

Death of a village schoolmaster

Herbold Löwenstein (1872-1944) from Meimbressen

by Michael Dorhs

In the photo, he looks like someone who has found his place in life. Together with his colleague Heinrich Schmittmann, he flanked a group of 34 children of Meimbressen in the mid-1920s. Strictly, but not unfriendly, with his arms crossed in front of his chest, he looks from his round face into the photographer's camera. We are talking about Herbold Löwenstein from Meimbressen, who has been teaching at the only Jewish Elementary School in the county („Landkreis“) of Hofgeismar since July 1, 1909. When the photo is taken, he has been in the small village for about 15 years and has gained recognition and respect there, far beyond the Jewish community. The fact that he, the Jew, was photographed together with his Christian colleague and the entire school-age population of Meimbressen impressively illustrates the good and trusting coexistence of Jews and Christians in the village at that time.



Judaica in Meimbressen e.V. / Bildarchiv

People have lived together in the village for centuries, and the Jewish minority naturally takes part in the administration, economy and community life.¹ „We jewish and christian children had good relations with each other; we knew nothing of anti-semitism at that time. (...) Christians and Jews lived in good harmony, as I recall (...) in Meimbressen. Although my parents were not rich, I remember that we children had to bring food to the poor and sick in the village on a regular basis. At Christmas I even went to church with our maid and received gifts, just like the Christian children.“² (Käte Herz, née Frankenberg) Herbold Löwenstein's work has contributed much to this harmonious coexistence!

He was born in Obermöllrich near Fritzlar on December 22, 1872 as the son of the merchant Gottlieb Löwenstein and his wife Bertha (Beschen), née Stern.³ His marriage certificate mentions „Hermann“ as his first name, but at the time of his life he is known everywhere only as „Herbold“⁴. We know nothing about his childhood and adolescence, nor about his teacher studies. In 1893 his name reappears: he is registered in Bremke (then province of Hanover), where he works as a teacher at the local Jewish School⁵. In 1899 he married Pauline Kaiser in Kleinenglis,⁶ very close to his birthplace. After the marriage sie moved to Bremke with Herbold. Her only daughter Brunhilde (Hilde) was born there on August 17, 1900. Nine years later Herbold Löwenstein was appointed teacher at the Meimbressen Jewish Elementary School as successor to Abraham Hammerschlag, who died in 1908. He carried out this task with great conscientiousness until his retirement in 1934.

Was he popular with his pupils? After all, for 25 years Löwenstein teaches the jewish children of his village in all subjects. It is a very small school („Zwergschule“) in which he works as a teacher. The number of pupils in the

¹ See Eberhard Wolff von Gudenberg, Meimbressen, die Wölffe von Gudenberg und die Juden. Von den Anfängen bis 1945. In: Dorfchronik Meimbressen. Festschrift zur 1100-Jahrfeier 2006. Meimbressen/Hofgeismar 2006, p. 82.

² Käte Herz, Alte und neue jüdische Heimat: Meimbressen – Kfar Yedidia. Mit einem Vorwort von Eberhard Wolff von Gudenberg. In: Helmut Burmeister / Michael Dorhs (Ed.), Das achte Licht. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden in Nordhessen. Hofgeismar 2002, p. 260f.

³ See Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden [HHStAW], Bestand 365 No. 203, 204: Geburtsregister Fritzlar 1824 – 1872, 1872 – 1938 and: Paulgerhard Lohmann, Der antijüdische Rassenwahn Hitlers, die Juden in Fritzlar und seinen Stadtteilen und ihre wenigen Freunde. 3. Auflage, Norderstedt 2009, p. 192.

