

“Like Hunted Animals.” *The November 1938
Pogroms in Rotenburg an der Fulda: Henny
Rothschild’s Letter from 18 October 1939*

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In the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute New York (Documents and correspondence: Rothschild family 1851–1980, Joseph Rothschild Collection, AR 6497, Box 1, Folder 4, Leo Baeck Institute Archives) I came across a lengthy letter written by Henny Rothschild (née Löwenstein), formerly of Rotenburg an der Fulda, northeastern Hesse, on 18 October 1939 (Figure 3). It was sent to the family of Albert Rothschild (brother of her husband, Meinhold Rothschild), who had been able to emigrate to the United States in July 1938, and subsequently resided in Los Angeles. The Rothschilds, after reading it, were supposed to forward the letter to Meinhold’s sister Jenny (married to Leo Kahn) in Ramot HaShavim, British mandated Palestine.

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Henny Rothschild composed the letter in Hotel Zeeland at Vlissingen (near Rotterdam), where she and her husband, Meinhold, together with their eight-year-old son, Joseph, had been waiting since 3 September 1939 for their entry visas to the United States. In January 1940 they succeeded in reaching New York from Rotterdam. For over four decades the couple lived in a very modest apartment in Elmhurst, a neighbourhood in Queens, New York City. Henny Rothschild (b. 1906) died from a heart attack on 8 June 1989 in a hospital in Manhattan; her husband, Meinhold Rothschild (b. 1897), had passed away on 1 March 1985 (Figure 1).

¹Translator’s Note: The original text contains many run-in sentences and very lengthy paragraphs. To increase readability of the English, the translation introduces more independent sentences and paragraph breaks than in the original. The writer’s use of the ampersand (&), however, has been retained to reflect her casual style. Any information enclosed in parentheses comes from the original, handwritten version of the letter. In contrast, information enclosed in square brackets has been added to the original by the author/editor or the translator. For sake of emphasis several extracts from postwar testimonies, interrogation accounts, statements of witnesses, and court verdicts included in the footnotes are shown in italic.

HENNY ROTHSCHILD'S FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

To place the content of the letter and events described therein in proper perspective it is necessary to briefly review the family relationships of the author of the letter. Henriette (called Henny) Löwenstein was born on 2 September 1906 to Abraham and Marianne Löwenstein, of 6 Brückengasse, Rotenburg an der Fulda. In 1930, she married Meinhold Rothschild, born on 11 August 1897 to Isaak and Gitta Rothschild. Isaak Rothschild ran a wholesale business for paints and chemical products at 9 Market Place, Rotenburg. After Isaak's death in May 1934, his son Meinhold continued the business.

Henny's father, Abraham Löwenstein (1863–1925), came from Diemerode (now part of the small town of Sontra), in Hessen-Nassau, Prussia. Abraham was the son of Wolf and Jette (née Wassermann) Löwenstein. Henny's brother David was born in 1895 in Diemerode. Henny's mother, Marianne, was born in 1868 to David and Jette (née Greif) Simon, of Langenschwarz (now a district of Burghaun), Hesse, and died on 27 June 1950 in New York City. Henny's parents, Abraham and Marianne Löwenstein, moved out of Diemerode around 1900 to what was then the county seat (*Kreisstadt*) of Rotenburg, where they opened a textile store attached to their home at 6 Brückengasse.



Figure 1. Henny Rothschild, néé Löwenstein (1906–1980), with her son Joseph (1931–2000), and husband, Meinhold (1897–1985), New York, c. 1980. Courtesy of Hanns Rothschild, Cape Town, South Africa.

Joseph Rothschild, born on 5 April 1931, to Henny and Meinhold Rothschild, belongs to the group of German Jews who, having fled from the National Socialist dictatorship, and despite the initial linguistic handicap, followed an extremely successful professional path in their new homeland—in this case, in the United States. Starting in 1955, Joseph Rothschild taught at Columbia University as professor of political science and eastern European history. His numerous publications became standard reference works in these fields. In the 1980s he belonged to the circle of foreign policy advisors to US President Jimmy Carter. Joseph Rothschild died on 30 January 2000, at the age of 68; the last years of his life were marked by severe illness. One appraisal of his scholarly work, given at an awards ceremony at Columbia University in 1995, stated: “What stands out is his engaged quest to comprehend the dark side of the human condition as a means to rescue the tradition of Enlightenment, an effort that conveys these essential and meticulous works beyond regional studies to a much wider audience.” The high esteem in which Joseph Rothschild was held in his academic field is also reflected in the fact that a research scholarship was established in his honour, as well as an annual research prize awarded jointly by the Association for the Studies of Nationalities and the Harriman Institute at Columbia University.

20 THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE LETTER WAS WRITTEN, THE
WRITING STYLE, AND SOME EDITORIAL NOTES

During the night from 7 and 8 November 1938, severe riots took place against the Jewish minority in Rotenburg an der Fulda (as well as in Kassel and Bebra), after the assassination attempt in Paris on the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath became known. The Rothschild family, which had a store at 9 Market Place, where they also lived, was deeply impacted by the massive assaults. As a result, on the afternoon of 8 November 1938, the Rothschilds, together with Henny’s brother David Löwenstein and his wife, Lotte, their eight-year-old daughter, Margot, and David’s mother, Marianne Löwenstein, fled to Göttingen to the family of Meinhold Rothschild’s sister, Lina (wife of Leopold Weil). Most of Rotenburg’s Jewish population followed the Rothschild and Löwenstein examples.

On 27 November 1938, to comply with orders issued by the local authorities, the Jews who had fled from Rotenburg came back to their hometown, where they remained for several days. There they were confronted with their homes and business places, which had been totally destroyed in their absence, and were made to suffer profound indignities.

The precisely detailed report in Henny Rothschild’s letter on the events that had taken place in Rotenburg an der Fulda in November 1938 brings to light the tremendous work of destruction whose extent has previously remained unknown.

40 Reading Henny’s letter, it is apparent that she is mainly interested in giving her addressees a detailed and graphic report of the destruction of property and the extreme harassment to which she and her fellow sufferers were subjected in

November 1938. She keeps pouring forth statement after statement, as though the events she experienced and suffered, in all their monstrousness, had only just happened. Obviously still extremely agitated by all that she is describing, she commits her emotions and memories to paper in an agitated, almost breathless style. She frequently piles one individual event or thought onto another, separating them from each other only by commas or ampersands (&). Her style suggests just how much the evil experiences of November 1938 continue to haunt, and even threaten, her eleven months later.

The writing style adopted in the document presented here may occasionally interfere with the reader's understanding of the text. However, it is of great importance for the correct perception of the author's mood as she wrote.

So that the text of the letter can be better understood, I have inserted—as footnotes—short annotations for certain concepts and individuals. Illegible words in the German original version of the letter are indicated by square brackets.

More details on the November 1938 pogroms in Rotenburg and nearby places, and on the Jewish families of Rotenburg and its vicinity, may be found at www.hassia-judaica.de, under the headings of *Places*, *Biographies*, and *Stolpersteine*.

Of the 54 *Stolpersteine* (memorial plaques known as “stumbling stones”) that were installed in 2010, 2011, and 2013, 26 plaques were installed for the following individuals named in the letter: Toni Bierhoff, née Kaufmann; Alexander, Jettchen, and Recha Döllefeld; Hanna, Margarete, and Viktor Falkenstein; Betty and Jettchen Gans; Johanna, Paula, and Willy Gans; Gretel and Margit Goldschmidt; Dina and Fritz Israel; Bertha and Karl Kaufmann; Honet Kaufmann I; Elka and Honet Kaufmann II; Clara Mayer; Karoline Piterson; Karoline (Lina) Rothschild; Hanna Speier; and Jeanette Werthan.

16 March 2015

Heinrich Nuhn, Jüdisches Museum in der ehemaligen Mikwe, Rotenburg a. d. F

VLISSINGEN (HOLLAND), HOTEL ZEELAND, 18 OCTOBER 1939

My dear, dear brothers and sisters, and your dear children,

Early this morning we received the first signs of life from you—a card from September 5 from dear Lina that was forwarded to us here.² It is still hard for me to tell you how much we were moved to read those lines of yours, filled with your concern for us. You have our deepest thanks for every word of your caring and sympathy, for which we, in such difficult life circumstances, are doubly thankful and doubly receptive.

Since you went away, so incredibly much has happened to us that we would never have believed we would have to experience or that we would be able to bear. And yet G-d has given us strength again and again and has allowed us to sense His help

²Lina Rothschild, née Spiegel, 1861–1942, died in the Theresienstadt Ghetto; she was married to Meinhold's uncle, Meier Rothschild.

in the midst of the greatest afflictions. I am assuming that in the meantime, you have received all of our mail from here, and so I want to begin to tell you about everything that happened since your departure.

5 You know how terribly hard every single individual in our small community was affected when a family emigrated. Your departure was, as you yourselves know, a great loss for us. (For a long time we didn't go up to your apartment.)

