Even as they continued to pursue commerce, they publicly continued to express their adherence to the social norm of guild-focused artisanry as the mark of productive participation in the mainstream German society and the way for German Jews to demonstrate their readiness to join that society.³⁵

The Siegel, Tuchmann, and Elsas narratives³⁶ portray this tension that existed throughout the first half of the nineteenth century between government encouragement without laws to enforce this benchmark, guilds' antipathy to accepting Jews as members, and the new ways that Jews were earning their livelihoods.

Because this guild-dominated artisan culture never welcomed Jews, Jews never fully embraced it, in spite of royal edicts and pronouncements encouraging Jewish involvement. Nevertheless, until the mid-1800s, economically successful Jews publicly expressed their support and philanthropically contributed to it because artisanry offered entrance into previously barred ways to earn a living, expressed the public's perception of that solid German society in which Jews wanted to participate, and signified a necessary step to gain eventual enfranchisement.³⁷

Indeed, some Jews did enter farming and artisanry. Jewish participation in these sectors increased overall from 7 percent in 1822 to 33 percent in 1842, and in Prussia from 4.6 percent in 1813 to 19.3 percent in 1843.³⁸ The increases, however, were only temporary and even exaggerated through statistical manipulations.³⁹ The narratives give evidence that Jews quietly pursued other occupations even as they publicly lauded the value of artisanry.

The two Jewish newspapers, *Sulamith* and *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* advocated for artisanry because it would prove the Jewish community's desire for full participation in the majority lifestyle. From the beginning of the nineteenth century through the 1850s, articles reported on efforts to encourage poor Jewish youth in this direction. *Sulamith*, in its first year of publication in 1806, quoted Dohm, arguing

that Jews pursued Händel only unwillingly. Giving Jews the same rights as others enjoyed would enable Jews to pursue occupations that would make them useful citizens.⁴⁰ The paper also encouraged Jews to buy land for its potential advantages for them as they strove to join the mainstream: “Show that you are worth of the name Bürger and subject. Fulfill your sovereign’s wishes where you reside by buying land as your income enables you. Cultivate this land with diligence and energy. Let this be your preferred business.”⁴¹

In a subsequent 1810 article, *Sulamith* cited recent actions in Anhalt-Deßau and Württemberg that permitted protected Jews the “opportunity” to become artisans, indicating the potential positive impact such measures had on enfranchisement. The article reported official encouragement and expressed the desire that the guilds’ masters not “hesitate” to give apprenticeships to Jewish youth.⁴² This same article praised Hirsch Schwabe, a Dessau merchant who decided that his youngest son, Samuel, should be a farmer; Schwabe gave Samuel a fertile piece of land, but he also hired a steward to guide Samuel. The article praised Schwabe and expressed hope that other Jews would follow this leadership example.⁴³

In an 1817 article, *Sulamith* again exhorted its readers to encourage Jewish youth to become artisans and craftsmen and to support poor Jewish apprentices.⁴⁴ The article noted artisanry’s importance in helping Jews become useful subjects *and* participate in the rights and duties of other citizens. That this *Sulamith* article also urged the guilds not to put barriers in Jewish apprentices’ paths, indicated the paper’s awareness of the hardships Jewish apprentices faced, including the unwillingness of

the gentile *Meister* to accept them and, if they did, to hinder Jews from becoming *Meister* and taking apprentices:

Even residence and travel in certain states is forbidden to Jewish (Israelite) apprentices. Therefore, it is not surprising that the associations are dedicated to promoting artisanry among the Jews. Without this, it would not be easy to convince those Jews, who have been raised in traditional ways, to dedicate their children to any kind of artisanry.⁴⁵

Sulamith continued to support guild apprenticeship programs through 1834, as it published annual reports of the *Vereine* (associations) and solicited additional contributions to enable the training of Jewish apprentices.⁴⁶

The gulf between *Sulamith*'s view that artisanry would have a potentially positive impact on Jewish enfranchisement and the behavior of the mainstream Jewish community was highlighted in its announcement of an 1812 Prussian edict that mandated family names for Jews. *Sulamith* praised this edict as a harbinger of Prussian support for ultimate enfranchisement,⁴⁷ although Händler Jacob Adam perceived it as a government law that did not benefit him directly. "We had just spent a lot of time traveling toward Russia and had done nothing to meet the new regulation concerning Jews or procure Bürger rights." His description of the steps he ultimately had to take and the time it took for him to comply and validate his Prussian birth bespoke his annoyance over what this "privilege" cost him.⁴⁸ This disconnect between the newspapers' support for political enfranchisement and the individual Jewish Händler's more immediate concern of earning a living helps historians appreciate the divide between what was expressed in the Jewish press and the perspective of the average Jew of that period who wanted to avoid all contacts with government officials.

The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* (*AZJ*), as part of its purpose to foster full Jewish participation in German society,⁴⁹ likewise promoted artisanry as a road to enfranchisement. An article on May 2, 1837, praised the progress of a *Verein*, established on September 10, 1829 to mark Mendelssohn's centenary, and complimented the *Verein* for its success in encouraging "productive" German occupations which would result in a good public impression of Jews and Judaism. It praised the significant financial investment made by *Verein* members to recruit and train apprentices and, significantly, noted encouragement from important personages, including King Friedrich August. It is noteworthy that *AZJ* used the word "Verbesserung," the same expression that Enlightenment thinkers used, to describe the *Verein*'s successes. The article emphasized the *Verein*'s attention to religious-moral values with the non-denominational word "Weißen" and referred to other "similar events," thus indicating *AZJ*'s awareness of "good" German qualities and behavior, and the *Verein*'s role in training "proper" German artisans who would be a credit to German guild culture.⁵⁰

Chapter IV: 1780-1800: Händeln and Hausieren

The narratives of this period provide a starting point from which to measure changes that occurred in the following periods. They offer insight into the prevailing Jewish economy and how small Jewish entrepreneurs evaluated their activities. The majority of German Jews born before 1800 were engaged in Händeln to some extent, even if that was not their primary business, because of restrictions that limited their options.⁵¹ In an 1807 edition, *Sulamith* agreed with Dohm position and characterized Händeln and Trödel as occupations of necessity. It called for laws that would permit

Jews to shift from peddling to sell their goods in the same honest ways like their Christian counterparts.⁵² Not surprisingly, all the Jewish narrators, even as they engaged in Händel, regarded it with the same disdain as did the majority community.

Isaac Thannhäuser's (1774 - ?)⁵³ narrative evokes the pathetic personalities of the "schlemiel" and "schlimazel" in its depressingly detailed and pitiful account of successive hardships and his inability to rise above a subsistence livelihood. After his father died when he was eleven years old, Thannhäuser was forced to rely on his stepfather and extended family which secured him his first employment with his uncle's wife's brother as a menial domestic as shoe shiner, stable boy, hunting dog, and nursery maid.

After two fruitless years in which he was unable to earn any money, Thannhäuser shifted into Händel with assistance from another family member. That Thannhäuser described his wares as "Kram" (rubbish) and "Schacherhandel" (peddler's bric-a-brac), words exuding distaste, vividly expressed his abhorrence with haggling, bargaining, and usury associated with this business he felt he was forced to pursue:

They bought me buttons, eye glasses, big and small mirrors, and other notions...with them I was to learn how to peddle. But the first time I set out with these new goods I broke one of the biggest mirrors...This was an omen that I would never like peddling. It stirred nothing but aversion in me... Now the period of my adverse fate really began. I was given a load of goods that I had...to get from place to place...There was no thought of profit since other dealers sold the goods at less than what I had paid for them....⁵⁴

What is significant about Thannhäuser's narrative is not its realistically harsh picture of the hardships and personal disappointments that Jews endured in this period, but his bitterness and expectation that he would fail in everything he

attempted. His pervasive expectation of failure made it a certainty. Thannhäuser provides a basis for comparison with other Jews in similar situations. His account offers the opportunity to draw inferences about the attitudes of his contemporaries who ultimately reached a point of contentment with their personal situation.

Thannhäuser's memoir offers a basis to compare the tone of other contemporaneous narratives, to understand how those accounts differed from Thannhäuser's in the way they responded to comparable personal and occupational hardships.

Ascher Lehmann's (1769-1858)⁵⁵ descriptions of his early experience reveal his acceptance of a limited reality when, at seventeen years old, his hope to become a rabbi evaporated in a series of temporary jobs he took to stay alive while he traveled to pursue his studies. He returned home to fall back on Händel, his father's livelihood. Lehmann described how his father supported his first Händel efforts and how he initially approached his father's customers. That Lehmann used the expression "gangbare Waren" (easily saleable goods) for the articles he purchased for resale indicated his awareness of their minimal quality and value and his interest in their movability--cheap potentially saleable items that he, a Kleinhändler, could entice people to buy on a whim. His account of his first experiences traversing the countryside in a series of unproductive village stops offers valuable insight into the personality necessary to cope with the unceasing drudgery of this "Jewish" business and to how he endured the prejudice of his customers:

I went...peddling. But when I came to the acquaintances of my father and offered my wares, with one voice the Catholic peasants, their wives and daughters said: "Oh, you pretty fellow, what a pity that you will go to hell and purgatory. Get yourself baptized!"...Boys who were herding cows or pigs called out to me: "Jew, mach mores!" If I didn't immediately take off my hat, they threw stones at me...⁵⁶

Lehmann then went to work for his wife's grandfather, who owned a slaughtering business, to buy calves, oversee their slaughter, deliver the kosher meat to Jewish households and non-kosher meat to inns, and then peddle the remainder.⁵⁷ As with his earlier Händel foray, lack of customers forced Lehmann to sell the remainder meat very cheaply, which made this operation unprofitable. What distinguished him from Thannhäuser was that Lehmann accepted his lack of success as endemic to Händel and not a personal failure. Equally important, Lehmann did not interpret these difficulties as an indication that he should stop trying.