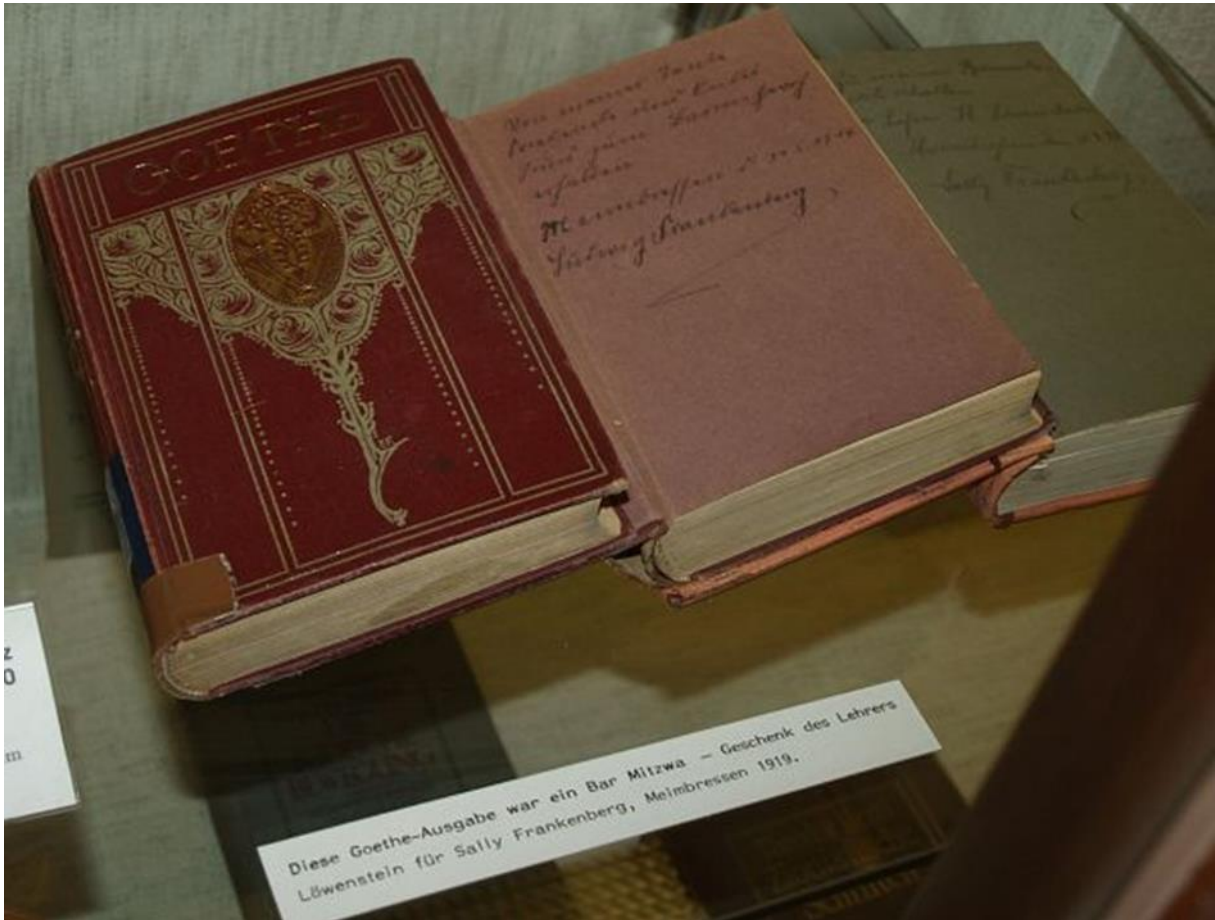
⁴ <https://www.myheritage.de/research/collection-10817/deutschland-hessisches-personenstandsregister-1849-1931?s=312665841&itemId=531559->

[&action=showRecord&recordTitle=Hermann+L%C3%B6wenstein+%26+Pauline+Kaiser](#)

⁵ In the marriage certificate No. 6 (October 16, 1899) of the Registrar's Office in Kleinenglis the profession of Hermann Löwenstein is mentioned as „teacher“.

⁶ Pauline Löwenstein, née Kaiser, born September 29, 1876 in Großenenglis.