10 We were happy when, in response to the request from my cousin in New York, sponsorships for all the Löwensteins and for us three were provided. That let us believe that we too would be able to get to America quite soon and in a reasonable amount of time.

15 During the week of your departure, M. and I were in Frankfurt, as you will recall, in order to make purchases.³ There we happened to hear that people [wanting to emigrate to the United States] had to get registered at the [American] consulate in Stuttgart, that there was a tremendous crowd there, and that emigration depended on how high [or low] your registration number was. We got ourselves such a number immediately and had the good fortune to get the relatively low number of 8072. We all believed that we would be summoned back to the consulate [to get our visas] in just a few weeks.

20 You certainly already know through Fridel and Adi what happened in this respect at the consulates, and especially the one in Stuttgart, where the biggest swindles resulted, at the expense of those who could not bribe the corrupt consulate officials as well. So we were soon told the target date: our number would come up in July 1939 at the earliest. You can imagine our disappointment; but in the end, we had a roof over our heads and something to live on, so that we just had to accept what
25 couldn't be changed. We continued to make our purchases.

Everything was labelled, washed & ironed, and then packed, all ready to go, into suitcases. We spent the Rosh Ha-Shanah⁴ days and the rest of the [Jewish autumnal] holidays in the usual way; we had Sukkahs⁵ made of [illegible].

30 All the men were there & we were all in the best of moods. And so came the memorable 7th of November, on which we had gone to bed at 11 p.m. as usual; the next day we were expecting Recha, who wanted to spend her vacation with us.⁶

35 Already at the stroke of midnight it all began at our home: the windows up to the dining room above were smashed in by means of fire department ladders; down below, on the ground floor, the bolted-down shutters were chopped to pieces by hatchets; cobblestones flew into our beds, from which we escaped at the last minute only with great effort and distress. I never want to live through such a night again. Little Josef screamed, we were almost incapable of moving—but we fled with the child up to Recha's bedroom. The quarter of an hour during which this destruction was carried out felt like an eternity to us.

³ M. = her husband Meinhold Rothschild.

⁴ Jewish New Year, in early autumn.

⁵ Temporary huts in which part of the autumn holiday of Sukkot is celebrated.

⁶ Recha Rothschild, born in 1895, Meinhold's sister, married Alexander (Alex) Döllefeld, born 1891 in Rotenburg; both were murdered in Sobibór in 1943.



Figure 2. One of the Torah scrolls of the Rotenburg synagogue, showing burn marks. It was rescued and kept in the archives of the Rotenburg local museum until 2006, and then placed on display in the Jewish Museum in the former Rotenburg mikveh building. Photograph by Heinrich Nuhn, taken at the Jewish Museum, Rotenburg an der Fulda.

When the group withdrew, not a single pane of glass nor any window crossbar remained whole in the front of the house, and we continued to hear the clashing and bashing-in noises in the town. What more can I say? Not a single house [belonging to the Jews] was spared, not a single house was not broken into, and the same was true in Bebra and in Baumbach. That happened on the orders of *one* district leader,⁷ just as one day later it would happen in the rest of Hesse—orders which in November created something that will never be forgotten [emphasis in the original].

Tuesday morning, after this night of terror, Alex came by already at 7 a.m. and a short time later *das Honnetchen*⁸ arrived from Rasen,⁹ howling—I will never forget it—and told us that during the night all the *Sefers*¹⁰ (Figure 2) at the Küllmers¹¹ on Steinweg had been burnt up, Mrs. Werthan’s apartment was demolished,¹² and also in the synagogue everything had been thrown all over the place. The burning of the *Sefers* struck us like a blow, that was the worst for us.

About one hour later, Bohlen¹³ arrived (but with what a tone of voice!), telling us that all the glass shards in front of our house had to be cleared away & Meinhold had to make sure that in 15 minutes the junk (the ashes) on Steinweg would be removed. What we all felt I cannot tell you. Viktor,¹⁴ David,¹⁵ and Alex¹⁶ managed to get the ashes *aufs Gutort*¹⁷ and buried them there,¹⁸ while—in front of all the schoolchildren (they had the day off from school)¹⁹—the synagogue was completely demolished; the crowd kept more people from getting into the Brotgasse.

⁷ Since 1934 the *Kreisleiter* (county leader) of the National Socialist Democratic Workers’ Party (the NSDAP) of Rotenburg county was Erich Braun, who in April 1945 disappeared from view in northern Germany. In November 1947 Braun was classified as belonging to Group 1 (the most guilty) by the Spruchkammer (the denazification court) and sentenced to five years in a labour camp. When he appealed the classification in July 1949, he was reclassified as belonging to Group 2 (less guilty), because a chief prosecution witness from 1947 “no longer could stand by the written and oral statements she had made in previous interviews, as a result of a serious operation that she had had to undergo in the meantime, which had totally clouded her memory” (from the newspaper *Hessische Nachrichten* of 11 July 1949, in a report under the heading: “Prosecution witness knows nothing anymore”).

⁸ A diminutive term, referring here to a man of short stature named Honet Kaufmann, born 1879; in 1938, he and his mother, Elka, lived in the house at 2 Brauhaus Street (where the Jewish Museum stands today); he died in Buchenwald on 13 December 1938.

⁹ Former street name.

¹⁰ The sacred Torah scrolls.

¹¹ The Küllmer restaurant (“Alheimer Klause”), at 11 Steinweg (today, the bank *Volksbank*).

¹² Jeanette Werthan lived with her sons, Norbert and Theo, at 19 Brotgasse, where the Jewish school for religious education and community house were also located. Jeanette Werthan and her son Theo perished in the Holocaust.

¹³ The chief sergeant of the police.

¹⁴ Falkenstein, born 1882, married to Johanna/Hanna Höflich, born 1882; both were murdered at Auschwitz in 1944.

¹⁵ Löwenstein, born 1895, Henny’s brother, who had a fabric store at 6 Brückengasse.

¹⁶ Alexander Döllefeld (see fn 6).

¹⁷ “To the Good Place,” a common expression used in the area to refer to the Jewish cemetery.

¹⁸ According to Jewish religious law, religious texts and objects that are no longer usable must be buried. It is remarkable that this precept of religious law was tenaciously followed in November 1938 even in the face of the great emergency situation in which the Rotenburg Jews found themselves at that time.

¹⁹ In light of other sources, this statement that the children were given time off from school is debatable. However, such an impression could easily arise, when one considers the following entry in a later

We had our work cut out for us, to clear away the glass shards in front of the house & in the bedrooms. Everywhere there were empty spaces & the whole town was out and about, in order to look at the destroyed Jewish houses. I would have liked to murder them all. We were all more than distraught and dreaded the night ahead. Around 3 p.m. Lotte²⁰ came by and told us that Gustav Dörr²¹ had been at Aunt Lina's²² and had wanted to extort money from her—now he is at Viktor's. He came to Aunt Lina just when she wanted to eat, and demanded her jewelry and money; naturally she refused him, and so he overturned her table, together with all the tableware and food that was on it.

No need to mention all the horror stories we went through. We decided to get away, so that we would not have to experience the *schlamazel*²³ all over again. Around 5 p.m. we took the express train to Bebra. There we met up with the Löwensteins, Alex, Recha, Rosa²⁴ & her family and children & so terribly many co-religionists from the region. You just can't imagine what it was like, with everyone distraught and like hunted animals.

Nine²⁵ of us traveled to Lina,²⁶ where everything was still in better shape. She was horrified at what we unfortunately had to tell her and was totally ready to offer

supplement from the summer of 1945 to the church records of the Rotenburg-Altstadt congregation, which stated: "*However, the most terrible thing was the ransacking and total destruction of the synagogue in Brotgasse, which the schoolchildren—under the leadership or at least the tacit approval of the teachers—carried out by throwing stones and through other violent actions. (!) The big Torah scroll containing the holy texts of the Old Testament was dragged through the Steinweg [the street]; someone donned the rabbinical vestments in a show of mockery and scorn. The Jewish cemetery halfway up the Katzenkopf hill was ignominiously desecrated. After Pastor Müller-Osten had rebuked, in a fatherly and serious manner, the students in his confirmation class for their disgraceful behaviour, he was seriously threatened in town meetings and also in potentially violent gatherings in front of his rectory.*" The corresponding entry in the Rotenburg town records reads: "*After the school day had ended, even the schoolchildren thought they had to continue these activities.*"

²⁰ Lotte Löwenstein, née Kleeburg, David Löwenstein's wife, born in Lauterbach in 1906; mother of Margot Löwenstein, born 1931. The three Löwensteins succeeded in emigrating to the United States.