Jacob Adam (1789 - ?)⁵⁸ similarly summarized his first unsuccessful attempts to sell silk ribbons, "I'd rather go where pepper grows...."⁵⁹ He recounted that his father had eked out his livelihood as a traveling Händler with his uncle. Similarly, Adam relied on his brother to begin his career with money borrowed from his father and uncle to acquire inventory in cloth and rent a booth at a town fair, where he made enough profit for more purchases.

Although Knigge's *Über den Umgang* may have given an accurate portrayal of Jews supporting other Jews, his picture was incomplete. The majority of the Jews in business in the first decade of the nineteenth century did not have significant "international Jewish connections" that Knigge described, but, like Isaac Thannhäuser, Ascher Lehmann, and Jacob Adam, they depended on immediate and close family members to cobble together their tenuous livelihoods. While such family connections may have provided the only possibility for these Jews to secure employment, these relationships were not financially beneficial. Although their relatives may have bought them their first bundle of potentially saleable bric-a-brac,

they did not gain any profit from them. As Katz notes, Jews continued to rely on close family and social connections to the extent they would help them to take advantage of whatever opportunities appeared,⁶⁰ because everyone, not just Jews, also relied on connections to attain professional and social advantage.

Jews who later wrote memoirs of their experiences had no positive words to describe their Händel. They accepted their experiences as normal, and they knew these experiences inured them to further hardships and insults. With the exception of Thannhäuser, no narrator indicated that the way he was treated would have prevented him from continuing. All felt that this was endemic to Händel and that they were experiencing the worst that life could offer. They were prepared to assume any amount of risk for incremental economic improvement. Knowledge accumulated through years of Händel about how commerce and government officials operated helped them to take advantage of the changes that accompanied the movement of armies through Germany during the Napoleonic period.

Early nineteenth century Jewish entrepreneurs repeatedly had to respond to restrictive edicts and government officials who, reflecting the majority community's negative attitudes toward Jewish Händler, were prepared to respond favorably to community requests to prohibit Jewish Händel. Jews of this period were sensitive to this ongoing tension between their needs to conduct business and official requests to limit or close their operations, and that they had to be prepared to deal with prejudiced officials. The Jewish Händler understood that whatever financial success they achieved would come in spite of ubiquitous official restrictions. A marker of the early successful entrepreneurs was how they coped with these officials.

Itzig Behrend (1766-1845)⁶¹ was a *Schutzjude*, i.e., a protected Jew who had official permission to reside in a specific geographical location. Behrend, an acknowledged leader of his Grove Jewish community in the Hanover district, understood what was necessary to ameliorate the effect of new regulations that threatened to shut down Jewish businessmen. He related what transpired after he and the other *Schutzjuden* received notice that the merchants from his and surrounding towns formally requested that prohibitions be placed on Jewish petty traders, peddlers, and clerks:

In response we submitted a statement with an accompanying cost of 13 taler, 21 groschen to which O.S. Freibisch, Meyer and his brother, Gumpel, I (Itzig) and my brother Aron contributed. In the end the issue was not pursued. God continue to give peace to us and all Israel...⁶²

Although the word “Jewish” was not in the petition, the specific reference to “handeln, hausieren und viele Diener halten” conveyed the message that the gentile community regarded these as “Jewish” occupations. It is not certain whether the officials intended to stop Jewish businessmen or to extract money from them for the “privilege” of continuing to operate. That Behrend chose to detail this with the names of the individuals who signed the Jewish community’s response together with the cost indicates that he and his companions took the threat seriously. That they understood what they had to do to satisfy the government was demonstrated by his statement that after the Jews paid the fee, neither the merchants who brought the complaint nor the officials who delivered it were interested in pursuing the matter.

Jacob Adam (1789 - ?)⁶³ described another way to respond to restrictive government regulations: ignore them. Adam circumvented regulations that prohibited Jews from traveling to markets and fairs to sell their wares. He explained

that he and other Händler who dealt in small quantities of cheap goods relied on lax official oversight. His comment, “everyone ‘handels,’ and everyone believed that whoever is a Jew can and must ‘handel,’⁶⁴ reflected an optimism that Jews could make a living through Händel, his own urgency to forge on in spite of potential government limitations, and his awareness of the caution he needed to exercise in order to continue.

Adam’s narrative also provides insight into how individual entrepreneurial Jews continued to operate as they maneuvered around the legal restrictions. Adam’s sarcastic expression “so-called protected Jews” gave a realistic portrayal of how Jewish Händler also “händeled” among themselves to evade government restrictions. Adam described the regulation which permitted a *Schutzjude* up to three “helpers” who could receive a pass to travel across borders to sell wares at the different town markets. He explained how a Händler would pay the *Schutzjude* what Adam named a goodly sum to be a named such a “helper.” In return for this payment, the Händler would receive the official authorization required to travel and conduct business, ostensibly on the *Schutzjude*’s behalf.⁶⁵ Adam’s own sensitivity to his government’s shifts in enforcing authorization, matched by his determination to cope with them, is a characteristic of Jewish entrepreneurial endurance in this period. Adam related his awareness of the value of official authorization to travel, as he described his concern at that moment about doing business under such circumstances:

My father, who was not a *Schutzjude*, accompanied my brother, Chaim, who had a *Schutzjude*’s pass which authorized him to travel. Now came the question how I could start...to start such a business without any authorization...was very chancy. Anyone who met us could report us to the authorities. And should we try again to obtain authorization to travel from a *Schutzjude*? First, this was not so easy to get, and second we did

not have enough capital to make it cost effective. We had no idea what to do.⁶⁶

Itzig Behrend's and Jacob Adam's responses pointed to their perseverance in the face of the official limitations and showed that they would find a way to continue to conduct business. It indicated an attitude that the post-Napoleonic Jewish entrepreneurs also would exhibit, an attitude of perseverance that helped make them as successful as they could be within the constraints under which they operated.

Chapter V: 1800-1815: The Napoleonic Period

One important indicator of the narrators' future success was the way they managed to operate within a restricted environment to maintain and improve their economic condition. In contrast to Thannhäuser, whose environment dictated to him, Behrend and Adam exhibited an inventiveness and fortitude to overcome government constraints that threatened their livelihoods. Although Behrend's and Adam's thinking was grounded in the present, their descriptions of how they managed their circumstances are indicators of their ability to deal with future barriers. This positive approach to overcome obstacles, which Thannhäuser lacked, is a characteristic of Jews of this period who achieved economic success.

Historians agree that the period of the Napoleonic Wars from 1806–1815 was significant in opening new possibilities for Jews in trade.⁶⁷ Trade with the advancing and retreating armies enabled Jews to broaden their customer base and to accumulate capital which would permit them to move into related and ultimately more profitable areas. Jews began to transform their local trade in cattle and grain to provisioning the German and Austrian armies, as they expanded their area of operation. Thannhäuser,

whose attempts to participate in these dealings with the military were singularly unsuccessful, looked enviously on what he termed the large transport businesses. He wistfully observed what he described as many companies formed by rich and poor who made sizable profits.⁶⁸ Because Thannhäuser gave no specific examples to support his statements, it is impossible to determine the nature or profitability of those partnerships.

The evidence from Jewish memoirs of the Napoleonic years is clear. Large groups of potential new, if also temporary, customers offered Jews opportunity for increased sales with enhanced profits. Indeed, they reveal how individual Jews took risks to take advantage of perceived new opportunities they themselves did not fully comprehend. The memoirists provide insight into how they understood their success as they strove to achieve it. These Napoleonic era narratives offer insight into the period before industrialization and what it meant to individual Jews whose unselfconscious actions paved the way for future Jewish entrepreneurs.

Although they may not have understood precisely the nature of their opportunities, the narrators appreciated that the movements of large numbers of soldiers offered possibilities for making money that could reduce their dependence on petty trade and peddling. But, as poor Jewish Händler who never felt certain of a steady income, they also knew that their efforts to maintain themselves and turn a profit in what they all recognized as a limited period of unrest could not continue forever. In that tumultuous time, none of them considered what they might do with whatever capital they acquired.

