

The Einstein Family

Looking back at four generations of Jewish life in Kriegshaber

Online presentation on the renaming of Langemarckstraße as Familie-Einstein-Straße in May 2021
by Monika Müller

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to introduce you the Einstein family, after whom the former Langemarckstraße in Kriegshaber is named now. The history of the Einsteins is closely associated with this district of Augsburg. Several generations of the family were part of the Jewish community that Kriegshaber used to be home to. The Familie-Einstein-Straße is therefore not merely a memorial to the family itself: it also commemorates the rural Jewish community that lived in Kriegshaber for more than 300 years.

The first evidence for the settlement of Jews here dates back to 1570. At that time, Kriegshaber was an independent village in the margraviate of Burgau in Vorderösterreich (Austrian Forelands).

[Image: Oil painting of Kriegshaber from the 18th century; copyright: Archive of the Augsburg Jewish Community]

This early view of the village was created around 200 years later. Since the House of Habsburg encouraged the settlement of Jews for political power considerations, the Jewish community in Kriegshaber continued to grow. In the mid 18th century, it had around 400 members and thus made up the majority of the local population. Thereafter, this proportion gradually decreased.

When the Kingdom of Bavaria granted Jews freedom of settlement in 1861, a marked rural exodus began. As a result, the Jewish community in Kriegshaber had only 45 members by the beginning of the 20th century. In 1917, one year after the incorporation of the village into the city of Augsburg, the Kriegshaber Jews merged with the Jewish community (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde) in the city centre. However, they did not wish to follow the Reform rite of the inner-city community and so continued to hold their own traditional services in the synagogue in Ulmer Straße.

[Image: Ulmer Straße, early 20th century; copyright: Archive of the Augsburg Jewish Community]

In this picture of Ulmer Straße at the beginning of the 20th century, you can see the synagogue as the third building from the left as well as, adjacent to this, the whole row of former Jewish residential buildings, which have been preserved to this day together with the synagogue.

The Einstein family lived in Kriegshaber from the first half of the 19th century. The first family member to settle in the village was Michael Einstein. He came from the Jewish community of Buttenwiesen, around 30 km north of Augsburg. In 1831, he purchased the property at what today is Kriegshaberstraße 7 from his father-in-law Leopold Oppenheimer. Together with his wife Fanny, he raised two daughters and a son there. Michael Einstein earned a living for the family of five as a butcher.

His son Simon followed his example and also did an apprenticeship in butchery. In 1869, he married Babette Münster from Cronheim in Middle Franconia. In the years that followed, the couple had eight sons.

[Image: Certificate of familial status; copyright: State Archives, Augsburg]

The certificate of familial status that is found in Simon Einstein's estate in the state archives in Augsburg lists these children in chronological order:

the first, Samuel, born in 1870,
the second, Ferdinand, who died at the age of 1,
the third, Ludwig,
the fourth, Max,
the fifth, Heinrich,
the sixth, Hermann,
the seventh, Isak,
and Moriz, the eighth son, born in 1886.

In the same year as his youngest son was born, Simon Einstein officially registered at the trade licensing office as a livestock trader, thus expanding his field of occupational activity.

When it came time for his sons to choose their career paths, most of them decided to follow in their father's footsteps. Samuel, Ludwig, Hermann and Isak also became butchers and livestock traders. At first, they worked together with their father until he passed away in 1906. After Simon's death, Moriz also devoted himself to livestock trading when he reached adulthood. Max and Heinrich both trained as merchants.

[Images: Graves of Simon and Babette Einstein; copyright: Jewish Museum Augsburg Swabia]

No photos of Simon and Babette Einstein exist. The two graves in the Jewish cemetery in Kriegshaber, which you can see in the photos, preserve their memory to this day.

[Image: Extended Einstein family, 1919; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

I can show you various photos of the brothers. In this one from 1919, you can see all seven of them with their wives (to the extent that they were already married at that time) and several of their children. The photo was taken on the occasion of the bar mitzvah of Samuel's son Siegfried, who is shown dressed in a suit and kneeling on the floor. In 1919, he turned 13 years old and was thus of age, religiously speaking – which the extended family celebrated according to tradition.