²¹ In the proceedings of the state court of Kassel (judgement of 26 May 1948), Gustav Dörr (b. 1906), the owner of a trucking company, escaped sentencing, on the grounds that for medical reasons, he could not be held responsible for his actions (Section 51, paragraph 1 of the German *Strafgesetzbuch*, or criminal law statutes). The charges against him, however, were found to be fully justified: "*Besides, the main trial has proven that D. was one of the most active participants in the activities. The accused should not be considered the main instigator or leader. However, he has violated the laws relating to civil disorders and rioting (Section 125, paragraph 2 of the German criminal law statutes).*" (HStAM, Best. 274 Kassel, Acc. 1983/86, Nr. 77, AZ 3Kls 24/47)

²² Lina Rothschild, at 24 Steinweg. (For more details, see fn 2.)

²³ Yiddish for "bad luck" or "one who attracts or experiences bad luck," possibly a combination of *schlimm* 'bad' and *mazel* 'luck'.

²⁴ Rosa Döllefeld, née Ehrlich, married to Theodor Döllefeld and mother of Käte and Dina.

²⁵ The nine people were Meinhold, Henny and Joseph Rothschild, Marianne, David, Lotte and Margot Löwenstein, Alexander and Recha Döllefeld.

²⁶ To Caroline (Lina) Weil, née Rothschild (born 2 March 1884), Meinhold Rothschild's sister, who lived at 5 Schiller Street in Göttingen. In August 1904, she had married Leopold Weil (b. 1869), who came from Eichstetten near Freiburg, and who had been an apprentice salesman in the paint company of her father, Isaak Rothschild, in Rotenburg, and then worked for the company as a travelling salesman. In 1907 the couple moved to Göttingen, where they first lived at 20a Lotze Street. From October 1933 on, they lived at 5 Schiller Street, where Leopold ran a wholesale paint and lacquer company, which he had to relinquish on 1 October 1938. In September 1941 the couple

Mirsingen (Holland) Hotel Zeeland, 18/Oktober 1939

Meine lieben, lieben Geschwister, Ihr lieben Kinder, heute früh erhalten wir das erste Lebenszeichen von Euch, eine Karte vom 5. Sept. von E. Lina nachher nachgesehen, ich kann Euch nicht sagen, was uns Beide bewegt, als Euer von Eurer nun uns so vielen Teilen lasen. Habt alle innigen Dank für jedes Wort der Fürsorge und Anteilnahme, für das man in so schweren Lebenslagen doppelt dankbar und doppelt empfänglich ist. Es liegt es unendlich viel sich nur abseits hinter uns, das wir nie geglaubt hätten erleben zu müssen und tragen zu können und doch hat uns der E. G. H. immer und immer wieder Kraft gegeben und uns in der größten Bedrängnis seine Hilfe spüren lassen. Ich setze voraus dass Ihr alle unsere Post ab hier in der Zwischenzeit erhalten habt und so will ich beginnen Euch zu erzählen, was sich alles seit Euerem Wegsein ereignete.

Ihr wisst, wie unendlich schwer es immer jedem Einzelnen in der kleinen Gemeinde traf, wenn eine Familie auswanderte, nur weggehen war, wie Ihr selbst wisst, für uns ein großer Verlust / wir sind lange Zeit nicht raus in eine Wohnung gegangen / wir waren glücklich als auf Anfrage bei meiner Tante in New York sofort Bürgschaften für alle Löwensteins und uns drei gestellt wurden, dann glaubten wir doch auch recht bald & in absehbarer Zeit nach Amerika zu können. In der Woche Eures Weggehen waren M. + ich, wie Ihr Euch noch entsinnen könnt in Frankfurt, um uns Beschaffungen zu machen und dort hatten wir zufällig, dass man sich beim Stuttgarter Konsulat registrieren lassen muss, da der Antrag dort sehr groß sei & die Auswanderung von der Höhe der Registrierungsnummer abhängig sei. Wir beschafften uns solche sofort & hatten dadurch das Glück die verhältnismäßig niedrige Nummer 8072 zu bekommen. Wir alle waren des Glaubens dass wenige Wochen unsere Aufforderung zum Konsulat gefolgt werden würde. Ihr wisst nun sicher durch Fridel + Adi was sich

Figure 3. The first page of Henny Rothschild's letter. Courtesy of the archives of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

help to all of us there. Some of us slept on the ground. Wednesday evening²⁷ then brought the report of the death of Herr vom Rath²⁸ & we knew that this would signify the beginning of further terrors.

5 During the night, the [Jewish] homes almost everywhere in Göttingen were demolished. Only Lina's was not, as if the merciful G-d had wanted to spare them and us that excitement. They came to three families in the same street but not to Lina's, that was really a miracle. Leop.²⁹ had a *Jahrzeit*,³⁰ in the evening (Wednesday evening) all the men were still in their *minyán*³¹ in the synagogue. The next morning, they had again set out on their way, but as they came close to the
10 synagogue, it was burning—and almost 1 minute later Leopold was arrested on the street by an SS-man. Alex, who came home again in order to tell us that the synagogue was burning, was arrested by the Gestapo in our apartment. They also asked the many women in the house about our husbands, Meinhold & David [Löwenstein], & since they were not there, they [the Gestapo men] stayed in our
15 house until about noon, and wanted to arrest us if the men did not appear.

Despite the surveillance by the Gestapo, we learned a little while later that a Jewish lady was keeping both of them hidden, and after we saw that they [the Gestapo men] were not going to leave the apartment, we succeeded despite
20 the surveillance in letting the men know that they should turn themselves in to the police, which also happened around 1 p.m. The greatest mercy of these days of terror that was bestowed on them was that they were brought to a court jail near Göttingen (Reinhausen) and there were treated humanely and properly by some really decent S.A. men.

In any case, only on Saturday did we learn where they had been taken, & on
25 Sunday we could already go there & visit them. If it had not been for the constant anxiety and concerns we had, that they could be transferred to Buchenwald, that camp of horrors, we could have spared ourselves a lot of worry. It was still “the slammer” but at least more comfortable than what thousands of poor Jewish men had had to endure during these weeks.

30 In the meantime, we were without any connection to Rotenburg, until one day I received a letter with a newspaper clipping from the *Rotenburger Tageblatt*³² from

was part of one of the last contingents of Jewish refugees to get out of Europe, as passengers on the Spanish ship *Navemar*, whose appalling sanitary conditions outraged the American public. (Alex Bruns-Wüstefeld, *Lohnende Geschäfte. Die “Entjudung” der Wirtschaft am Beispiel Göttingens* [Rewarding Businesses: The “De-judaization” of the Economy, as Exemplified in Göttingen], Hannover 1997, pp. 239f.)

²⁷ 9 November 1938.

²⁸ The German diplomat whose shooting two days earlier in Paris by a young Jew, distraught by his parents' deportation, served as a pretext for the National Socialist pogroms of 9–10 November.

²⁹ Leopold Weil (see fn 26).

³⁰ Anniversary of death for a relative, for which religious Jewish men must recite prayers in the company of others in the synagogue.

³¹ A Hebrew word denoting the quorum of ten male participants needed for a Jewish religious service.

³² The local newspaper.

the Brandes family, who had fled to Krefeld.³³ The letter, actually written by Mrs. Strube³⁴ to the Brandeses, contained more or less the following: You don't need to come back again, you won't find anything left. The newspaper clipping [stated]: Rotenburg is *judenfrei*.³⁵ We had not expected anything good, but had never thought that we would come across multiple houses in that condition ever again.

After the Brandeses had received this report, I wrote for the first time to the Brandaus,³⁶ who did not yet know where we were staying. Instead of an answer, Mrs. Brandau herself arrived promptly on Sunday morning³⁷ in Göttingen and told us that our things, our entire household and inventory, had been burned on the playing field—and another whole bunch of details about what had happened during that performance in those November days. But I will tell you later in detail all that we were to experience very shortly.

Around noon, Mrs. Brandau traveled back to Rotenburg, and would not let me reimburse her for the fare despite all my urging. Early Monday the order came from the mayor in Rotenburg that within 8 days, all the demolished windows &

³³ On 8 November 1938, Moses (Max) and Hanna Brandes, and their son, Ludwig, who lived at 1 Neustadt Street (then called Am Rasen), fled to her daughter, Gretel, who herself had found accommodation [earlier] in 1938, together with her husband, Hans Goldschmidt, and their daughter, Margit, in the house of Gretel's uncle, Siegfried Strauß, at 85 Goethe Street in Krefeld-Ürdingen.

³⁴ Maria Strube, a neighbour of the Brandes family.