Ascher Lehmann gives the fullest picture of how a Jewish Händler, through a combination of serendipity and “chutzpah,” took advantage of this period’s unfolding opportunities. Lehmann, who had been unable to earn a living before, gravitated to the armies that were marching through Germany. Unsuccessful until he encountered a group of former French war prisoners with pockets full of back pay, he sold a soldier a watch he had in his pocket for twice what the watch cost him. Lehmann, immediately understanding the potential and realizing that there was a market for watches, was becoming a capitalist. He described how he seized on this fortuitous event to increase his profits, first by locating a watchmaker and traveling overnight for stock which he sold the next day, and then expanding his operations through an arrangement with another watchmaker to ship watches to him weekly.⁶⁹ Lehmann continued to reinvest his profits, adjusting his inventory to take advantage of what he hoped would be other opportunities.⁷⁰ His description of his dealings with a French general offers insight both into the trials Händler typically endured but also the risks a Jewish Händler who wanted to achieve success would be willing to take:

I went into the house...where some of his (the general’s) servants were resting in their quarters and asked them if their master would be amenable to doing business. They laughed and said that when he was in Vienna and Jews came to buy things from him, he chased them out with of his dog whip. I lost my enthusiasm...but took courage...and stood in front of this barbarian. “Ha, he said to me in French, he wants to buy something!” Immediately he stood up...and showed me a general’s uniform with two epaulettes, each weighing a pound, and a large hat with wide braids, a braided saber case, three to four bandoliers decorated with silver and gold clasps...later I learned they were made of the finest Parisian silver...I asked him what price he would like to have. “Five louis d’ors.” I took out my money belt and gave him the five louis d’ors. He didn’t expect that. He believed I would offer him less after which he would have chased me out of the room, beating me with his whip...He led me into another large room where there was a trunk. He said that he didn’t know the value of the contents and I should offer him something. I was panicked that I would not

offer him enough. If I offered too little, he'd beat me with his dog whip. If I offered too much, I would reduce my own profit. I gathered my courage, "I'll give you 80 louis d'ors for it all..." Immediately, he gave me the trunk and its contents, on which I made more than 500 louis d'ors.⁷¹

The ability to "read" his customer's expectations and manage this initial interaction to make the general feel he controlled the transaction enabled Lehmann to obtain a much larger profit. This skill to evaluate a situation and assume potentially advantageous calculated risks was a common characteristic of this early capitalism.

Although Lehmann gave no details, he recounted that he continued in trade in Verden (Hanover) after 1815. He petitioned government officials to continue to deal in textiles, implying that he had become sufficiently profitable to hope that his request would be dealt with favorably. When the authorities rejected his petition, Lehmann, ever the entrepreneur, held an auction, which he described as very profitable until a group of gentile businessmen petitioned officials to stop the auction, with the ultimate result that the Jewish Händler were permitted to sell wool goods but not the more profitable cloth, which was reserved for the gentile merchants.⁷²

Lehmann never described his business as profitable, but noted how much he earned compared with what his goods cost or the attendant costs of submitting petitions to the government. By 1825, when he was 56 years old, Lehmann likely had improved his profitability significantly, as gleaned from his portrayal of his business relationships.⁷³ Other Jewish dealers came to him to represent their interests, to submit petitions on their behalf, or to arrange for public auction so that they would not lose their investment in goods for resale, indicating that his requests would be seriously considered. That he needed to acquire an inventory to get the funds to pay

his suppliers also was an unspoken but strong indicator that he had become a successful Jewish entrepreneur.

Ascher Lehmann's account reveals how these early Jewish entrepreneurs balanced risk against potential profitability. In this period, none focused on how they used their money to make their personal lives more comfortable. None of the accounts indicates that the Händler felt sufficiently secure to take a significant risk with their money for future gains. In spite of the succession of hardships that faced Jewish Händler of that period, Lehmann's cautiously optimistic perspective is characteristic of that period's mentality. Although Lehmann could not predict if or how much money he would earn, he (unlike Thannhäuser) approached every difficulty with a sense that he somehow would manage, even if he was unsure precisely how or when, e.g., his watch sales to the French soldiers and his dealings with the French general.

Unlike Thannhäuser, Lehmann never referred to himself as worthless or explained his lack of success by blaming others. Nor did he permit what he described as dishonest actions of fellow Jewish merchants to hinder him. He had a sense of optimism that present hardships could be ameliorated, as evidenced at the end of his narrative when he recounted how a judgment against him ultimately was resolved. Unfortunately, Lehmann never described what happened.⁷⁴ Other Jews who conducted business in the post-Napoleonic world exhibit this same optimism that their efforts would reap potentially profitable opportunities.

Like Ascher Lehmann, Jacob Adam followed the German and French armies to create business opportunities by sussing their locations as they advanced and

retreated. Like Lehmann's experience selling watches, Adam took advantage of opportunities to do whatever was necessary for business. For example, Adam's "audacious" action lessened the ever-present threat that a retreating army officer would expropriate Adam's horse and wagon by pretending that he belonged to the army and intermingling his wagon with the army's other freight. With his brother and cousin, Adam followed the French army advancing into Russia and accompanied its ignominious retreat through Germany, negotiating with the starving French soldiers for their plundered Russian gold, silver, and jewelry, which they were eager to trade for food, after which Adam continued to sell food and alcohol to the advancing Russian troops.⁷⁵

The majority of the Jews who earlier pursued Händel continued to do so after 1815.⁷⁶ Indeed, the Jews' entry into Germany's middle classes was the result of gradual economic improvement. Nonetheless, increasing numbers of Jewish Händler after 1815 began to use their acquired capital to venture into trading in other areas where they perceived opportunity. This gradual movement by Jewish traders was matched by a shift in the Jewish population over two generations as Jews moved from east to west and from the rural areas and small towns to larger urban centers.⁷⁷ This population movement, which occurred ahead of the general German population, loosened traditional structures and reconfigured economic opportunities. For the first time, because of historical constraints on ways they could earn their livelihoods, Jews were well positioned to take advantage of the slowly emerging economic landscape.⁷⁸

Jews who engaged in Händel during the Napoleonic period continued after 1815 to rely on it for their livelihood, even as small increases in capital offered the

opportunity to look beyond Händel, and they relate what persuaded them to broaden their scope. Memoirs of Jewish traders reveal the mindset, feelings, and thoughts of individual Jewish businessmen of this period, as they absorbed opportunities and dealt with setbacks. The narrators give valuable insights into how they assessed the changes as they experienced them. Their insights, often unintended, help historians understand these Jews' growing awareness of new possibilities and how their individual perceptions of what they could achieve grew.

Chapter VI: 1820s-1830s: The Post-Napoleonic Period

Hirsch Oppenheimer's (1805-1883)⁷⁹ early experiences were similar to those of the previous memoirists who were born before 1810 and who, like their fathers, depended on Händel for their livelihood. Oppenheimer began as an independent Händler when he was thirteen years old with one thaler from his stepfather.⁸⁰ Unlike other narrators of this period, Oppenheimer received no guidance from family or friends, but unlike many in his and his stepfathers' generation, his narrative indicates his early ability to take advantage of every contact.

Although Oppenheimer did not give details, his description of his reliance on relationships with his customers, who gave him free overnight lodging, confirms that he was able to establish productive relationships in this early post-war period. That he specifically referred to his early contacts as *esteemed* indicates his awareness of their capacity through financial ability or advantageous connections to be of immediate or future assistance. As he relates, he "...earned the attention of the most *respectable* (italics added) people in Gronau (Hanover),"⁸¹ enabling him to come into close, cordial contact with them and the authorities. And after his income had

increased to a certain point, he was able to establish a permanent location from which to conduct business.⁸² That these contacts merited Oppenheimer's trust was substantiated in 1826. When he was only twenty-six years old, Oppenheimer was invited to become a citizen of the town of Gronau, which the narrative describes as an honor rarely given to Jews at that time.⁸³

Oppenheimer made use of opportunities his contacts gave him to establish a retail store. At a time when Jews still conducted business from temporary stalls at town markets, establishing a permanent location indicated significant economic improvement which also pointed to increased social status. Oppenheimer described this first permanent location as small, but it catalyzed his impressive series of subsequent successes, putting him in a position to take advantage of other opportunities. Although he never indicated what his initial merchandise was or what led him to pursue these new areas, he was aware that he should be sensitive to new opportunities. He showed his awareness of the continuing value of his contacts, as he noted in his memoir, when he was invited to participate with high-level officials in important meetings.⁸⁴ As a result of expanding his business into metals, bones, glass and pigs hair, his contacts invited him to participate in their deliberations and then named him their sales representative for a new mining and foundry works in the Gronau vicinity.⁸⁵

In contrast to accounts of the preceding period, Oppenheimer's memoir is punctuated with stories of support from the gentile community at pivotal points in his career: free overnight lodging from customers, establishment of a permanent store, city citizenship, sales representative, etc. He attributes his successes to his upright

conduct which won admiration and attention of the city's leading citizens but, unfortunately, he does not detail what he did to gain that attention or to earn a confidence that was atypical, even for upright Jewish merchants of that period. Nonetheless, the account is significant, because it points to the possibility of a shift in gentiles' attitudes as they do business with Jews and learn that Jews can be reliable and astute business partners.