The livestock trade operated by Simon Einstein and his sons grew into the livestock breeding and slaughter business "Gebrüder Einstein". The year in which the business was established isn't known from the existing documents. With the exception of Max Einstein, who worked for another company in Augsburg, all of the brothers joined the family business.

[Image: Company advertisement from 1932; Augsburg directory]

This advertisement from the Augsburg directory of 1932 promoted their livestock business, which was one of the most renowned in Swabia.

[Image: Ulmer Straße 139; copyright: Jewish Museum Augsburg Swabia]

The company had its premises at Ulmer Straße 139. The house that you can see in the photo no longer stands. It belonged to Ludwig Einstein, who also lived in it together with his family. For a while, there was a shop on the ground floor that sold meat products. Behind the house there were several stables for the cattle in which the company traded. These have been preserved in part but are no longer used for agricultural purposes.

The brothers divided the day-to-day running of the business among themselves. Heinrich Einstein acted as the commercial manager. The five other brothers ran the actual livestock trade. In doing so, each one of them was responsible for a particular district in the company's business region, which stretched as far as the Allgäu.

[Image: Letter with company logo from 1920; copyright: City Archives, Augsburg]

The company had two branches in Schongau and in Denklingen, 15 km to the north, that are highlighted in red in the company letter-paper. With this letter here, the brothers were applying in June 1920 to the Augsburg city council for permission to trade in horses – which was granted.

[Images: Horse trader ID cards; copyright: City Archives, Augsburg]

The ID cards that entitled Samuel, Ludwig, Hermann, Isak and Moriz to trade in stud and workhorses are preserved in the city archives. However, they abandoned the horse trade again after a year and concentrated on the cattle business. Since then, they no longer called their business a butcher store.

Moriz Einstein had a photo attached to his ID, which showed him as a non-commissioned officer. Apart from the oldest, all of the Einstein brothers served as soldiers in the First World War.

[Images: Statutes of the Association of Livestock Traders of Swabia and Neuburg from 1908 & Letter from the Association from 1922; copyright: City Archives, Augsburg]

Even before the First World War, in 1908, Ludwig Einstein co-established the "Verein der Viehhändler von Schwaben und Neuburg" (Association of Livestock Traders of Swabia and Neuburg). For 14 years, he was on the board of this professional body for Swabian livestock traders – initially as deputy chairman, as recorded in the statutes in 1908, and then later as first chairman.

When he stepped down in 1922 for health reasons, Heinrich Einstein – who had acted as treasurer until that point – became his successor.

The Einsteins' sense of familial solidarity was strong. The brothers and their families also had close contact with each other outside the business. They all lived just a few minutes' walk away from each other on Ulmer Straße in Kriegshaber.

[Image: Samuel Einstein; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

Samuel Einstein, the oldest, was the owner of the property at Ulmer Straße 121 that now abuts Familie-Einstein-Straße to the south. He lived there first with his wife Therese and their two sons. After Therese's death, his second wife Camilla lived there with him.

[Image: Ludwig and his horse, 1936; copyright: Philip Kuhn]

Ludwig Einstein lived with his wife and their four children at Ulmer Straße 139, as has already been mentioned. This photo of him on his horse was taken there in Mai 1936 in front of the stables.

[Image: Excursion to Starnberg, 1928; copyright: Steven Anson]

Hermann Einstein lived with his wife Mina and daughter Brunhilde in a rented property at Ulmer Straße 151. This excursion photo from 1928 shows the whole family on the front steps. Brunhilde is wearing the white dress with the black ribbon. As well as Hermann's family, the photo also depicts Isak's. Isak and his wife Ida are standing at the back on the steps. Their daughter Beate is in the middle at the front. It is not clear who the woman in the 2nd row is.

[Image: Ulmer Straße 185; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

Isak, together with Moriz, was the owner of the property at Ulmer Straße 185. The brick building that their mother had built in 1906 after she had become widowed still exists as it is in this photo from the early 20th century.

Isak, Ida and Beate lived on the first floor.

Moriz and his wife Lydia lived with their two children Siegbert and Liese on the ground floor. They shared the apartment with Heinrich, who remained unmarried. Max, who did not marry until 1938, also lived with them for many years.