1920s fluctuated between 6 and 13 children.⁷ School councillor Becherer from Hofgeismar attested to him in 1932 that the children achieved „*consistently satisfactory, even good performances*“, especially in arithmetic, spelling and reading. „*Only the handwriting needs improvement.*“⁸ Herbold Löwenstein is also responsible for the religious education of the children. In addition, not only in Meimbressen, but also in Grebenstein, Hofgeismar and Zierenberg, he gives Jewish religious instruction and prepares the boys thoroughly for their Bar Mitzvah, which is comparable to the protestant Confirmation, a festive ritual



Stadtmuseum Hofgeismar. Department „Judaica Hassiaca“

by which the boys reach maturity in the religious sense at the age of 13. Löwenstein owes it to this fact and to the official policy of the Prussian government that every district should retain as much as possible a Jewish Elementary School in order to ensure worship, religious institutions and the

⁷ Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg [HStAM], Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 4080: Besetzung der Schulstellen in den Städten und Gemeinden des Kreises, Bd. 7: (Meimbressen-Oedelsheim) 1919-1930: Handschriftliche Aufstellung des Gemeindeältesten

⁸ HStAM, Bestand 166, Bd. 3868: Bericht des Schulrats Becherer (Hofgeismar) über die Visitation der Israelitischen Volksschule in Meimbressen (23.9.1932).

education of young people.⁹ The different attempts made in 1924, 1927 and 1931/32 to close the Jewish School in Meimbressen because of too few pupils failed until the Nazi era. His pedagogical work is appreciated not only by the parents of his pupils, but also indirectly by the state school inspectorate: *„There is the best agreement between the Protestant and the Israelite schools in Meimbressen (...). Craftsmanship and gymnastics have both schools (...) in common today. If one of the two Protestant teachers or the Israelite teacher falls ill, then the children of the Israelite school immediately go to the Protestant school and have joint lessons with the Protestant children, excluding religious instruction. If a Protestant teacher is to be represented in such cases, the Israelite teacher immediately teaches in the orphaned class. No disturbances of any kind have occurred.“*¹⁰ In this way Herbold Löwenstein becomes for a whole generation of Christians and Jews in Meimbressen an influential village schoolmaster, who also works for the general public beyond the teaching. For example, he took over the office of secretary of the „Vaterländische Frauenverein“ under the chairmanship of Dorothea Wolff von Gudenberg and helped shape its programme for many years with his own musical contributions on the piano and the violin or so-called „educational lectures“. When the war memorial for the soldiers, who died during World War I was inaugurated on the Lindenberg in 1924, under the old fortifications of the church, Herbold Löwenstein, who himself fought as a soldier in World War I and was awarded a medal („cross of honor“),¹¹ was of course present in the midst of the entire Protestant and Jewish population of the village.¹²

For the Jewish community, which still numbers 70 people in Meimbressen in 1933,¹³ *„the spiritually superior teacher of the Jews Löwenstein“*¹⁴ (Arnold Wolff von Gudenberg) is also the principal responsible person for their cultural and religious life. He serves as a prayer in the Meimbressen synagogue, which was

⁹ See HStAM, Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 4080: Besetzung der Schulstellen in den Städten und Gemeinden des Kreises, Bd. 7: (Meimbressen-Oedelsheim) 1919-1930: Vorsteheramt der Israeliten (Cassel) an die Regierung in Cassel (14.11.1927).

¹⁰ HStAM, 166, 3868: Brief des Schulrats Becherer (Hofgeismar) an die Regierung in Kassel (15.11.1930); see also HStAM, 180, HOG, 4080.

¹¹ See. HStAM, 180, HOG, 3530: 1934-1936 [Alphabetische Listen der Ehrenkreuzträger]: No. 2135: Hermann Löwenstein, 26.4.1935.

¹² The photo is printed in: Herbold Löwenstein, Die jüdische Schule zu Meimbressen – Die Situation im Jahre 1926. In: Jahrbuch [Yearbook] 1988 Landkreis Kassel, p. 95 and in: Eberhard Wolff von Gudenberg, Meimbressen, die Wölffe von Gudenberg und die Juden (see footnote No. 1), p. 72f.

¹³ See HStAM, Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 3524, sheet 80.