Oppenheimer's story also is the first that relates how a narrator, who began in trade at the end of the Napoleonic Period, in 1818, gained self-confidence to grasp what he perceived to be significant overlooked opportunities. Oppenheimer's "big break" came later in 1842, when he read newspaper article that reported a major fire which destroyed a large section of Hamburg's warehouses and fused diverse burned metals that were stored there into large masses. In spite of advice to the contrary, the article inspired Oppenheimer to purchase this molten mass.⁸⁶

Oppenheimer's response was that of a capitalist who understood the significant potential profitability of this step. Like Ascher Lehmann, who was willing to take what was for him a significant risk for what could be a substantial profit, Oppenheimer was willing to take an even greater financial risk for what, if successful, he knew would be a very large return. Like Ascher Lehmann, who unhesitatingly traveled evenings to Bremen to buy watches to resell at a profit the next day, Oppenheimer likewise immediately engaged to transform a mass of worthless fused metal into significant profit:

...he rented a large ship's crane, attached it to the fused metals and lifted the mass. Under the metals, a fire was started, which slowly melted the metals and separated them. The chunks of iron fell apart from each other, while the lead, copper, tin and zinc were caught in the hole. In the meantime he rode

to the George and Carl forges and sold all the iron. Simultaneously he sold the rest of the metals to firms and in this way laid the foundation for his significant wealth.⁸⁷

Simon Hirschland (1807-1885),⁸⁸ a contemporary of Oppenheimer's, also started as a Händler and pawnbroker. But unlike Oppenheimer, Hirschland initially was unaware of his business' significant potential profitability. As his memoir describes, Hirschland's two businesses supported each other, as a portion of the wares he sold originated in unredeemed pawned items. Currency exchange was a sideline, as the early ledger records indicated.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, he continued the currency exchange, to which he added purchase and sale of shares in mines, foundries and other commodities that ultimately led him to take the next step in his increasingly profitable business and establish the Simon Hirschland Private Bank. As his narrative related, "A great change was occurring in the Ruhr region, and Essen was the center for the mining and iron industries. In this way he converted his business from the sale of small goods to an initially modest banking business that continued to grow."⁹⁰

Both Oppenheimer's and Hirschland's economic growth followed similar paths: they began as Händler and enlarged their businesses into substantial concerns with sustained profitability. Neither mentioned that he was able to take advantage of capital accumulated during the Napoleonic period; indeed both state that they started with no funding. What distinguished Hirschland from the earlier generation's powerlessness was his growing self-awareness that he was moving in a new direction that offered him the opportunity to take advantage of accumulated knowledge. Like earlier Jews who used experience gained through Händel, Hirschland was able to use

acquired knowledge to begin his bank at the right moment and in a good location where he always had conducted his business.⁹¹

Contemporaneous with Oppenheimer and Hirschland, Aron Hirsch Heymann (1802-1880)⁹² also earned his first money in Händel, apprenticed to his father at fifteen years old. In his narrative, which he wrote in the third person, he described what he regarded as a distasteful marginal business. “He traded in whatever came along, but the apprentice (Heymann) was never given any instruction. At the same time, he was supposed to know all that was necessary to do business. Although this was impossible, he nevertheless was scolded.”⁹³

Unlike the traders who were active in the Napoleonic period, this group of businessmen in the 1820s who also began in Händel expressed a need for secular knowledge. Like Oppenheimer, Heymann described his significant efforts to learn bookkeeping fundamentals as well as German grammar.⁹⁴ And like the others, Heymann’s self-education program implied his awareness of additional possibilities together with a self-confidence that he would need this knowledge for an unidentified future activity, because he would not be in Händel forever.

Like Hirschland, who began his first bank and currency exchange business with his brother in 1829, Heymann partnered with his brother to begin a similar business in Berlin. “At that time there were not very many of these businesses and the new undertaking quickly acquired a respectable number of customers.”⁹⁵ And, like the other two entrepreneurs, Heymann’s banking business enabled him to shift from being controlled by events to controlling the events to his advantage. Although Heymann acknowledged that the 1848 Revolution caused economic dislocation in

general, his bank did not suffer. Although he began in Händel in 1817 and was tutored by a mentor who had been active before and throughout the Napoleonic period, that Heymann was able to benefit from the 1848 upheaval spoke to a self-confidence absent in narrators before 1815. Heymann's detailed description of how his profitability rose when he took advantage of opportunities to guarantee loans to construct the new railroad line from Chemnitz to Riesa⁹⁶ was reminiscent of Napoleonic era Jews who recounted how their Händel operations with the advancing and retreating armies were profitable for them.

In addition to Jews' historical involvement in money from small pawnbroker operations to large banks, Jews throughout Germany also had a long history of involvement in the textiles, a focus of early industrialization. Unlike other industries, wool and linen did not have to be imported and textiles could be produced on home looms. Excluding fabrics such as linen and wool, in which the guilds were dominant, and absent gentile activity, early Jewish entrepreneurs were able to participate with single looms in their homes. Jersch-Wenzel describes the impact of Jewish involvement in textiles, beginning in 1779, when authorities in Moravia and Bohemia granted Jews permission to import raw cotton.⁹⁷ And in 1800, a Hamburg senator reported, "Certainly everyone knows...that our calico cotton factories are largely owned by Jewish residents."⁹⁸ Throughout this period and continuing through the mid-nineteenth century, Jews who began textile production modestly in their homes or who went into business after receiving their *Meister* authorization helped put the textile industry on the "cutting edge" of German industrialization. Linking the

narratives with the historical data deepens understanding of what motivated individual Jews to participate in this emerging industry.

Samuel Kohn's (1807-1879)⁹⁹ description of the barriers he faced in starting his business after receiving his *Meister* certification in 1834, highlights his and the perseverance other Jews of this period. In direct contrast with Faibel Siegel, who adroitly used his contacts to acquire a *Meister* certificate, Kohn encountered obstacles from the local officials who routinely supported guilds' exclusion of Jews, including those who completed all the membership requirements. Kohn recounted his meticulous adherence to the weaver guild's prescribed regulations to complete its competency exam which he described with a hint of pride that he was "declared fully competent to practice the weavers' craft independently,"¹⁰⁰ but was unable to obtain permission to establish residency in Augsburg to proceed.

Unlike Siegel, who had contacts and, therefore, was able to achieve his *Meister* certification without adhering to the weaver guild's requirements, Kohn's trials reflect the guilds' continuing authority and their influence with German officials and local authorities who felt comfortable using flimsy reasons to reject Jews' legitimate requests for residency to establish businesses.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, Kohn's account indicated improving prospects for the individual Jewish businessman in the 1830s, if only very slowly, as indicated by his correspondence with the authorities. In spite of no assistance from gentiles, such as Siegel enjoyed, and in the face of gentile community's sustained resistance, Kohn felt it appropriate to phrase his request for residency in Augsburg in terms of the economic advantage that a positive response to

his petition (together with adding more weavers, of which a portion likely would be Jewish) would bring to the German economy:

Here (in Augsburg) there are only three cloth manufacturers and these already send the acknowledged proof...most of the wool our many sheep herds produce is exported, because we lack cloth manufacturers. We lose profitability as we give foreigners the advantage in our industry. If the loden manufacturers are excluded, there remain only two cloth manufacturers, which is not enough. The magistrate's "fear", that there could be a cloth master who would lose income is unjustified. "What would be the impact of 14 cloth manufacturers on Augsburg, the second city of the kingdom—does someone think that would lessen Augsburg's importance? Or would one perhaps want to wait until the foreign industries have completely eliminated the domestic manufacturers from production?"¹⁰²

Kohn ultimately was granted the right to reside in Augsburg with the rights to marry and operate a business on April 19, 1837. He immediately began to manufacture cloth with fourteen looms, which he ultimately increased to twenty-five. He was vindicated when the Swabian and Neuburg cloth exhibition awarded him its silver medal for his production. In 1864 the city magistrate gave him a certificate to display that his business was well conducted and recognized him as an irreproachable and honest businessman.¹⁰³

The narrative of Moses Samuel Landauer (1808-1893),¹⁰⁴ extracted from the 1934 Festschrift that marked the 100th anniversary of the firm, M.S. Landauer, is a rags-to-riches story of how Landauer started with a hand loom in his parents' house in 1833, selling the textiles he produced at fairs in Augsburg and Elm, and then increasing to two additional looms in a neighbor's home and selling the fabric from a front-room "store." Because this narrative is extracted from a Festschrift, it portrayed Landauer's early and sustained self-awareness of potential opportunities, e.g., from his first shop to the advantage of opening a mechanical textile mill in Augsburg.

Landauer's narrative is infused with his forward thinking at every step in his grand plan to refashion himself from weaver to a major entrepreneur. "In increasing numbers, the plant kept ten to twenty workers busy... The undertaking seemed to promise success...,¹⁰⁵" the *Festschrift* noted. Although this narrative is written to celebrate Moses Landauer's achievements and his firm's successes, it is important as the first narrative to record assurance about expected future successes. Landauer's narrative places him at the beginning of a new Jewish attitude that will characterize the next generation's expectations.

Chapter VII: Jews Active in the 1840s: Rising Expectations

In comparison with those Jewish businessmen who were born before 1810 into very modest circumstances and overcame significant barriers to become part of Germany's *Bürgertum*, the majority of Jewish narrators born after 1810, grew up in the more prosperous environments that their fathers had created and felt they belonged to this *Bürgertum*. Governments increasingly accepted Jews in business, as evidenced by Kohn's ultimate acceptance in Augsburg, and the guilds' authority over their crafts was weakening, albeit slowly, as Siegel's experience in obtaining his master certification indicates. Simultaneously, as succeeding narratives illustrate, Jewish businesses were becoming increasingly profitable.