[Image: Max with Siegbert and Liese, 1925; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

This photo from August 1925 shows Max with Siegbert and Liese.

[Image: Holiday at Kochelsee, ca. 1929; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

This picture shows the siblings with their mother Lydia and uncle Heinrich. It was taken around 1929 during a holiday at Kochelsee.

When Liese Fischer, as Liese was called as a married woman, was asked in 2012 by the Jewish Museum Augsburg Swabia about her memories, she said that her parents had usually gone on holidays with her and Siegbert during the school vacations, for example to Lake Constance or the Alps. In between, the family also regularly went swimming in the Bavarian lakes.

[Image: Ammersee, 1935; copyright: Steven Anson]

This picture was taken in August 1935 at Ammersee. It shows Ida at the back in the middle with her daughter Beate beside her. The two children are probably Siegbert and Liese.

In this short presentation, I can only give examples of the schools that the Einstein children attended.

[Image: Liese with abecedarians, 1931; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

In 1931, Liese became the last family member to be enrolled in the Kriegshaber primary school. She can be seen at the left of the second row in this photo with her fellow abecedarians. She followed three of her cousins when she transferred to the Maria-Theresia-Schule in the city centre after the fourth year. Liese was forced to leave the school in November 1938 when Jewish children were forbidden from attending public schools.

[Image: Graduation photo from Beate, 1933; copyright: Steven Anson]

Her cousin Beate was still able to take the university qualification examinations (Abitur) in 1933. Here you can see her graduation photo. She is third from the left in the second row.

The Einstein family led a traditional Jewish life, and Jewish customs and celebrations were therefore a natural part of their everyday lives. The brothers and their families adhered to a kosher diet, observed Shabbat as a day of rest and attended the synagogue in Kriegshaber at weekends and on holidays.

[Image: Interior of the synagogue, after 1913; copyright: Archive of the Augsburg Jewish Community]

This photo shows the interior of the synagogue as it was after the last renovation in 1913. The Einstein brothers continued to take care of matters related to the synagogue after the merging of the Kriegshaber Jews with the inner-city congregation, even though they no longer held any official positions. Thus, they also paid for the prayer leader, who led the services in the 1930s. While the Jewish community in Kriegshaber was still independent, Ludwig and Heinrich Einstein acted for many years as committee members.

Ludwig Einstein also held offices in the Kriegshaber civic municipality. He was one of the authorised representatives for the municipality and a councilor on orphan affairs.

The other family members, too, were committed to the good of the community outside the Jewish congregation. Some of the associations and social institutions in which they were active were, for example, the voluntary fire service and the Red Cross.

[Image: Opening of the nurses' home St. Elisabeth, 1930; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

When the Red Cross Women's Association opened the nurses' home St. Elisabeth at Obere Osterfeldstraße 12 in 1930, Liese Einstein was allowed to help out as a flower girl and was photographed with the other guests as a souvenir of the celebration.

The coming to power of the National Socialists did not immediately threaten the livelihoods of the brothers and their families, although takings from the livestock trade did decrease markedly thereafter. The brothers made ends meet thanks to the farmers who at first did not want to give up their reliable business with the Einsteins. The Association of Livestock Traders of Swabia and Neuburg immediately turned its back on its Jewish board members. Heinrich Einstein felt forced to step down from his office in April 1933.

Because of the respect that the brothers continued to command in their personal milieu, they did not feel seriously under threat despite the growing discrimination, so they made no plans to emigrate, in contrast to their older children who left Germany one by one.

The sons of Samuel emigrated to Palestine.

[Image: Ludwig and Sophie with children, 1933; copyright: Philip Kuhn]

The three children of Ludwig still living in Germany went to their brother Max, who had already emigrated to South Africa in 1926. Following the death of her father in October 1936, their mother Sophie was able to join them. In this photo from August 1933, you can see Ludwig and Sophie Einstein united with their children. Sigmund sits at the front to the right beside the parents. In the second row stand (left to right) Max, Cecilia with her son, Erna and Cecilia's husband.