³⁵ In the *Rotenburger Tageblatt* [the local newspaper] on 11 November, 1938, this one-column-wide announcement in the form of a commercial advertisement appeared: “Rotenburg is Jew-free.” Already on 8 November 1938, a report about the riots on the night of 7–8 November could be read in the *Rotenburger Tageblatt*, as well as in the *Kürhessische Landeszeitung* (the publication of the National Socialist headquarters in Kassel). This makes it perfectly clear that the earlier anti-Jewish actions in Rotenburg and Bebra occurred in coordination and/or cooperation with the National Socialist leadership in Kassel. In the absence of the *Gauleiter* (National Socialist regional leader) Karl Weinrich, who had been ordered to attend a meeting of the *Gauleiters* in Munich, the deputy *Gauleiter* Solbrig and the *Gauleiter* for propaganda Heinrich Gernand, who had grown up in Bebra, were left in command of the district. Wolf-Arno Kropat (chief archivist in Wiesbaden) in his book, *Kristallnacht in Hessen. Der Judenpogrom vom November 1938. Eine Dokumentation* (Schriften der Kommission für die Geschichte der Juden in Hessen, Wiesbaden 1988), identified Heinrich Gernand as the person most responsible for the fact that northern and eastern Hesse were in the vanguard of the November pogroms of 1938; he based this on the documentation in the main Hessian state archives in Wiesbaden and in the state archives of Marburg for the events of 1938. For more details, see www.hassia-judaica.de, under “Kristallnacht in Rotenburg” and, for Bebra, “Es geschah vor aller Augen [It happened in front of everyone].”

³⁶ The Brandau family lived at 2 Burggasse, next door to the Rothschilds, in whose firm Mrs. Brandau's husband, Wilhelm, worked part-time. A butcher by occupation, Wilhelm was a candidate on the list of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) during the elections to the Rotenburg town council on 12 March 1933. The significance of the relationship of Anna Brandau to the Rothschild family is best expressed in a letter written by Meinhold Rothschild to his cousin Julius on 1 December 1977, in which he reports about an earlier visit to Rotenburg. Meinhold maintains that the only reason he traveled to Rotenburg was to visit the Brandau family and the Jewish cemetery. He wrote: “*And now about our 1972 trip to Rotenburg: At the time [of our 1972 visit] we didn't keep our plans secret from anyone. . . . that we were traveling to Rotenburg exclusively to visit the cemetery and had absolutely no need to see or speak with anyone there except the Brandau family. . . . The next morning at 10 a.m. we flew from Frankfurt to Switzerland, so eager were we to get out of Ashkenaz once again.*”

³⁷ 20 November 1938.

doors had to be fixed (this order went to all the Jews); the next day a letter from the Finance Office arrived, according to which the largest part of our entire property would be seized; a day after, another letter reporting a confiscation on the part of the Finance Office—all these job-like messages coming to me, because Meinhold
5 was, after all, in detention.

In the course of the week, Brandes called up to say that we should meet in Rotenburg on Tuesday³⁸ of the next week, insofar as people could be reached, in order to undertake steps concerning the repair of the houses, etc. Lotte³⁹ & I traveled on Monday already, because the terrible path to the Finance Office still
10 lay in store for me. Paula Witzenhausen,⁴⁰ travelled with us & there in Rotenburg we came upon sights that will never, ever, be forgotten.

At Aunt Lina's⁴¹ we first saw instead of a front door, two slats forming a cross as a door closure,⁴² all the way up to the roof, no window, no window frame; in no room was there as much as a nail remaining; on the house, a large sign: This house is off-
15 limits by police order: [signed by] the local police! We three women (Lotte, Recha & I)⁴³ went back; at the Plauts' on Lindenstraße,⁴⁴ the same picture, [but] our barns⁴⁵ were undamaged; further along to the Brandeses,⁴⁶ the house demolished from all sides exactly like the others; on the road over the bridge at the Gansens,⁴⁷

³⁸29 November 1938. On 21 November 1938, the families that had fled from Rotenburg were ordered by the mayor "on the basis of the order of November 12, 1938" to do the following: "to remedy the existing damages by no later than the end of the week. If you do not carry out this order on time, then the damages will be remedied by police action and/or police actions will be taken against you." (Rotenburg town archives, "Juden II" files.)

³⁹Lotte Löwenstein, Henny's sister-in-law.

⁴⁰This refers to Paula Löwenstein, Henny's sister-in-law (née Kleeberg, married to a Kugelmann); Henny refers to Paula this way because she was living with the Kugelmans in Witzenhausen (8 Walburgerstr.) in November 1938.

⁴¹Lina Rothschild, at 24 Steinweg in Rotenburg (see fn 2).

⁴²An entry in the Rotenburg records, written in 1938 by the town inspector Finke, confirms Henny Rothschild's statement: "In the course of November 11, the entrances to all Jewish houses, as well as a number of window openings through which one could easily enter the houses, were covered up with boards." In an entry written one month later, this chronicler deplored the following state of affairs: "The complete fumigation of the Jews from Rotenburg that was hoped for has not yet been successfully carried out. Before the events [of November 1938] Rotenburg still had 72 Jews. On January 1, 1939, 31 Jews were residing in Rotenburg."

⁴³Lotte Löwenstein, née Kleeberg, Recha Döllefeld, née Rothschild, and Henny Rothschild, née Löwenstein.

⁴⁴3 Lindenstraße, the business and home address of master upholsterer David Plaut, who had also fled from Rotenburg to Göttingen with his wife, Selma. In August 1939, they were registered as living at 10 Obere Marchstraße in Göttingen. David Plaut died there on 17 July 1940; Selma Plaut reached America in 1941.

⁴⁵The building at 2 Lindenstraße was used as a warehouse by the Rothschilds' company, because of its proximity to the railway station. In November 1938 there were most probably very few goods left in it.

⁴⁶At 1 Neustadtstraße (then called Am Rasen), the business and home address of the family of Moses (Max) Brandes, the last president of the Rotenburg Jewish congregation, who was known familiarly as "the Jewish mayor." (See also fn 33.) For more details about the extent of the destruction in the Brandes house, see www.hassia-judaica.de under the heading "Kristallnacht in Rotenburg."

⁴⁷At 1 Schlosstor, the business and home address of Moritz Gans. Together with his wife, Johanna (née Goldschmidt), he fled to relatives in Göttingen; in 1939, the couple were able to leave for America.

at Mrs. Neuhaus,⁴⁸ at old Mrs. Speyer’s,⁴⁹ everywhere the same, the Levys⁵⁰ near the Löwensteins.⁵¹

5 But why should I list all the houses individually? Everywhere it was the same. We first went to the police. Wöske took us into the conference room; I asked him to go into our house with us, but he would not. He only demanded the [synagogue] congregation records & books, which indeed were being kept by Meinhold at our place. If they are there, I said, you are welcome to them. I had to personally sign that I would get the house fixed up by the next week and, in fact, by carpenter Stein (near the Reinhardts’) for, believe it or not, 480 Marks (moreover, he was the 10 one who had helped to demolish my beautiful household).

Then we went back into our house. What can I tell you—instead of a front door, a barricade of slats; the same sign: “off-limits by police order”. We pushed the boards away and so came into the front entrance: not even the breadbox was spared. The living room totally empty, nothing in it, only the picture of the parents between the 15 windows with the cat and—like a miracle—the built-in cupboard in the living room was untouched, with all the *Machzorim*⁵² & *Tfillin*⁵³ and the Yom Kippur

⁴⁸ At 6 Altstadtstraße, the business and home address of Minna Neuhaus. She was the widow of Isaack Neuhaus and the stepmother of Dr. Leopold Neuhaus, the last rabbi in Frankfurt until his deportation in 1942. Minna Neuhaus died on 3 April 1943, in the Theresienstadt ghetto.

⁴⁹ At 16 Altstadtstraße, the business and home address of the widow Jettchen Speier (née Gans). She died on 7 May 1942, in Frankfurt, to which city she had fled in April 1939 from Hersfeld with her daughter Hanna.

⁵⁰ Why she cites the name of Levy is unclear, because no family with this name is documented in Rotenburg after 1935.

⁵¹ Detailed statements about the extent of the destruction and plundering of the Löwenstein business and residence at 6 Brückenstraße, the home of Henny Rothschild’s family, are available because of the interviews conducted as part of the reparations proceedings which the Löwensteins initiated in 1953. These investigations had become extremely detailed in 1953, because the burden of proof was on the party applying for restitution, in order to extensively justify the damages claimed. Before the *Amtsgerichtsrat* [district court magistrate] Dr. Bauer, the following testimony was given on 24 February 1953: Witness G. J., 51 years old: “*After the Aktion was over, the entire warehouse was empty. The goods from the warehouse had been carried out of the warehouse over a wall into the former stables of the castle [Marstall] After this had been done, I could see from my window, which was opposite the Löwenstein residence, that not much more was left than a small pile of rubble, and here and there a table drawer or some such. Above David Löwenstein’s apartment, there was a bigger storage room of his, in which textiles had been piled up. This storage room had now become totally empty.*” Witness H.B., 47 years old: “*In May 1939 I purchased the site in question from him. . . . As I was negotiating with Löwenstein in 1939 for the site, I thus came into his house; in the whole house there was hardly anything more than a pile of rubble and such things lying around.*” Witness F.R. on 28 April 1953: “*On that specific day, as an SA man, I was pulled out of bed early in the morning. . . . I was then ordered to go to Rosengasse, and help with the recovery of the things taken from David Löwenstein’s domain. The back of David L’s property and the back of the building of the former stables of the Rotenburg castle [Marstall] were both on the Rosengasse. . . . But in addition, as I entered, there were people who, in a human chain starting at the rear door of L’s house and going over to the Marstall building, were passing along all sorts of textiles. I joined this chain and, for a while, passed along to the Marstall such things as bundles of towels and bundles of bed linens. As I did that, I was standing on top of a hatch for storing wood at the back of the Marstall building. The things that had been passed along were deposited in a lower room of the Marstall!*” (Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden, Entschädigungsakten, Bestand 518, Nr. 38547.)