¹⁴ Hans Manfred Bock, Die Wolff von Gudenberg. Zur Sozialgeschichte und Familienchronik eines Adelsgeschlechts der Region Kassel. Kassel 2019, p. 83.

inaugurated in 1842.¹⁵ And he is also responsible for the funerals in addition to the bar mitzvah. Evidently, he struck the right tone in synagogue services and in the cemetery and reached the people, for there were numerous honours for his „*well-thought-out*“ funeral speeches and „*warm-hearted obituaries*“, which appeared in the weekly newspaper „*Jüdische Wochenzeitung für Cassel, Hessen und Waldeck*“ (JWC) between 1924 and 1933. There he also appears as a competent author of historical treatises. He carefully evaluates source texts that later fell victim to the destruction of the Nazi era and World War II. In this respect, his essays and micelles are of great importance for regional history up to the present day. When Pauline and Herbold Löwenstein celebrated their Silver Wedding in 1924, the newspaper wrote: „*May the beloved teacher be granted a long and blessed activity for the good of our community.*“¹⁶

Nine years later, there is no mention of it. When the German President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor in 1933, the life of Herbold Löwenstein and his family changed. On March 26, 1933, the now 61-years-old Löwenstein was one of the victims of the Nazis' revenge actions against political opponents and Jews. Together with at least seven other Jews of Meimbressen, he is taken to Hofgeismar to the local SA home in Fürstenweg and brutally mistreated. Only a short time later, the members of the NSDAP district parliamentary fraction in Hofgeismar demanded „*the immediate abolition of the Jewish dwarf school in Meimbressen.*“ It seems „*completely incomprehensible and a mockery of the German people's feeling that one foreign-race dwarf school with 8 to 10 children is maintained at state expense [...].*“¹⁷ The same horn was echoed by the Nazi newspaper „*Hessische Volkswacht*“, in its issue of April 18, 1933, which called for the closure of a total of 31 Jewish schools, including the one in Meimbressen.¹⁸ Only twelve days later, on May 1, 1933, Herbold Löwenstein was on leave of service¹⁹ and after another eight months, on April 1, 1934, he retired.²⁰

¹⁵ See Michael Dorhs, Meimbressen (Landkreis Kassel). In: Synagogen in Hessen <https://www.lagis-hessen.de/de/purl/resolve/subject/syn/id/275>.

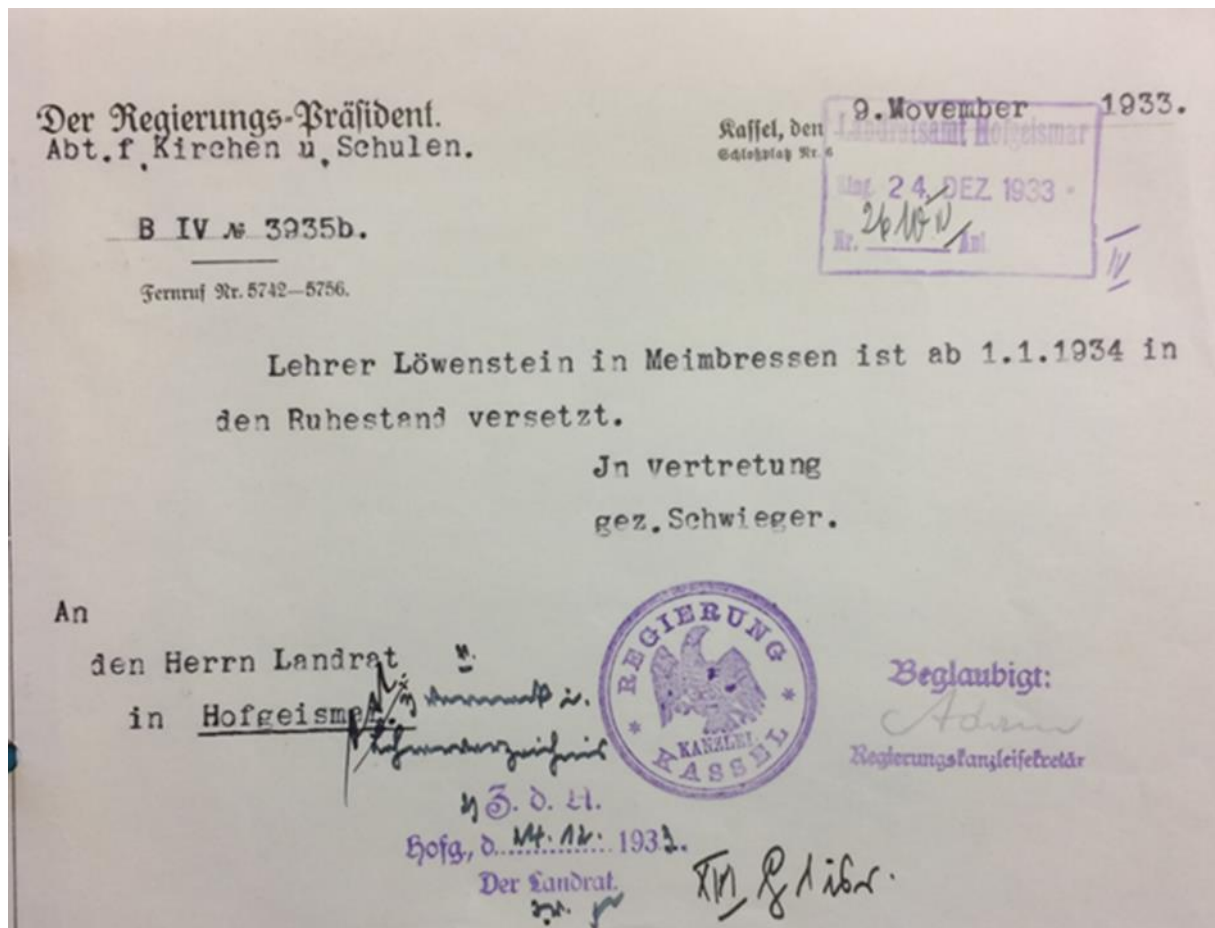
¹⁶ JWC 1 (1924), No. 4.