The November Pogroms in 1938 made the Einstein brothers who stayed behind very aware of their perilous situation. Not long after, they lost their livelihood with the forced liquidation of the livestock business. In the months that followed, they tried everything to flee Germany together but their efforts were in vain.

[Image: Farewell photo, 1939; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

Moriz and Lydia Einstein thus decided to send their children to safety in Great Britain with a Kindertransport. In the photo you can see Moriz and Lydia at the front right. Siegbert and Liese stand beside them and Heinrich Einstein stands at the back. The photo was taken in July 1939, shortly before the family had to split up. Siegbert Einstein died seven months later in England from an infection that was treated too late and led to inflammation of the heart, lungs and kidneys.

After the loss of her brother, Liese was assisted by her cousins Beate and Brunhilde, who had also managed to escape to Great Britain.

The news of the death of their son devastated Moriz and Lydia Einstein deeply. It reached them at a time in which the situation had become even more critical for the family members remaining in Germany. Since the beginning of 1940, the brothers who were still alive had to do forced labor in factories in Augsburg. In February 1942, Lydia and Mina were also obliged to do so, with Ida following in April. Added to the hardships and worries that made life ever more unbearable for the ten family members still living in Kriegshaber was the fear of being deported.

In the spring of 1942, Max, his wife Johanna, Heinrich and Samuel's widow Camilla were forced to bid their relatives farewell. They were deported at the beginning of April to the Piaski transit ghetto near Lublin, where they all lost their lives.

In May 1942, Isak and Moriz were obliged to sell their property at Ulmer Straße 185. Shortly afterwards, they had to move with their wives into so-called "ghetto houses" in which the Jewish population in Augsburg also was rounded up.

[Image: Moriz and Lydia Einstein, 1939; copyright: Diane Castiglione]

From June 1942, Moriz and Lydia Einstein had been living in the apartment on the ground floor of the synagogue in Kriegshaber, which had also been turned into obligatory housing for Jews. The photo you can see here is dated November 15, 1939 on the back. It is the last photo that their descendants have of the couple.

Hermann and Mina Einstein were also moved into the ground floor of the synagogue in September 1942. No portrait of them has survived.

[Image: Isak and Ida Einstein, 1939; copyright: Steven Anson]

The photo of Isak and Ida Einstein that you see here was probably taken in spring 1939. They had to spend their last months in Kriegshaber in the "ghetto house" at Ulmer Straße 207 diagonally opposite the synagogue.

In March 1943, the three Einstein couples were deported to the Auschwitz concentration camp, where they were all murdered.

[Image: Remembrance Bands; copyright: Jewish Museum Augsburg Swabia]

Since June 2017, remembrance bands have marked the last voluntary places of residence of the ten murdered members of the Einstein family in Ulmer Straße and remind of their fate. They have been endowed by their descendants, who today live in the United States, Canada, Scotland, Israel, South Africa and Australia.

[Image: Remembrance Band Dedication, 2017; copyright: Jewish Museum Augsburg Swabia]

More than 20 descendants were present at the dedication of the remembrance bands.

Liese Fischer would also have loved to be present as the memorial bands to her parents, aunts and uncles were installed but for health reasons she was unable to make the journey from the United States.

[Image: Liese Fischer at LIFELINES 2012; copyright: Jewish Museum Augsburg Swabia]

She visited Augsburg in November 2012 for the last time when she was invited to the Jewish Museum's LIFELINES series as a contemporary witness. This photo shows her with a school class, with whom she talked on this occasion about her life and family history.

Liese Fischer set down the thoughts and wishes that she associated with the dedication of the remembrance bands in a greeting. I would like to conclude this presentation here by quoting from it:

“Family and community were extremely important to the Einstein brothers and their families. Always modest, they were nonetheless proud of being an integral part of both the Jewish community of Kriegshaber and Augsburg and the community at large. Some of their contributions were very public. [...] However, a lot of what they did was done on a quieter, more personal level. So quiet, in fact, that I only learned about much of what they did during my last visit here in 2012. People shared stories with me about how my mother helped pay for a neighbor’s daughter’s First Communion dress or about how my father helped provide for a friend’s widow and her family. This is the legacy that I hope my family has imparted to the people of Kriegshaber and Augsburg.”