⁵² Prayer books for the holidays.

⁵³ Phylacteries, worn by Orthodox men during prayers.

*Yamulke*⁵⁴ from you, dear Irma,⁵⁵ and from Jim, plus the postcard photo of Hermann and Josef of blessed memory⁵⁶—and that was the only untouched little place in our entire large house. Even today I consider this as a good omen, that all this was kept for us, may it also be so.

5 In the little one's bedroom, nothing was left: no bed, no curtains, only shards of jelly glasses & their contents blended with peas, splinters, stones, & in the midst of it all the large death certificate of Hermann of blessed memory, which lay with the facsimile signature of Kaiser Wilhelm II! The girls' sitting room, where Dina had slept, empty, no congregation records, no community book. (Anyone who today
10 needs a birth or death certificate has to contact the Jewish collective archives in Berlin!) In the kitchen nothing more than the stove, nothing in the cupboard, nowhere the smallest little thing, the cellar door open, everything hauled away, no tins of sardines in oil, no jars of preserves, etc., everything gone.

15 In the hallway on the second floor, only the 3 walls of both wardrobes; all my bed linens, etc. had been in the fir wardrobe; the oak clothing closet was empty without any door left; nothing in the small room, not even the heater, the lighting wiring torn out, the water cut off, nothing more in our bedroom, not a fragment in the sitting room, nothing in my dining room, not one single trace left of all the many beautiful things that Recha⁵⁷ had in the 3 connecting rooms. Where the sink had
20 been, there was only a hole in the wall, nowhere a stove, the lighting wiring torn out here too, the oven in Recha's kitchen smashed, as if swine had last lived there, that's what it looked like everywhere & also on the back side of the house, not one window left nor any window crossbar or frames.

25 In the hallway on the third floor, again jelly and shards and preserves all over— just dreadful. On the floor, all of Recha's and my holiday dishes in pieces, the crate cracked and broken, only a few pots left and all of these in all corners. But the worst sight presented itself to us in the yard: the laundry shed half ripped away, the roof of the warehouse gone from its mounting and the walls half ripped away; everything that had any value such as the bicycle, the paint-mixer, wood, etc.
30 looked as if it had been burnt.

Where there once was a business-entrance door on the little house, now only the lock hung there, with free entry for anyone. In the store, all the papers on the floor, no cabinet that hadn't been hacked into, the business books taken over to the office of the [Nazi] party's *Arbeitsfront*.⁵⁸ You can imagine how one's heart just turns over
35 inside, the gate missing a lock, open. And so it was in every Jewish house & where

⁵⁴ Men's skullcap, specifically for the Day of Atonement.

⁵⁵ Irma Rothschild (née Dreifuss), the wife of Albert Rothschild, the mother of Heinz/Harry (born in 1921) and of Thea (born in 1922); they arrived in Los Angeles in July 1938 (see introduction).

⁵⁶ Meinhold's brothers Hermann and Josef died as soldiers in the First World War. When religious Jews mention loved ones who have died, they add "of blessed memory" in English, corresponding to *seelig/selig* in German.

⁵⁷ Meinhold Rothschild's sister, Recha Döllefeld (see also fn. 6).

⁵⁸ A National Socialist organization that replaced all trade unions, employers' associations, and professional organizations.

any Jewish family was living, no one was spared, not even the poor Paula Plaut⁵⁹ & the poor Honetchen⁶⁰ on the Rasen [former street name].

In our house this was all accomplished between 6 a.m.⁶¹ until late into the night by Messieurs Otto Schmauch, Regelkamp,⁶² Ede Kurz, District Leader (or some such title) Walper (in the district administrator’s office), and Stein the carpenter, in other words, the town officials and others like them, who consider themselves good citizens. The whole S.A.⁶³ took part in the operation, like Gustav Dörr, Horst Mainz,⁶⁴ the entire business staff of the Finance Office, and the teachers of the grade school such as Köberich, Landgrebe, Traulsen, Keim & however else the others are called.

I must also tell you that baker Eckhardt had the laundry shed and the warehouse ripped out by people he had hired and paid, namely Albrecht (who lived in the house in back) and a man by the name of Breitbart, because Mr. Eckhardt had

⁵⁹ Pauline (Paula) Plaut, born in 1887 the daughter of Heinemann and Bertha Plaut; lived at 1 Am Rainchen, murdered in Sobibór, June 1942. Until November 1938 she was the attendant in the Rotenburg mikveh, the ritual bath of the Jewish congregation of Rotenburg.

⁶⁰ Honet Kaufmann, born 1879, died in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Together with his mother Elka Kaufmann, he had lived in the building at 2 Brauhausstraße (then named Am Rasen) in which the Rotenburg mikveh was located.

⁶¹ This specific time of day corresponds with the statement made by the teacher Karl Keim, a SA squad leader in 1938, when he was interrogated on 1 February 1946: “*In the morning of Nov 8, 1938, when it was still dark, there was a knock at my door and the clerk from the finance office Eduard Kurz told me I was expected to get dressed quickly and take a pickaxe with me, since we were going after the Jews. . . . After discussing with my wife whether this would be the right thing to do, since I had some misgivings about it, I finally set out. In the street I ran into troop leader Kurz again, who assigned me to the house of the Jew Döllefeld. At the Döllefelds’ I found the family still sitting around the oven. . . . In the meantime, others were busy overturning the furniture on the second floor. They called me up, and I helped to overturn a wardrobe. I had a big axe with me, but I didn’t use it. . . . I then taught for two class periods, and during the break, I went to the nearby house of widow Neuhaus, where I saw Gustav Dörr throwing furniture out the window. I went into the house and saw that Dörr wanted to throw a chest of drawers out the window, but he couldn’t budge it because of its weight. I advised him to remove the drawers. I then helped him to get the thing done, by throwing the drawers out in front of the [exterior] doors, where the other things had already been tossed. I then went back to school and continued to teach.*” HStAM, Best. 274 Kassel, Acc. 1983/86, Nr. 77, 3 Kls. 24/47.

⁶² She means Rekelkamm.

⁶³ Abbreviation for *Sturmabteilung*, “Assault Division,” the National Socialist paramilitary organization commonly known as “Brown Shirts.”

⁶⁴ In 1947/48 both Dörr and Mainz were indicted in the district court of Kassel for severe breaches of the peace, and found guilty. Horst Mainz (b. 1910) was the chief SA squad leader in 1938, and as such, was in charge of the Rotenburg storm troopers. On 26 May 1948, the district court of Kassel indicted him as the chief culprit in the November pogroms of 1938, and for severe breaches of the peace, and found him guilty. During his interrogation on 1 February 1946, Mainz stated: “*In the night of Nov. 7–8, I was awoken at 2 a.m. Spengler, the county secretary of the NSDAP, appeared at my house, and ordered me to come immediately to the Stöltzing restaurant, where the [NSDAP] county leader was. After some time, I got there and was informed by county leader Braun of the murder of vom Rath, a staff member of the German embassy in Paris, and of the fact that measures had to be taken against the Jews. . . . We sat together for a while and eventually I woke up a number of SA comrades, who in turn mobilized the others. In the SA headquarters I then gave my orders to the SA men who turned up. That must have been around 6–7 a.m. I assigned some troops to the Altstadt and some to the Neustadt, and instructed them in the way that I had been instructed by the Nazi county leader. I gave the order to arrest all Jewish residents and bring them to the town hall, but to not mistreat them. Then their houses should be inspected.*” HStAM, Best. 274 Kassel, Acc. 1983/86, Nr. 77, 3 Kls. 24/47.



Figure 4. The window of the coffee roasting shop of Hermann Linz, Breitenstraße 19 in Rotenburg, on 20 April 1939, almost six months after destruction of the property and boarding up. From a series of colour photographs taken in Rotenburg on Hitler's fiftieth birthday. Courtesy of the Town Archive, Rotenburg an der Fulda.

wanted to have daylight coming into his windows, which Papa of blessed memory⁶⁵ allowed him to build already three years earlier. At the time, Newiger was considering buying the house and he had ordered Gendarme Sieland to the place, who forbade its demolition because it would have been a singular action.⁶⁶ After
 5 the terrible things that I had now seen in my own house, I went to the Finance Office. You can just imagine how I felt, I could not look at anyone on the street. After I had waited almost a half an hour in the vestibule, a senior civil servant received me & I have to say, he was humane—he offered me a chair. I was so wiped out, I can not tell you; I was choking on my tears, but I was too proud to
 10 show it. Then I had to hear that all our liquid assets had been impounded. I couldn’t have access to even a penny, for my subsistence costs 100 Marks a month would be made available to me—it was just one thing after another.