The numbers of Jewish bourgeois and petty bourgeois whose ambitions centered on the acquisition of wealth and culture that economic success would bring were increasing by the 1840s.¹⁰⁶ The generation of Jews born after 1810 was able to take advantage of expanding opportunities in areas such as trade and textiles where

Jews traditionally were active, had received support, and achieved some success, although at the mid-century only a minority (15%) of Germany's Jews belonged to the upper and middle classes.¹⁰⁷

The memoirs of these self-identified members of this new German-Jewish economic middle class focused on entrepreneurial opportunities. Their participation in *Kleinhandel* and *Hausieren* diminished, and they spoke about it with a nostalgic aura of a past difficult life that had improved. The narratives reveal how these Jews who were active at this time perceived their parents' experiences, entered business relationships with other Jews, and interacted with government officials in this transition period at the beginning of Germany's industrialized age. What makes this group significant is its expectation that they or their children could participate in middle class life. By 1871, 60% of Germany's Jews were part of the German-Jewish middle class.¹⁰⁸

Many Jews in this period relate comfortable childhoods, educational advantages, or family businesses that would assure them a livelihood. In contrast to Oppenheimer, Hirschland, and Heymann, Philipp Tuchmann (1810-1883)¹⁰⁹ described his childhood in a "comfortable" family home where he enjoyed a secular education, commenting that it was "better than others in his peer group received."¹¹⁰ Unable to circumvent a Bavarian law that prohibited Jews from engaging in trade or sales, Tuchmann apprenticed himself to a tanner. Although he obtained his *Meister* certification in 1834, his response to his difficulties with the guilds convinced him to join his family's hops business.¹¹¹

Unlike his counterparts born before 1810, Tuchmann felt he had a viable option in a known business that interested him. He never discussed his choice of apprenticeship, but he did state that he did not feel obligated to be an artisan and allowed his grandmother to convince him to join the family business. That the narrative only briefly described his difficulties with the guilds, combined with his accounts of positive interactions with brewers during his journeyman period and readiness to join the family's hops business, raises the question of whether Tuchmann ever was serious about artisanry. The narrative's description of a viable family business that he understood, could enter and expand would become a pattern among other Jews of this period:

It was very useful to him (Philipp Tuchmann) that his father, Marx Tuchmann, was engaged in hops growing and the hops trade, and, therefore, it was easy for him to familiarize himself thoroughly with this pursuit in his father's business. Even while journeying, he was very interested in breweries, because of his father's hops business. He got to know brewers here and there and very soon sensed...an appreciation for Bavarian hops.¹¹²

As narratives of the Napoleonic period depicted the Jewish Händler's continuous movement, e.g., following armies, traveling established circuits, or hawking at town markets and fairs, Jewish businessmen active in the 1830s began to be more intentional in shifting locations. Their thoughtful descriptions of why they relocated reflected their growing optimism and their sense that change in location would have a positive outcome. Like other Jews of his generation who moved to specific locations to take advantage of new economic opportunities or circumvent official restrictions, Tuchmann decided to shift his base of operations to Dessau when enforcement of the restrictive laws made it too difficult for him to continue selling hops. His specific relocation to the center of his customer base enabled him to

increase sales significantly and diversify into lumber, placing him in an emerging economic German Jewish middle class with its accoutrements:

In the early forties, my father (Philipp Tuchmann) was already able to maintain a small one-horse chaise and a coachman...They sent their sons to commercial school, their daughters to the so-called Braun's Girls Academy...and, in addition, did not neglect having them instructed privately.¹¹³

Like Philipp Tuchmann, Faibel Siegel (1807-1887),¹¹⁴ was active in his family's established textile business in the 1830s. And like Tuchmann, Siegel also had to respond to guild antagonism, when textile guild members objected to him making a profit selling goods produced by his brother, who was a master weaver with guild membership. Unlike narrators before 1815 whose accounts are tinged with uncertainty, Siegel's narrative communicates a confidence that he can manage present obstacles and overcome future attempts to limit his business growth. His confidence, based on his awareness that other gentile master weavers, who sold him cloth in spite of the guild's opposition,¹¹⁵ would not support the guilds, is evidenced in the expressions he used to describe guild opposition: clannish pettiness, denunciation by envious people, and interference from envious "small masters."¹¹⁶

Siegel displayed this same cocky self-assurance when he flaunted the clever but irregular tactics he used to gain the *Meister* title and become a guild member before he was thirty years old. Siegel's son, who wrote the narrative describes how this occurred:

"...applied himself *pro forma* to the weavers trade...and completed his apprenticeship after a designated period...And after he completed his apprenticeship product, which he himself did not produce—his master managed that for him, the guild members demanded that he adhere to the prescribed three-year journeyman period..."¹¹⁷

Unlike Oppenheimer who modestly referred to himself as the recipient of others' goodwill and largess, Siegel's narrative showed exuberant self-assurance when he related his situation to one of his major customers:

Arnoldi (the customer) was disgusted by the bullying (*Schikanen*) heaped on my father...contacted a master, explained the situation to him, and asked the master to register his young friend (Siegel) as a journeyman and validate his journeyman years, with immediate leave of absence for as long a period as he (Siegel) desired...¹¹⁸

That Tuchmann treated his guild apprenticeship and journeyman periods lightly and Siegel, with his well-placed customers' assistance, effectively ignored guild regulations and restrictions were early indications that guild control of local economies was weakening. This episode between Siegel and the guild together with Hirsch Oppenheimer's ability to encourage the "esteemed" of Gronau to show him favor, indicate that the post-Napoleonic Jews' capacity to control their business activities was increasing.

But, as these memoirs also show, the narrators were not consistent in adopting the most modern ways to conduct their business. For example, Faibel Siegel focused on enhancing his business, but did not modernize. His business continued to operate with hand looms. He also continued to conduct his operations in a pattern reminiscent of traveling Händler, visiting merchants individually, such as the one who procured him his *Meister* certification, and attending the larger fairs.¹¹⁹

The immediate and significant profitability of the hand looms made Siegel's operation respectable, indicated by his inclusion in the *Geschichte der Juden im Herzogtum Meiningen*, 1898, as the largest fustian looms in Thuringia of his period through 1870.¹²⁰ Because the narrative does not mention mechanization, which the

Geschichte implied came later, and because Siegel's business was profitable, it is doubtful that Siegel concerned himself with the impact that mechanical looms could have on profitability. Siegel's narrative is an excellent depiction of how a traditional Händler in a period of artisanry and guild dominance was able to expand his operations and gain respectability as a wholesaler in large quantities of cloth.¹²¹

Like Tuchmann, Siegel's economic success brought him participation in his community's German middle class, illustrated by his membership in the Casino Club. That he identifies himself as one of the "better" Jewish families indicates his self-awareness of his economic success and the status that came from that success:

The *better Jewish Families* (italics added) together with a number of Christian townspeople, organized in the 1840s a social association called "Casino." They established a library to further the community's desire for culture and education...And there also were a number of Jews at that time who had acquired skills in playing instruments and singing. There was no lack of diverse uplifting pleasures.¹²²

Itzig Hamburger's (1811 - ?)¹²³ experience reveals how Jewish businessmen in the 1830s gradually increased their modest merchandise with continuously enhanced profitability. His narrative provides insight into how these Jewish entrepreneurs used what they learned in Händel to navigate the emerging capitalist world.

Similar to Heymann's experiences traveling with his father, Hamburger describes his very inauspicious start when he was thirteen years old and accompanied his father to fairs. Hamburger's father had a permanent space in his home from which to sell—an advance over other Jews who depended on traveling Händel. Although the narrative stated that the father did business in wholesale sales of haberdashery and manufactured goods, the description of his cobbled-together stock

of diverse items—coffee and sugar, spirits, shoes, books, toys, diverse fancy goods interspersed with rummage—that were offered to the petit bourgeoisie, the poorer residents in the town, and farmers tells a different story. Like Ascher Lehmann, Hamburger began his modest business in Posen with an assortment of goods from his father's stock when he was seventeen years old.¹²⁴

Although the narrator, who is Itzig's son, described what he felt was the stultifying environment that Itzig, scrambling continuously for his insecure livelihood, ultimately overcame, the son also commented that he was speaking of past Jewish history from his perspective of a late nineteenth century German Jewish middle class businessman:

It (the store) was not exactly suited for an especially rapid expansion of business, but at that time one did not have great hopes for quick progress and increase of trade. Circumstances changed only little and over longer periods; chance changes in fortune and economic conditions did not occur...and one's estate increased only by virtue of what one earned and saved through hard work and a frugal way of life.¹²⁵

This narrative reveals the hardships that characterized Hamburger's life as a Jewish *Kleinhändler*. Like the *Händler* before 1810, who dealt in a variety of goods, Hamburger also sold pieces of leather to shoemakers, indigo, and rags to paper manufacturers.¹²⁶ The narrator's past tense description of these events indicates his distance. He personally never experienced this treatment, which was no longer the norm in the imperial period when he was recording his father's history.