¹⁷ HStAM, Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 4080.

¹⁸ HStAM, Bestand 180, LA Rotenburg, No. 4291, sheet 800.

¹⁹ See HStAM, Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 4080.

²⁰ See HStAM, Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 4080, sheet 320.



Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, Bestand 180, LA Hofgeismar, No. 4080

In the same year, Herbold and Pauline Löwenstein left Meimbressen, where they had been well-suffered for a quarter of a century and fully integrated into village life. They move to Heiligenstadt (Thuringia), where their daughter Hilde now lives in her own house at Stubenstraße 20,²¹ who has been married to the merchant Julius Meyerstein from Bremke since 1927.²²

Only little information has been preserved about Herbold Löwenstein's time in Heiligenstadt. Only his address is known: Richtenberg 6.²³ Here he and his wife suffer all phases of the increasing disenfranchisement and social exclusion of German Jews and the destruction of their economic existence. There is a document from 1939 which shows that he was forced to deliver „valuable objects“ to the so-called Landesleihhaus Kassel.²⁴ Together with his son-in-law,

²¹ Information from Wolfgang Friese to the author, dated 11.2.2020 with reference to a compilation of the County Councillor (Landrat) in Heiligenstadt from 1938 about the Jews still living in the villages of the district.

²² The wedding took place on February 27, 1927 at the Hotel Meier in Kassel; see. JWC 4 (1927), No. 8 (25.2.1927), p. 4.

²³ Information from Wolfgang Friese to the author, dated 11.2.2020.

²⁴ See Arolsen Archives: Document ID: 70442543 (Aufstellung des Landeshauptmanns in Kassel, 26.3.1949).

he was imprisoned and mistreated in the Buchenwald concentration camp from November 10 to 27, 1938, in connection with the November pogrom of 1938. In 1940 his economic conditions were apparently so precarious that he, now 68 years old, had to take the trouble to travel regularly by train to Witzenhausen in order to give private lessons there.²⁵