At that point we did not encounter a single Jew. Lotte, Paula, & I then went to Brückenstraße⁶⁷ where the sight was exactly as it was at our place: nothing left,
 15 only they had let all the wreckage just lie there, while at our place in the *Sack*⁶⁸ the *Arbeitsdienst*⁶⁹ prior to their military service, had to remove the debris with shovels. At our place everything had been thrown out of the windows onto the street, a mountain of things that had once been our belongings had lain all across the street, reaching as far as the *Wacht* building opposite.⁷⁰ The few hours went by quickly, the
 20 dawn was breaking.

Since we wanted to come back the next day at 8 a.m., we did not travel back to Göttingen—instead, Lotte and I went to Kassel to meet acquaintances there. Around 8:30 p.m. we managed to locate Moses, Gretel, & Lutz Brandes where they
 25 were staying with some Jews on Gießbergstraße. Then we learned for the first time all that had happened on the day that we—thank G-d!—were already in Göttingen. As I noted in the beginning, we had travelled already on Tuesday afternoon [8 November] from Rotenburg to Göttingen. On the same day Frieda & Isi Gans,⁷¹ Aunt Lina, Klara;⁷² the old Speier & the young Speier⁷³ had also got

⁶⁵ Meinhold’s father and Henny’s father-in-law, Isaak Rothschild (1854–1934).

⁶⁶ The terror of the Nazi party and the Third Reich executives were based on laws, decrees and edicts. Thus, “spontaneous” actions by individuals or groups was contrary to the Nazi policies and the Nazi programme.

⁶⁷ She means Brückengasse, i.e., 6 Brückengasse, where the Löwensteins lived and had their textile store.

⁶⁸ Former name of the street that later became part of the Market Square at which the Rothschild house was located.

⁶⁹ Special “labour service” instituted in 1933 by the National Socialists in which young men had to serve for six months, and which, in Rotenburg, had its living quarters in the castle.

⁷⁰ Former police prison used for daytime detentions.

⁷¹ Isidor Gans, who lived at 1 Schlosstor 1, and was married to Frieda Plaut. Both succeeded in emigrating to England in 1939, and from there to the United States.

⁷² Klara Gitta Mayer, née Rothschild, Lina’s daughter and Meinhold’s cousin.

⁷³ Hanna Speier (“the young Speier”), who lived at 16 Altstadtstraße. She was murdered in Auschwitz in October 1944. Hanna’s mother Jettchen Speier (“the old Speier”) died in Frankfurt in May 1941 where she had gone with her family in April 1939.

away. On Wednesday these people left: the Brandeses went to Krefeld⁷⁴ & Mrs. Neuhaus to Frankfurt⁷⁵ & the Moritz Gansens.⁷⁶

In the night between Wednesday and Thursday [9–10 November], Mrs. Plaut⁷⁷ slept at the Döllefelds [5 Querweingasse]; her husband was working as an upholsterer in Schlüchtern [roughly halfway between Fulda and Frankfurt], & during just that night, all men and women were taken into custody. The men were put into the *Wacht* police station & the women in the town hall basement. Betty & Jettchen Gans⁷⁸ dressed in their nightgowns and a coat, stockingless, Hannchen Falkenstein⁷⁹ with her hair down and dressed in the same makeshift fashion, and the same for Mrs. Karl Kaufmann.⁸⁰ These must have been appalling scenes, that with G-d's help we were spared from experiencing ourselves.

During the night they heard—as we had—furniture being hacked to pieces & chinaware and all kinds of other things being thrown out onto the street, and in the town hall basement, the women heard this noise from Viktor's [Viktor Falkenstein's house], from Mrs. Katz' [house], and Karl Kaufmann's house. Everyone remained in custody until 11 a.m., then everyone was led off to the train by the sergeants; a cordon of gawking and sneering petty bourgeois formed all the way to the train [station]—*nebbich*⁸¹—these poor people, some of whom were dressed so provisionally. The men were brought to Buchenwald and the women had to get into another train, which took them who knows where.

It would take too long to describe to you, how individuals are driven all over by world history—like hunted animals—I also want to spare myself having to depict such scenes for you, because you can not imagine how just the memory of everything that was experienced upsets one all over again. [illegible] landed in Frankfurt, as did Jettchen & Betty Gans; the Speiers [landed] in Hersfeld, the Karl Kaufmanns in Köln. In Kassel there were, besides Aunt [Lina Rothschild] & Klara [Mayer, née Rothschild, Lina's daughter], Tante Jettchen,⁸² [illegible name],

⁷⁴ Krefeld (Goethestraße 85) was the place of residence of Hans Goldschmidt and his wife, Gretel, née Brandes, and their daughter Margit. All three perished in the Holocaust.

⁷⁵ Minna Neuhaus went to Frankfurt to her stepson, Rabbi Dr. Leopold Neuhaus.

⁷⁶ Moritz and Johanna Gans who lived at 1 Schlosstor.

⁷⁷ Selma Plaut (née Blum, b. 1867) lived at 3 Lindenstraße. In 1941 she succeeded in escaping to the United States.

⁷⁸ Master tailor Jettchen Gans and her niece Betty (née Speier), whom Jettchen had adopted, lived at 21 Breitenstraße; both perished in the Holocaust.

⁷⁹ Johanna Hanna Falkenstein (née Höflich) lived at 1 Weingasse. She and her husband, Viktor Falkenstein, as well as her son, Fritz, and her daughter, Margarete, perished in the Holocaust.

⁸⁰ Bertha Kaufmann (née Stern) lived at 35 Breitenstraße. She and her husband, Karl Kaufmann, as well as her sons, Fritz and Heinz, perished in the Holocaust.

⁸¹ A Yiddish word usually meaning “a hapless, unfortunate, and/or weak individual,” but here more likely intended to mean something like “dreadful, disgusting” in reference to the onlookers' behaviour.

⁸² “Aunt Jettchen” presumably means Jettchen Döllefeld (1864–1960) who lived in the house of the family of her brother Joseph Döllefeld at 5 Querweingasse. She managed to survive the ghetto of Terezin, and died in a senior citizens' home in Switzerland.

Dina Falkenstein,⁸³ Paula Plaut,⁸⁴ Mrs. Werthan,⁸⁵ Toni & the Kaufmann parents,⁸⁶ Mrs. Plaut,⁸⁷ old Mrs. Kaufmann⁸⁸ from the Rasen [an earlier street name, now 2 Brauhausstraße]. Hannchen & Gretchen⁸⁹ [were] in Stuttgart. Everyone distraught, wherever they could find a roof over their heads. Johanna Gans with her mother⁹⁰ & her old aunt⁹¹ in Göttingen, they both spent the night in Eichenberg & were able to get taken to Göttingen only with a car & the two old folks could not get accustomed to Göttingen & the aunt wanted the man who had brought her [to Göttingen] by car to drive her back to the locksmith Gans.⁹²

You can imagine all that was stolen during this operation. Plenty of people managed to stuff their pockets full; a lot of the supposedly respectable citizens there were not too pious to keep from enriching themselves with Jewish belongings. When they were finished and drunk from all the wine, etc., that they had come across in the cellars, Gustav Dörr drove a horse-drawn buggy through the town, dressed in a *Sargeneskittel*,⁹³ a top hat on his head, and a big *Chumash*⁹⁴ in his hand—you can imagine the fun of it.⁹⁵

⁸³ Dina Falkenstein, daughter of Viktor and Hanna Falkenstein, was married to Hermann Israel (1880–1921). In 1938 she lived with her parents at 1 Weingasse. Dina and her son, Fritz Israel, perished in the Holocaust.

⁸⁴ Paula Plaut lived at 1 Am Rainchen (see also fn 59).

⁸⁵ Jeanette Werthan, née Goldschmidt, lived at 19 Brotgasse; she and her son, Theodor, perished in the Holocaust.

⁸⁶ Honet Levi Kaufmann and his wife, Sarah, née Katz, lived at 21 Brotgasse, their daughter Toni had married Herbert Bierhoff. Toni and her father perished in the Holocaust.

⁸⁷ Selma Plaut (see also fn 44 and fn 77).

⁸⁸ Elka Kaufmann, née Freudenberg, who perished in the Holocaust.

⁸⁹ Johanna (Hannchen) Falkenstein and her daughter Margarete (Gretchen) lived at 1 Weingasse. They then moved to Stuttgart since Hannchen's brother-in-law Louis lived there with his “Aryan” wife. Both Hannchen and Gretchen perished in the Holocaust.

⁹⁰ Johanna Gans (perished in the Holocaust) and her mother, Hedwig Gans, née Rosenthal, lived at 6 Brotgasse.

⁹¹ Karoline Piterson, née Rosenthal, 6 Brotgasse; perished in the Holocaust.