Hamburger's continuing attendance at fairs through the 1850s,¹²⁷ even as his retail business, J.Z. Hamburger & Co in Breslau, flourished, reflected the caution of the previous generation. His experiences with the hardships associated with *Händler* and doing business at fairs would not allow him to trust that Hamburger & Co. would

succeed without this activity. Hamburger's narrative expressed this cautious approach as he gradually shifted merchandise, dropping individual items he dealt with at the beginning (e.g., leather pieces for shoes and rags for paper production), and replacing them slowly with new items as his business continued to grow, until he ultimately moved to larger quarters in 1864, when his sons joined the enterprise.¹²⁸

Moses and Benedikt Elsas' (1814 - ? and 1817 - ?)¹²⁹ Horatio Alger narrative belonged to the group born after 1810 that emerged from grinding family poverty and social ostracism. Although Benedikt received special dispensation to take his *Meister* examination before he completed the required three-year journeyman period and before he was 25 years old, this dispensation did not remove the minefield laid by the weavers guild. "As my father related, he was intentionally given a tangled-up cord to wind. In spite of this chicanery (*Schikane*), he completed the assignment in the short time allotted for it."¹³⁰ It is interesting, parenthetically, that Siegel also used the word "Schickane" to describe his dealings with his weavers guild. It raises the question whether this was a common expression that Jews of that period used among themselves when they alluded to the guilds. Passing the exam enabled Benedikt Elsas to become entrepreneurial. He had the right to weave cotton and linen for his own use and to sell what he produced, and the right to take his brother, Louis, as his first apprentice. The brothers' combined efforts enabled their fledgling business in Württemberg to grow until they ultimately relocated to take advantage of the railroad and employed "hundreds of hand weavers from the surrounding area." Like Hirsch Oppenheimer and Simon Hirschland whose memoirs describe how they adhered to current business practices until a significant event caught their attention, the Elsas

brothers' reliance on hand loom production continued until they visited the London World Exhibition in 1862.

Benedikt Elsas was especially impressed with the mechanical looms and immediately saw the potential for significantly increased production and profitability. Louis Elsas spent his entire time at the fair studying this "new wonder" and returned home determined to acquire these mechanical looms.¹³¹ In 1863 they moved from their Württemberg location to a larger factory on the Neckar River that would accommodate the mechanical looms and give them water power.¹³² This was the springboard for the family's business for the next three generations:

For the first time he (Moses Elsas) saw the mechanically driven color loom in operation. Uncle Louis was so inspired by this new wonder that he spent most of his visit studying this new loom. He then asked Father to acquire this new machine and test it. Because this was the first mechanical color loom that would be installed in Württemberg, Father was permitted to import it duty free. Installing the loom and putting it into operation was difficult, but Uncle Louis was intelligent and energetic and did not shrink from any obstacle.¹³³

The Elsas narrative reveals how Jews in this period continued to rely on family connections. Their shift to mechanical production, which Salomon Kauffmann's weavers rejected in 1841,¹³⁴ also was supported by the brothers' Württemberg government. This change in governments' attitudes from how earlier officials treated Faibel Siegel and Samuel Kohn, with government support given to the Elsas brothers in 1862, including waiving customs duties for the mechanized machinery, reflects the shift in government-Jewish relations over the past twenty years that recognized the profitability Jewish entrepreneurs brought to their governments (which Kohn unsuccessfully advocated 25 years earlier). Like Oppenheimer, who was named the city's sales representative for its iron works,

Moses Elsas' appointment to his city council and his title of commercial counselor signaled that the roadblocks that budding Jewish entrepreneurs such as Siegel and Kohn faced had lifted.

Chapter VIII: Mid-Century Jewish Businessmen: A New Confidence

In the early nineteenth century, Jews generally had a more conservative approach compared with those, like Hamburger's son, whose proper German-Jewish middle class upbringing in the mid-nineteenth century allowed them the luxury of a comfortable economic position from which to view their fathers' achievements. Salomon Kauffmann's (1824-1900)¹³⁵ narrative is important for its insight into how the first generation of Jews born into the German-Jewish economic middle class with no personal memory of Händel approached business. Like Itzig Hamburger's son, Salomon Kauffman did not experience his father's rags-to-riches experience. Unlike the Elsas brothers who raised themselves up from poverty, Salomon Kauffmann's comfortable childhood enabled him to approach his business with a self-confidence that his father lacked, an eagerness to adopt all technological innovations, and a mind-set that assumed profit while focusing on the "next opportunity" to assure even greater growth.

These narrators, members of a successful German-Jewish economic middle class, expected success. The opening sentence in Salomon's narrative, "After a few years my father was not satisfied with retail sales,"¹³⁶ indicates that he regards his father a successful entrepreneur and the father's start in Händel as ancient history. Salomon Kauffmann's description of his carefree childhood came from his assumption that his family's solid middle class economic status precluded

discrimination. Kauffmann refers to himself as a member of the educated classes, signifying his certainty that his Jewish contemporaries would never be subjected to the religious prejudice that earlier narrators, such as Samuel Kohn and the Elsas brothers, endured:

Among the *educated classes* (italics added) there was no religious animosity. No teacher would have permitted that a person be harassed because of religious affiliation. Only among the lowest classes did it happen that Jews would be mocked, because of their clothing or unusual appearance.¹³⁷

Kauffmann discounted his father's peccadilloes with affectionate tolerance. His memoir is the first in the Richarz collection to give voice to the comfortable life that the family business would assure. "My father in this period (Salomon Kauffmann's youth) likely was immersed in checking his accounts and calculations; I myself, who am writing my memory of this time, was the oldest, and would enter the business, which matched my own inclinations."¹³⁸

Unlike other narrators, who felt their economic circumstances, as they understood them, precluded presumptions of success or whose upbringing made such predictions hubris (a kinahora),¹³⁹ Kauffmann's narrative is suffused with self-confidence in his ability to plan for and actualize his successful business future. For example, he was proud of how he managed the economic uncertainties after the upheavals of 1848. When the firm that earlier had lent funds to the family business, Firm Meyer Kauffmann, in this uncertain period gave the patriarch, Meyer Kauffmann notice for the money owed it, Meyer Kauffmann wrote his son, Salomon to stop all further payments and put a hold on the firm's other obligations, to which Salomon responded:

I was fully convinced that such a fatal step was completely unnecessary and that the required funds would be available, I responded that I personally would travel to the firm to give it cash...and I was completely successful in settling or paying in full all accounts.¹⁴⁰

Salomon's assurance that the cash would be available compared with his father's perceived need to protect himself reflected a generation of German Jews who felt they were part of a stable German middle class business world, confident in dealing with its vagaries, and optimistic that their business instincts were solid, as Salmon related, "I returned from the trip not only with money, but also orders, to assure that that production would continue."¹⁴¹ His pervasive optimistic attitude surfaced again when the expected government support to improve training for the firm's hand weavers was denied, serendipitously enabling Kauffmann to direct the firm's operations without government intervention, "For the rest of my life I'll be thankful for this rejection,"¹⁴² he noted.

The contrast between the anxieties of businessmen born before 1810, like Meyer Kauffmann, and his son Salomon's middle class assumption of success is depicted in the decision to replace the factory's hand looms with mechanical ones, which Salomon was certain would rocket the firm to new heights of profitability. Salomon Kauffmann's 1851 trip to England for the World Exposition alerted him to Firm Meyer Kauffmann's untapped production capability and simultaneously filled him with confidence to make that potential a reality. He summarized his visit as a "turning point in how our business was managed," similar to the Elsas brothers whose attendance catalyzed a "decisive change in the business' management."¹⁴³

As Kauffmann extolled the English mechanical looms' superiority, his enthusiasm to install them immediately was frustrated by his father's hesitancy. The difference in approach between the two generations is palpable:

The patterns that were brought back from London were especially advantageous for us. Our firm's credit had risen to the extent that we could receive additional credit to acquire all the thread, which came mostly from England, that we needed. In Berlin we had gained a circle of larger customers who also had means to support us. In spite of all this, my father could not decide to invest capital in a factory.¹⁴⁴

When the head of the Kauffmann firm's thread supplier, to whom the firm owed a large sum, expressed surprise at a letter from Salomon's father advising the supplier to proceed cautiously in doing more business with the firm. Salomon self-confidently responded, sure the supplier would disregard his father's fears. "On the other hand, I was certain that the head of the firm in question knew my father and that he trusted our energy and solidity, which also proved to be the case. The firm in question had not for one moment considered changing its relationship with us."¹⁴⁵ As a result, the firm installed 200 mechanical looms which transformed Firm Meyer Kauffmann into one of Germany's leading textile producers.¹⁴⁶

Hermann Elias Weigert's narrative (1819-1908),¹⁴⁷ also reveals the attitudes of this generation. The tension centered on the unexplained inability of Abraham Weigert (Herman's father, Abraham, b. 1786), to compete with mechanized looms which led Abraham to accept a series of positions in several businesses, including breweries and potash production. Hermann's brother eventually relocated to Berlin and found a good job in a textile factory, which catalyzed the two brothers' careers. Like the Elsas brothers and Salomon Kauffmann, Weigert was eager to bring England's mechanical loom technology to Germany. His activities illustrated these

Jews' changing assumptions about their participation in the German economy and, by implication, in German society. Compared with the previous generation's wariness, this is the first generation to assume self-confidently that their forward thinking business decisions would make them successful.