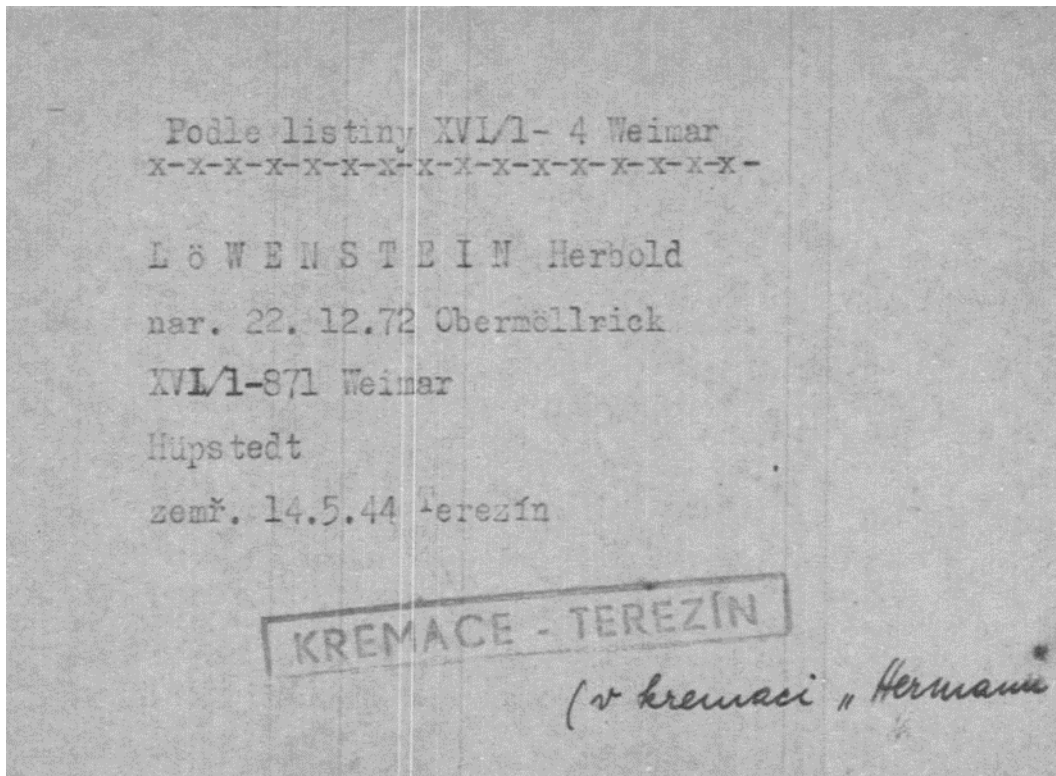
Finally, Heiligenstadt also wants to be considered „free of Jews“ („judenfrei“). In December 1941, Herbold and Pauline Löwenstein, together with their daughter and her husband, were among the last Jews living in the city who were forcibly sent to a camp in Hüpstedt, 30 km from Heiligenstadt. These are empty buildings of a former Kalish mine called „Felsenfest“ in Reifensteiner Straße, surrounded by a fence and guarded. Here the inmates are waiting for their deportation, which takes place on September 19 or 20, 1942 by train with the transport number XVI/1-871 via Weimar and Leipzig to Theresienstadt. After the deportation of their owners, the small furniture and utensils brought by Löwenstein and the other camp inmates are auctioned off in the Hüpstedter community tavern.²⁶ Herbold „Israel“ Löwenstein signed a so-called „home purchase contract H“ in which he and his wife are promised a place in one of Theresienstadt’s “retirement homes” including free accommodation, meals and medical care. This was a gigantic concealment and fraud project of the Gestapo and the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, through which the assets of elderly Jewish men and women amounting to more than 1,000 RM (including securities) were legalized for the benefit of the Nazi state. Herbold and Pauline Löwenstein pay the sum of 13.479,35 RM into the corresponding account of the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland²⁷ and find, to their horror, overcrowded and hardly heated dwellings in Theresienstadt, inadequate food and inadequate medical care. The elder Jews who are deported there are in no way prepared for such a catastrophic situation and are dying there in the hundreds. Among them are at least six Jews from Meimbressen²⁸, including the former village schoolmaster, whose life ended on May 14, 1944 in the Theresienstadt ghetto at the age of 72.

²⁵ See Manfred Baumgardt, *Es stand alles in der Zeitung. Witzenhausen in der Zeit des Terrors 1933-1945*. Norderstedt 2016, p. 139.

²⁶ See Edgar Rademacher, *Zwischenstation Hüpstedt. Die letzten Heiligenstädter Juden*. In: EMZ 44 (2000), p. 414.