⁹² Locksmith Willi Gans, at 6 Brotgasse. He was the son of Karoline's sister Hedwig. Until 1936, when he moved to Cologne, his family (his wife, Paula, daughter, Ruth, and son, Ernst) had lived in the same house with Aunt Karoline.

⁹³ A burial shroud.

⁹⁴ The Hebrew word for Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses).

⁹⁵ After the war, dean Hammann of the Rotenburg-Neustadt Lutheran congregation made an entry in the church records in which he stated: “Two ruthless Rotenburg Nazis, who are still running around unmolestedly, after the destruction [of the synagogue] were not ashamed of driving through the town in a horse-drawn carriage in a triumphal procession in which they carried holy utensils/ gadgets from the synagogue with them. One of them was presenting himself like a king on his throne, the other one was playing the role of a coachman with a big cigar in his mouth. Apparently not aware of the blasphemy they were committing, every time they were passing by the house of a Jewish family, the “king” would shout: All of you who feel troublesome and aggrieved, would you please come here to me.” Horst Mainz, the chief SA squad leader in November 1938 and main defendant in the district court trial against the trespassers of 1938, in his judicial interrogation commented on this as follows, “I met Gustav Dörr driving around in his carriage clad in a top hat and a shroud. I rebuked him for this nuisance as being something ignoble. I received the reply that, on a holiday like the one we were right then having, even these things should be allowed.” In the verdict of the Kassel district court of 26 May 1948 one can read in regard to Dörr: “In the afternoon of November 9, he was driving through the streets of Rotenburg, a top hat on his head and clad in a shroud which was probably taken from the synagogue.” For more details in regard to Dörr see fn 21 (HStAM, Best. 274 Kassel, Acc. 1983/86, Nr. 77, AZ 3K1s 24/47). According to Dieter Obst (“Reichskristallnacht.” *Causes and Progression of the Anti-Semitic Pogroms*

A lot happened during these days, but all that occurred in Rotenburg was the height of all the events. I can only tell you that everywhere we ended up [among their fellow Jews], as Rotenburg Jews we were received with special *Rachmones*.⁹⁶

5 Early Tuesday morning [29 November] we met in Rotenburg, until each person arrived at his house, weeping; you can imagine their faces. There we learned that a portion of our clothing lay in the castle (the labour service camp) and for its removal from our houses and its “safekeeping” in the castle, we had to pay 600 Marks in advance! Then we were allowed into the halls and could go searching about.

10 You can not even imagine what all lay there all mixed up, like cabbages and turnips, bed linens and clothing, featherbeds, mazzot, G-d knows what all from all the families in the community. The *Frauenschaft*⁹⁷ had sorted out the best of everything that lay there & had not yet been stolen, & Mrs. Boller had been sent to the Sudetenland⁹⁸ with our good linens and clothing, in order to share them with
15 the poor Sudeten Germans!⁹⁹

You can imagine what kind of trouble and grief we had on these days—Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday [29 November to 1 December 1938]. There were only a few hours in the day when we were allowed to look for anything [at the castle where their belongings were being held]; darkness always fell quickly on those
20 November days, and then in the evenings we always had to find lodgings somewhere. One evening I slept in Hersfeld at a family named Blumenfeld [at 16 Dudenstraße], the next evening in Kassel, and on the last night at the Brandeses [at 1 Neustadtstraße, Rotenburg], on the floor, covered with blankets I had been

of November 1938, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 223), the reaction of the leaders of the “*Jew Aktion*” is clear evidence of how embarrassing it was for the instigators that what was played out was totally in public view—and not only behind closed doors: “But the really grotesque aspect, that is, the simultaneously ridiculous and gruesome behaviour of these Kafkaesque characters, was fundamentally an appropriate conclusion, a symbol that unmasked these insane ‘Jew Actions’ in all their manifestations—this ‘holiday’ of insanity. It is therefore not astonishing that the particular instigators of the pogrom experienced these clear displays of insanity in the ‘Jew Actions’ as embarrassing and unworthy acts, as soon as they played out in view of the entire local population. And it is indicative that the leaders of these actions tried to suppress this monkey business as soon as it went beyond the immediate target zone of the synagogue and Jewish residences.” For Obst, concerning the driving forces behind the rampaging in Rotenburg and some similar situated examples, it was “obvious that psychopaths were involved here, who had got the idea of a pogrom into their heads and were thus driven by it to these ways of making it manifest.”

⁹⁶ Yiddish, from the Hebrew, for “compassion, sympathy, kindness, mercy.” We can only speculate as to whether the exceptional extent of the destruction carried out in Rotenburg (and Bebra) was facilitated by the fact that the exodus of almost all the local Jews meant that the houses were empty and there were no more Jewish witnesses for the second round of destruction.

⁹⁷ The National Socialist women’s league.

⁹⁸ Parts of what is today the Czech Republic, whose population was mixed Czech and ethnic German.

⁹⁹ People considered ethnic Germans. Less than two months earlier—on 30 September 1938—Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini had signed the Munich Agreement which transferred the Sudetenland to Germany. When Czechoslovakia protested against this decision, Chamberlain replied that Britain was unwilling to go to war over the issue of the Sudetenland. And so the German Army marched into the Sudetenland on 1 October 1938, under the pretext that they were liberating and protecting its German minority.

able to find again. My good mattresses had been burnt, my duvet had been cut to pieces on the Market Place. Believe it or not, I had not been able to keep a single bedspread or a single duvet cover & I had had a great quantity of linens of all kinds. My dining room carpet lay so mucked up with soot and bedfeathers as to be unrecognizable, all tossed about in the castle, not a trace left of the many beautiful scatter rugs. The same was true of almost all of Meinhold’s and Josef’s clothing and all the many pieces of underwear belonging to all of us.

As I came back to Göttingen on Friday [2 December 1938] at midday, as derelict as a dog, that is just how Meinhold, Alex, & David were when they were released on Dec. 1, Leopold had already been released 8 days earlier—the former 3 because they could prove that they had been frontline soldiers.¹⁰⁰ We were happy that they were home again.

In January we got a note from the town of Rotenburg that we had to sell our house to the town for 10,500 Marks so that a preschool could be built, and permission to sell to anyone else would not be granted. A few weeks later the town reversed this in response to *our* inquiry [emphasis in the original]—not that they had informed us. Then we were ordered to have a new chimney built, then just a short time later once again [we were ordered] to replace the doors on the inside of the house – the harassment was unending. We were happy when we got the house off our hands in March by selling it to Fritz Keim for 11,000 Marks. Then we had to wait for approval! The old Reiche & Gustav Dörr desperately wanted it. Keim wasn’t expected to receive approval; the district farming community had to campaign on his behalf, until he finally was approved after a lot of agitation and bickering. He profited splendidly on this deal. The Eisenträgers are living on the ground floor for 25 Marks, and the Office of Culture is on the second floor!!! An arrangement that had never previously been known in our little town & the first that seems to have become necessary after November.

On the third floor a daughter of Lutz Aubel is living, & he has the small trade building turned into an apartment, but I don’t know who is living there. When he took over the house, Keim had lawyer Both write to baker Eckhardt¹⁰¹ to inform him that he would have to pay for at least half of the construction of the laundry shed and storage facility, but how this came out we do not know any more.

Meinhold got something back from the money that the Finance Office had seized, and now we began, bit by bit, to purchase [what we needed for] another household, like washcloths, cooking pots, plates & spoons; and like shoes, a suit, a coat & hat. That lasted entire months, & we would have had to struggle even today.¹⁰²

We bought ourselves some small furniture, 2 couches and a folding bed (will we ever see it again?). In July Klara¹⁰³ was taken into custody, we were immediately

¹⁰⁰ Those who served in the First World War. This status protected such Jewish veterans during the early years of the National Socialist regime—but only up to a point.

¹⁰¹ At 8 Marktplatz, immediately adjacent to the Rothschild house.

¹⁰² She seems to be implying here “had we not fled to Holland?”

¹⁰³ Klara Mayer, a cousin of Meinhold Rothschild’s, who had been living in Kassel in the meantime.

ordered to go there by Juler.¹⁰⁴ Meinhold & I spent a whole day taking care of Aunt [Lina, Klara's mother], which involved a lot of agitation.

Hugo & Bertel¹⁰⁵ came back to Göttingen at 2 a.m. (thank G-d, Klara was free again after 8 days, after everything had been cleared up, it had something to do with grants paid to her little son¹⁰⁶) and 2 days later Alfred's *Schlamazel*¹⁰⁷ began. He has been sitting [in jail] since July 13, thank G-d still in Heiligenstadt, because of a foreign currency swindle.¹⁰⁸ The case is totally appalling, and poor, poor Selma is suffering terribly.¹⁰⁹ Meinhold & I went to her immediately and both of us several times a week [after that]. You can understand how much this case has cost us in worries and agitation, may G-d send them a change for the better.