The brochure, "How Can Our Manufacturing Industry Be Best Advanced?,"¹⁴⁸ which Weigert wrote in 1843 when he returned to Germany after observing the English mechanical loom's efficiency, attests to this confidence. Weigert believed that his brochure would be read and that his ideas would receive a positive response from the government and other large private companies. He felt comfortable proposing domestic production of thread and its profitability for the German textile industry. Like Moses Elsas, who was honored with the title, *Kommerzienrat*, Weigert's brother, Salomon, responded to the Prussian's government's request to assist the Silesian weavers. That the government funded Salomon Weigert's decision to buy and retool a silk factory which improved its weavers' incomes and acknowledged Salomon as one of its leading experts by appointing him to its royal commercial council, reflected this new positive official attitude toward Jewish businesses.¹⁴⁹

The Elsas and Kauffmann narratives described attendance at the London exhibition as confirmation that they were successful business entrepreneurs with full membership in the German-Jewish economic middle class. The Weigert brothers expressed themselves, not as successful Jewish business owners, but as successful German business owners. Hermann Weigert, who could translate from English to

German, was cognizant of his value to the German businessmen attending the 1851 London Exhibition and his role in his firm's success:

My knowledge of English guaranteed me many agreeable introductions (to German businessmen)...Our firm captured the Golden Prize Medallion, which further raised our firm's good reputation, and spread my own reputation as a good businessman.¹⁵⁰

Hermann Weigert's self-deprecating announcement that at 50 years old he had an income of 200,000 Marks which was sufficient for what he described as his own modest lifestyle¹⁵¹ was testimony to how Jewish perceptions had changed.

Falk Valentin Grünfeld (1837-1896),¹⁵² the youngest example of this generation born after 1810, was the only member of this group who, although beginning in Händel, consciously approached his business with a modern mid-century perspective that he would be successful. Although he received only minimal assistance from his father, enjoyed no patronage, and endured taunts, Grünfeld never felt the need to adhere to the accepted business format and make changes gradually, as did other early post-Napoleonic period Jewish entrepreneurs. Like Weigert, Elsas, and Kauffmann, Grünfeld unself-consciously gravitated toward the modern, mechanical looms. In 1859, he correctly predicted that the factory of hand looms where he was apprenticed would fail, which it did.¹⁵³ And unlike the previous generation of German Jewish entrepreneurs who began in their fathers' occupations (usually Händel), the Jewish entrepreneurs born after 1815, whether scions of factory owners or poor apprentices, felt comfortable with mechanization and did not feel constrained to follow their fathers' path.

Grünfeld's narrative embodied the new perspective of this cadre of Jews who felt comfortable with change and ready to embrace innovation. Starting his business,

literally, on the ground floor in a tiny rented store, Grünfeld posted prices for the assortment of small goods he offered, and immediately other Jewish merchants denigrated him for his presumption that customers would pay the prices he set.¹⁵⁴ He detailed his revolutionary stance as a newcomer in a business where bargaining was an accepted principle, to allow customers who would not pay his clearly marked prices to leave his shop:

He often told us (his children) how the purchase of an object of value was made in the past, namely how the value of a coat or a shawl was determined: “What does such a piece cost?” – “Well, for you, 30 taler.” – “I won’t pay more than 6.” – “I really can’t let it go for less than 27.” – until through skill or stubbornness they both agreed to 12, 13, or 14 talers. (Sometimes on the ticket was a secret sign that indicated the amount below which the object would not be sold.)... Grünfeld adhered to the principle of “firm prices,” which at that time in Silesia was new and unique and which older merchants thought arrogant and impossible to sustain....¹⁵⁵

Grünfeld’s underlying self-confidence suffused his narrative that customers eventually would see that “fixed prices” was good business for them, which ultimately they did. His “stated price” became his best advertisement for prices that did not vary with a customer’s perceived capacity to pay or depended on the customer’s ability to squeeze a “best” price from the seller. Similarly, Grünfeld’s narrative describes how he rejected cheap, *Kleinhändler* goods, and stocked only high quality wares, although his first customers were the small farmers who paid little attention to their appearance or to how their homes were furnished.

Even as initially he found it difficult to attract customers, he was able to convince suppliers to give him credit, which was most unusual for newcomers who normally were required to pay cash for their inventories. Grünfeld’s self-confidence ultimately was vindicated as his successes exceeded established merchants’

expectations, and his business continued to grow. The oversized display windows and mirrors that Grünfeld added to the building he purchased and remodeled in 1869, caused a “Sensation.”¹⁵⁶

Jewish businessmen successfully integrated themselves into the larger gentile economies as their personal profitability simultaneously enriched their regime’s economic profitability. European regimes in this period also encouraged and supported trade and commerce to make their economies more profitable. One of the ways they did this was to host fairs, which Jewish businessmen would attend. The Elsas, Weigert, and Kauffmann accounts describe how Jews were welcome to participate at fairs and were awarded prizes for innovative achievements. In 1853, this practice was tested when officials of the newly constructed elegant Posen bazaar, bowing to pressure from the Polish nationalists and Catholic clergy, refused to permit a Jewish manufacturer to occupy a prime space that he had rented. Earlier such an incident would have been resolved quietly after the offending Jew complied with the order to vacate the space (the “offending” Jew did graciously relinquish his prime location), but in 1853 this incident was not quietly resolved. Instead, it split the bazaar’s governing board into two factions, and the bazaar’s director resigned, emphasizing how important the Jewish participation in commerce had become for healthy competition.¹⁵⁷

Chapter IX: Sulamith and Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums: Accompanying the Changes

As the *AZJ* supported efforts to enter artisanry from 1837 when it published its first issue through the 1850s, editorializing on the intrinsic value of hand work and

especially farming in a tone evocative of the twentieth century Jewish romantic view of kibbutz life, its vehement criticism of what it described as a dangerous shift to commerce and industry unintentionally revealed the realities of Jewish life. For its series of articles in 1848, which criticized the dominance of industry and commerce to have meaning, *AZJ* likely assumed its Jewish readers were themselves involved in industry and commerce or aware of its impact on them. In its articles, the *AZJ* indicated that industry and commerce were responsible for the change in Jewish lifestyles, which *AZJ* criticized.

For example, *AZJ*'s arguments in the 1850s against the acquisition of elegant household furnishings implied that increasing numbers of Jews were either living or could imagine adopting this economic middle class lifestyle. And that the Jews were making the shift is attested to in the *AZJ* 1856 Jewish New Year article, "About the Materialism of our Time," that decried Jewish materialism with these phrases: a "pernicious plague...to want to become rich...a luxury, to want to display the home...all classes are driven in the same way to exceed their resources..."¹⁵⁸ That the article referred to "all classes" substantiated *AZJ*'s position that a significant portion of its readers were "afflicted" with this condition and that many of Germany's Jews had joined that economic middle class which could afford the luxuries the paper decried.

A May 22, 1848 *AZJ* article traced the seeds of the ongoing Revolution to availability of credit that funded industry's investment capital and expressed fear that the credit flow would cease and bring commerce to a standstill.¹⁵⁹ A July 10, 1848 article that tied the turbulence to commerce and industry presumably had meaning for

a portion of its readership.¹⁶⁰ Its extensive analysis of the economic impact of this “confusion” throughout Western Europe similarly implied that there were a significant number of readers who could be negatively affected, “...from that time, when industry and commerce alone established where freedom resided and what made men free, from when industry and commerce appeared as the universally accepted remedy, from that time, misfortune appeared.”¹⁶¹

Heymann, however, did not regard this period of economic uncertainties that accompanied the political turmoil as a misfortune, but a storm to be weathered, as he philosophically related, “As far as it (the 1848 Revolution) impacted the bank’s business, there were significant losses, which is not to be avoided in such upheavals.” He then continued to detail how his bank successfully weathered this storm.¹⁶²

Oppenheimer also was able to deal successfully with the Revolution when it spread to his town of Gronau::

The authorities ...gathered...to discuss the necessary steps against the rebellious citizens...but could not arrive at any results. Then father offered to negotiate all alone with the crowd...The authorities considered this risk too dangerous...but they allowed themselves to be influenced by his self-assured manner, and thus he...said to them: “Citizens, friends! You are making such a racket here and want a revolution!” General agreement. “You probably don’t even know what that means, but you do know that I have your well-being at heart, and I advise you to...go home, and remain calm. If you wish to change the existing ordinances, elect a commission, which should come to me tomorrow and with which I will go to the mayor...”Again, great approval and the cry: “Long live Hirsch Oppenheimer!” And after that, the revolution ended.¹⁶³

Blaming industry and commerce for the social disruptions caused by the recent revolutions, which there was no indication that *AZJ* supported, it exhorted Jews to turn away from being “chained to the looms” that recreated Egyptian-like slavery and urged them to rededicate themselves to farming as the most reliable way to support

themselves and maintain their independence. “This social transformation reconfiguration has impacted a great number of our co-religionists, because significantly large numbers are active in textiles”¹⁶⁴ The unstated message this article sent is that there were sufficient numbers of Jews engaged in commerce, and especially textiles, for a Jewish newspaper to be concerned about the impact of the 1848 Revolution, and that *AZJ* realized its readers were not listening to its repeated exhortations to become farmers.