²⁷ See Arolsen Archives: Document ID: 128186036 (Heimeinkaufsvertrag H No. V / 535, 13.9.1942)

²⁸ Jakob Frankenberg, Bertha Goldwein, geb. Mosheim, Herbold Löwenstein, Rosa Rosenthal, geb. Goldwein, Helene Wolff, geb. Goldwein and Josef Vorenberg.



Collections Arolsen Archives (Arolsen), DocID: 5059118

For more than seventy years, his fate remains unexplained in Meimbressen, the site of his longest activity. Many people will remember him in Meimbressen after the end of World War II. But no one has searched for him! In the meantime his name, that of his daughter and – mistakenly – that of his wife are on the memorial plaque in the Protestant church with the names of the murdered Shoah victims from Meimbressen.

His daughter Hilde and his son-in-law Julius were deported via Weimar and Leipzig to the Belzyce ghetto near Lublin in occupied Poland and murdered there.

Only Pauline Löwenstein survived the two and a half years in the Theresienstadt ghetto. She returned to Heiligenstadt and lived there in Wilhelmstr. 39 „at Keseling“.²⁹ She apparently makes little comment on her detention in the camp,³⁰ but gives a good testimony to the mayor of Hüpstedt regarding the forced placement in the „Felsenfest“ shaft at the time: *„We were very well looked after by the mayor (...) in terms of housing, accommodation and food. He always treated us well and did not bother us in any way, so we would have liked to have stayed in Hüpstedt until the end of the war.“*³¹ Pauline Löwenstein died

²⁹ See Edgar Rademacher, *Zwischenstation Hüpstedt. Die letzten Heiligenstädter Juden* (see footnote No. 26), p. 414.

³⁰ Information from Wolfgang Friese to the author, dated 11.2.2020.

³¹ Edgar Rademacher, *Zwischenstation Hüpstedt. Die letzten Heiligenstädter Juden* (see footnote No. 26), p. 414.

on October 1, 1947 in the Catholic St. Vinzenz Hospital in Heiligenstadt shortly after her 71st birthday. She never saw Meimbressen again.

Am Mittwoch, dem 1. Oktober
1947, verschied im Alter von
71 Jahren
Frau Pauline Löwenstein
geb. Kaiser
Nach langer, mit großer Geduld
ertragener Krankheit erlöste sie
Gott von ihren Leiden und ver-
einte sie wieder mit ihren Lie-
ben, welche ihr mit ihrem Tode
als Opfer des Faschismus vor-
aus gingen.
Im Namen der trauernden
Hinterbliebenen:
Erna Hoffmann.
Heiligenstadt, London, 1. 10. 47
Beerdigung Samstag, 4. Oktober,
vormittags 11 Uhr vom Kloster-
Krankenhaus.

Published in the daily newspaper „Thüringer Volk“, October 3, 1947. Stadtmuseum Hofgeismar, Department „Judaica Hassiaca“.

Translation: Marike Dorhs

Important publications of Herbold Löwenstein: Die jüdische Schule zu Meimbressen. In: Jüdische Wochenzeitung für Cassel, Hessen und Waldeck [JWC] 3 (1926), No. 41, p. 4-6; published again in: Jahrbuch [Yearbook] 1988 Landkreis Kassel, p. 93-96 and in Helmut Burmeister / Michael Dorhs (Ed.), Juden-Hessen-Deutsche. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden in Nordhessen. Hofgeismar 1991, p. 105-109;-- Louis Rosenthal und seine Heimat Niedermeiser. In: JWC 4 (1927), No. 12 of 25.3.1927, p. 2f.;-- Die Synagoge zu Meimbressen, In: JWC 4 (1927), No. 41 of 28.10.1927, p. 4 (1. Teil) und No. 42 of 4.11.1927, p. 4f. (2. Teil);-- Dem Andenken Siegmund Rosenbaums (Zierenberg). In: JWC 4 (1927), No. 42, p. 5;-- Jüdische Bräuche in ehemaligen Kurhessen. (Ergänzungen zum Art. von Samuel Blach). In: JWC 5 (1928), No. 29, p. 4f.;-- Altes aus der Gemeinde Meimbressen. In: JWC 8 (1931), No. 21 of 29.5.1931, p. 2f.

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