Thank G-d, Alfred has it good so far, he is being treated very very fairly by a former fellow soldier, who is the jail warden. If he stays there, then that is still really good luck amidst all the *Schlamazel*, since the judge, just like the whole population, is very decent and fair. There are still so many details to tell you, but I do not want to lapse into trivia. We had managed to obtain the permit for the purpose of short time stopover approval in England. Soon thereafter came the summons from [the US Embassy in] Stuttgart¹¹⁰ to get our papers in order. We could therefore count on a summons coming soon for the purpose of issuing [to us our] visas to the USA, and we wanted to wait this time too in Germany, in order to spare ourselves the factor of having to emigrate [to the United States] via another country. It would even have been possible & would have become true, if only, if only this wretched war had not broken out.

We did not want to believe it—but by Friday, September 1 the situation had become so much more exacerbated [since Germany invaded Poland that day], that we all knew that the unspeakable [i.e., war] would in fact occur. On the Saturday of my birthday [2 September 1939 when she turned 33] we decided to try to get across the border. We hastily packed 2 pieces of hand luggage with the barest of essentials & at 3 o'clock the train was supposed to leave—but it left after a delay of

¹⁰⁴“Juler” presumably is a nickname for Julius Rothschild, a cousin of Meinhold Rothschild's. Until August 1939 Julius lived in Erfurt, where he had offered shelter to his mother (Lina Rothschild) and his sister Klara Mayer before they went to live in Kassel in March 1939.

¹⁰⁵Meinhold Rothschild's cousin Hugo had married Bertha Levy from Melsungen; both perished in the Holocaust.

¹⁰⁶In 1936, Klara Mayer's son Bernhard (who was named after his deceased father) succeeded in emigrating to the United States, presumably because his mother had provided him with (illegal) foreign currency.

¹⁰⁷Yiddish for “bad luck, misfortune.”

¹⁰⁸In 1934, strict foreign currency restrictions had been passed, allowing emigrants no more than 10 Marks in foreign money to take out of the country. Therefore, Jews who intended to take at least part of their property with them when organizing their emigration were forced to commit currency offenses.

¹⁰⁹Meinhold Rothschild's sister Selma had married Alfred Weil. Both lived in Heiligenstadt in Thüringen, where they ran a leather shop. Both perished in the Holocaust. Alfred was the younger brother of Leopold Weil, Lina's husband. In 2013 a street in Heiligenstadt was named after Alfred Weil.

¹¹⁰This was the American Consulate in Stuttgart which was responsible for issuing visas for the United States.

two hours. The Löwensteins¹¹¹ traveled with us; they had their passports and also their permit for England. In Frankfurt we obtained tickets to London via Belgium and our ship tickets for New York.

In Köln—it was Sunday, September 3—the declaration of war by England and France [in response to the German invasion of Poland] became known & we were advised not to travel through Belgium—because a transit visa would be needed there which could cost us 1 day’s time—but instead to travel to London via Vlissingen in Holland.¹¹² With G-d’s help, we got over the border near Kaldenkirchen—Venlo,¹¹³ and it was in fact the last train carrying emigrants that Holland still allowed to enter. In Vlissingen the English consulate explained that all visas for England issued before September 4 had been declared invalid.

It suited all of us just fine, at least we were in Holland and, first of all, happy to be out of Germany. But now we’ve been sitting around here for 6 weeks already, under the care of the Jewish Committee¹¹⁴ in Amsterdam, together with about 50 people, our belongings in 2 suitcases and all our [other] things left behind once again. Lina¹¹⁵ is trying to get permission to forward some hand luggage with the essentials. Meinhold thinks we will never manage to procure a shipping container, because the special freight charges, taxes, etc. have risen so enormously that it will be impossible to ever get our things.

No matter what happens, we have had to get used to so, so much—if anyone had ever told us that we would end up being taken care of by the Committee! Now just think about the biggest irony: during the first weeks that we were here, Lina forwards us the summons from the [American] consulate in Stuttgart for October 6, where we would have been able to obtain our visas—and for that we sat for three months & waited & went through so many terrible things. We have communicated with the appropriate consulate for the USA in Rotterdam, but have not heard anything yet. Who knows when we will get across. Lina, Recha, and all the dear ones write to us often, we take endless pleasure in every greeting as we did with the first lines from Marga,¹¹⁶ hopefully a report will reach us soon from you too.

I have written at really great length, and I would have reported many, many more particulars if my hand would not hurt so much. I know that all this interests you, even though it is unfortunately nothing pleasant. Please send these letters to Jenny & Leo,¹¹⁷ they also want to know all this & I cannot write it all over again. But I do still want to tell you that we—especially dear Meinhold—have come to terms with our fate—there is nothing that can be changed about any of it, we suffer

¹¹¹ David and Lotte Löwenstein with their daughter, Margot, and David’s mother, Marianne.

¹¹² A port city on the North Sea in southwestern Holland, near the Belgian coastline.

¹¹³ A German village and Dutch town, respectively, close to the German-Dutch border.

¹¹⁴ Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, also known as the *Comité d’Evian*, an organization founded by thirty-two countries in July 1938 to arrange for German Jewish emigration.

¹¹⁵ Lina Rothschild, Meinhold’s aunt in Rotenburg, at 24 Steinweg, meanwhile living in Kassel.

¹¹⁶ Margot Löwenstein, the eight-year-old daughter of Henny’s brother David and his wife, Lotte, who had also fled to Holland in September 1939 (see fn 111).

¹¹⁷ Meinhold Rothschild’s sister Jenny and her husband, Leo Kahn, had emigrated to Palestine in 1933 and were living in a settlement called Ramot Hashavim, founded by German Jews.

all this without guilt feelings & the merciful G-d will see to it that we too will find employment and our livelihood once again.

Our dear Josef, who unbidden gives us great joy, is recovering and developing splendidly here, he plays a lot with three other emigrants' children in the healthy sea air. I hope you got his photo still from Göttingen and are enjoying it. Please send these letters also to Ramot Hashavim¹¹⁸ and write to us again very, very soon. Stay well, all of you together. Dear siblings, will we ever find each other again? Better not to think about it! I wish all of you every good thing imaginable. To all with deep love and affection, I remain, your Henny

10 **Epilogue**

On the reverse side of his wife's letter of 18 October 1939, Meinhold Rothschild composed the following note: "*Henny's report is exclusively meant for our siblings in Los Angeles and Ramot Hashavim. I do forbid each of you to pass it on to others or tell about it. We want Jenny and Leo [Kahn] to send the report to our future address in the USA.*"

15 These instructions were apparently followed, and so Henny's letter was found in her family's effects when these were turned over by Meinhold Rothschild to the Leo Baeck Institute New York at the beginning of the 1980s and became part of the "Joseph Rothschild Collection (1851–1980)". Meinhold Rothschild's strict instruction, written in 1939, to keep his wife's report secret is indeed the most important reason that the document remained hidden for decades. Only once she and her family were beyond the jurisdictional reach of the German government did Henny Rothschild set down on paper what the Jews on German soil had had to endure and suffer during the previous months. But at the time of the drafting of the letter in October 1939, most of the victims were still in Germany and therefore
20 subject to the immediate control and acts of violence of their persecutors.

"Most of those who were able to escape in the meantime also maintained a stubborn silence. Many feared for their relatives who were still living in Germany." This observation was made by Konrad Heiden while in exile in Paris, where in January 1939 he finished the manuscript for his book, *Eine Nacht im November 1938. Ein zeitgenössischer Bericht* (One Night in November 1938. A Contemporary Report).
30 His book was published for the first time only in September 2013.¹¹⁹

Should the contents of the letter have become known, the Jewish relatives of the Rothschilds and the Löwensteins who were still living in Germany would not have been the only ones who would have got into additional difficulties. The courageous neighbour Anna Elisabeth Brandau also would not have been granted any sympathy from the National Socialist rulers for having travelled to her Jewish neighbours in November 1938 in order to inform them about the terrible things that had happened in the days since they had fled from their hometown. Henny Rothschild had made it blatantly obvious that the extent of the destruction of
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¹¹⁸ See fn 117.

¹¹⁹ *Eine Nacht im November 1938, Ein zeitgenössischer Bericht* (ed. by Markus Roth, Sascha Feuchert, and Christiane Weber. Göttingen: 2013). This quotation is from p. 44 of that edition: "In none of the cases was the ancestry of the sources revealed". (From Heiden's epilogue, written in 1939, p. 102.)

Jewish property in Rotenburg an der Fulda was incomparably large, when she wrote: “A lot has happened everywhere in these days, but what all transpired in Rotenburg was the absolute worst of all that took place. I can only say that no matter where we went, as Rotenburg Jews we were greeted with special *rachmones* [Yiddish for *pity, compassion, mercy*].”

Now we can only ask: Would it have been more difficult for the raging local marauders if they had had to carry out their activities in full view of their Jewish fellow citizens and neighbours? Would the vandalism that raged on 9 and 10 November 1938, in almost every place in Germany that had a Jewish population, have taken a less severe form in Rotenburg an der Fulda if the perpetrators’ victims had stood in person opposite them also *after* 8 November 1938? Would the perpetrators perhaps then have felt a few scruples?