In this period of increasing focus on industrialization that *AZJ* reported, it is difficult to estimate the number of Jews who continued to earn their livelihoods through artisanry, because the records do not distinguish between the Jewish apprentices who completed their training and those who practiced their craft. As the narratives of Kohn, Siegal, Tuchmann, and Elsas indicate, Jews would take advantage of their *Meister* certification to begin their own businesses.¹⁶⁵ Jews purposefully limited their reports to numbers of Jewish youth who *completed* apprenticeships, because the organizations submitting those numbers wanted their governments, eager to encourage Jewish artisanry, to be pleased with the program’s success.¹⁶⁶ Many Jewish apprentices also may have immigrated to America.¹⁶⁷ The Faibel Siegel memoir notes that there were 567 Jews living in Walldorf in 1837, but that the population declined to 493 Jews in 1855. According to Siegel, this was because many “left for America,”¹⁶⁸ although he did not indicate the number of artisans who may have been among them.

Throughout this period from 1820 through the 1850s, as the narratives reported, Jews continued to enter apprenticeships, even if not through formal

arrangements with Christian masters, but with immediate or extended family members or with friends of parents who also might be business contacts. They may have regarded their apprenticeships as a general preparatory course, after which they would establish their own business or enter a firm owned by a family member, mentor, or contact from a mentor. Indeed, the artisan apprenticeships often were the route that poor Jews took to learn new ways to earn a living.¹⁶⁹ The Elsas brothers' narrative is an example of this progression. After Benedikt Elsas became a master weaver, he established his own business, which his brother Moses joined. Another brother, Louis, entered the firm as Benedikt's first apprentice.¹⁷⁰

Other narratives give valuable insights on how individual Jews negotiated the craft system, e.g., those of Faibel Siegel and Philipp Tuchmann. Their apprenticeships were arranged through family members, business associates, or friends. After completing their programs, they both joined family businesses. While artisanry after 1815 publicly continued to be the officially preferred occupation and remained central to the discussion of civil rights for the Jews, and the percentage of Jewish artisans increased,¹⁷¹ in fact Jews did not generally become artisans but entered areas of commerce, where they historically were active. *AZJ*'s lead January 14, 1850 article subtly acknowledged that artisanry was in decline in its description of what the entrepreneurial Jews had accomplished.¹⁷² This article proclaimed that Jews were emancipating themselves through their economic successes that significantly improved the Jewish standard of living. Its unstated conclusion was this economic *de facto* emancipation inexorably would lead to Jewish political emancipation:

What is it that you call emancipation? Only those few words which state: from now on you are capable of active and passive enfranchisement and

service to the state? Truly, that is only the final result of the real emancipation. Don't you know that for a long time this inner emancipation was proceeding apace. You don't emancipate the Jews; they already emancipated themselves much earlier.¹⁷³

AZJ's new emphasis on Jewish commercial inclusiveness was evident in its March 14, 1853 edition, which was devoted entirely to the recent Austrian-Prussian Treaty to foster commerce between the two countries. This treaty specified that Prussia's Jewish subjects were to be included in the provisions that required equal treatment of citizens who wanted to cross the border for business purposes and of subjects who wish to work in the neighboring country. The *AZJ* praised the Prussian government for its insistence that Jewish businessmen and laborers be included in the treaty's provisions. In this article it also praised the government's recognition that a Prussian (economic) Jewish middle class existed that benefited Prussia.¹⁷⁴

Chapter X: Conclusion

Focusing on Jewish memoirs, this study tracks mainstream German Jewish economic activity the first half of the nineteenth century to examine how these Jews, who were limited in the occupations they could pursue, took advantage of opportunities and gained self-confidence in their own abilities to become successful participants in the German economy. Their narratives enable us to understand how Jews approached the challenges they faced, responded to official limitation and gentile exclusion, and their pleasure with their ability to succeed, as they understood success.

The narratives of Jews born before 1800, whose livelihoods depended on the uncertainties of Händel, describe a self-motivated personal persistence that inured one

to the formidable challenges of belonging to an ostracized group engaged in a marginal business. The narratives portray the innate optimism that motivated Napoleonic period Jewish Händler to continue to deal and show how they responded to seemingly insignificant incidents to attain their personal definition of success. The narratives enable us to comprehend what they experienced to maneuver through barriers and overcome restrictions.

In the post-Napoleonic period, the narrators enable us to understand how this same optimism shifted slowly to combine a need for security with a willingness to seize opportunities. These narrators, who were active in the century's second and third decades, approached new opportunities with a self-confidence derived from their primary business. Like their fathers, this first group of post-Napoleonic narrators all expressed a need for a secure business, taking advantage of opportunities they were certain would bring them greater success. Like the Napoleonic Händler, they were open about what they did to become successful, but none focused on the comfortable life their entrepreneurial accomplishments brought them. All were focused in the present. And like the Napoleonic period Händler, none of the narrators shifted their thinking from present to a longer-term planning. The narratives highlight this shift that came with those who entered business, beginning in the fourth decade. For the first time, there was expressed a sense of entitlement that accompanied their calm childhoods. They acknowledged, but did not dwell on their secular education. What was new was their self-confidence. They assumed they would enter their father's business or be mentored into another occupation. Even without an assured income, they were willing to assume risks. They trusted

themselves to manage industrial production. And they believed themselves able to plan successfully for the future.

The narrators' own business initiatives in fields where they had less competition and fewer restrictions, such as textiles and banking, combined with the nature of those businesses, made them aware of opportunities and encouraged them to rely on their own judgment. The increasing number of Jews who succeeded encouraged other Jews to enter business and be successful. In the 1840s, the newspapers which noted the lifestyle embellishments of Jewish successes, even as they inveighed against them, portrayed an emerging German Jewish middle class and fostered an expectation that this life was possible for all German Jews.

Given that the narrators felt so strongly about their experiences to have them recorded for posterity, it is not surprising that their accounts are a positive expression of their belief in themselves and a sense of satisfaction with what they achieved as they defined it. As a composite, the narratives offer a positive perspective of the mainstream Jewish community's rags to riches engagement in nineteenth century German economic life. They add to historians' understanding of how individuals perceived and responded to these significant changes, which impacted them directly, as they were experiencing them.

Endnotes

¹Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, “Juden in der Wirtschaft um 1800,” in Michael Brenner, Stefi Jersch-Wenzel and Michael A. Meyer, *Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit, Vol. II, Emanzipation und Akkulturation* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2000), p. 66.

²Jersch-Wenzel, in Brenner et al., pp. 77-78.

³Monika Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland: Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1780-1871* (Nördlingen-Augsburg: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1976).

⁴Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp.25-26; Werner Eugen Mosse, *The German-Jewish Economic Elite 1820-1935: A Socio-cultural Profile* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 40.

⁵Jersch-Wenzel, in Brenner et al., p. 69; Avraham Barkai, *Hoffnung und Untergang: Studien zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Hans Christian Verlag, 1998), p. 8; Mosse, p. 77.

⁶Monika Richarz, “German Jews in the Rural Economy,” in Werner Mosse et al., *Revolution and Evolution: 1848 in German-Jewish History* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981), p. 97.

⁷Richarz, in Mosse et al., p.96.

⁸Ascher Lehmann, narrative in Richarz, p. 91.

⁹Katz, p. 38.

¹⁰Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Alabama University Press, 1973), p. 264; Katz, p. 50.

¹¹Katz, p. 62.

¹²Katz, p. 162.

¹³Michael Brenner, “Der Vormärz als Konfliktfeld,” in Brenner et al., pp. 50; Jersch-Wenzel in Brenner et al., p. 79.

¹⁴Ascher Lehmann, narrative in Richarz, p. 90.

¹⁵Ascher Lehmann narrative, in Richarz, p. 90; translation from Monika Richarz, *Jewish Life in Germany: Memoirs from Three Centuries*, translated by Stella P. Rosenfeld and Sidney Rosenfeld (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 57. This English volume only translates some of the memoirs in the 3-volume German version.

¹⁶Altmann, pp. 450-459.

¹⁷Christoph Wilhelm von Dohm, *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, Vol. I (Berlin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1781, quoted from UB Bielefeld Digitale Rekonstruktionen), p. 11. Here and elsewhere translations from the German, unless other wise indicated, my own.

¹⁸Altmann, pp. 450-454.

¹⁹Katz, pp. 59-60.

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- ²⁰*Sulamith*, 1807, p. 363. There are no indications of months or days in the edition I consulted.
- ²¹Katz, p. 81.
- ²²Katz, p. 22.
- ²³Dohm, Vol. I, p. 145.
- ²⁴Jersch-Wenzel, in Brenner et al., p. 69.
- ²⁵Jersch-Wenzel, in Brenner et al., pp.69-72.
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