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THE HAARBLEICHER FAMILY

by Lucas Bruijn

INTRODUCTION

As a boy growing up in Amsterdam close to the old Jewish neighborhood, I was fascinated with the fate of the Jews deported from there. My interest in the von der Porten family was the result of research on Anne Frank's transport to Auschwitz. One of the deportees was a young woman, named Eva Marianne de Zwart née von der Porten. She was murdered in Bergen-Belsen about the same time as Anne.

I have researched all branches of the family and met with Mr. Haarbleek, who took the name van der Poorten. A Russian biologist, descendant of the Latvian/Curonian branch of the Haarbleicher family, sent me an article from the *Chicago Tribune* and that was the start of my investigation into Mr. Naphtali Herman Haarbleicher.

THE HAMBURG HAARBLEICHER FAMILY

The German word Haarbleicher translates as hair bleacher. The Hamburg family Haarbleicher bleached horse hair, which was used in mattresses and upholstery.

The State Archives of Hamburg hold much information on the city's Jewish inhabitants. Additional sources about the family are the Hamburg cemeteries and address books.

The first Haarbleicher, Meir, is in the Jewish Cemetery Hamburg-Altona, Königstraße and died in 1726. Samuel Moses, Meir's grandson, is the first Haarbleicher to appear in the Hamburg address books in 1800. The following two years, he and his sons are listed as dealers in clocks and sundry goods. Later, the family are dealers in clocks (Uhren), feathers (Posen) and hair (Haare).

In 1834, Samuel's grandson, Moses Martin (ben Meier) Haarbleicher, was not only a dealer in hides (Felle), leather (Leder), hair (Haare), brushes (Borsten), and feathers (Federn), he was also a community leader. He served as Secretary of the German Jewish Community in Hamburg from 1840 until his death in 1869. Moses Martin was a poet and a writer. His History of the Jewish Community in Hamburg is still quoted by almost every writer about modern Jewish history. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says "he had an extraordinary knowledge of Romance and Germanic languages, wrote fluently in Hebrew, and was an acute and clever critic." It also mentions, "Forty of his songs and



poems are contained in the hymn book of the Hamburg congregation." Moses Martin Haarbleicher wrote in his diary, after the anti-semitic excesses in Hamburg in 1835, "Actually, the explosiveness in itself was not so important as the abject attitude, that was shown by all walks of Christians, officials not excluded. My decision to go forth from here as soon as my circumstances will allow and, in any case, not to raise my children for Hamburg, has been unswerving ever since." Moses Martin stayed in Hamburg, but two of his sons later went abroad. The Jewish Museum in London has his seal. Their description reads, "A round seal with an inscription in German (M M Haarbleicher Secretary of the German Jewish Community in Hamburg around the edge). In the center there is a cartouche containing the two tablets of Moses (with the Ten Commandments) surrounded by rays, an inscription in Latin translated as Light, Law, Liberty, and the Lesser Coat of Arms of Hamburg."

The Haarbleicher family branched out to Holland, England, France, Latvia, the United States, and Russia. The members of this extended family distinguished themselves in several professions, including banking. Colonel Martin Herford (Haarbleicher) is known as "the most decorated doctor of World War II." André Haarbleicher was Chief Engineer of the French Navy before WW II. He, his wife, and his son were murdered by the Germans.

Haarbleicher, S. Moses et Söhne. Uhren, Posen und Haare,
B. C. unter Herrn M. M. Warburg, 2te Elbstraße, no 56 M. 7
Haarbleicher. Meyer Sam. Associé von S. Moses Haarbleicher
et Söhne. Väterstraße, no 123 J. 11
Hamburgisches Adress-Buch auf das Jahr 1805, 1806, 1807, 1808

HEYMAN NAPHTALI HAARBLEICHER

(Naphtali Heyman Haarbleicher) — Moses Martin [Meier] Haarbleicher had several children, including Heyman Naphtali Haarbleicher, who died at the age of 52 in Chicago on December 28, 1880. A newspaper report tells us that he first came to the United States in 1852 to settle in New Orleans and that he moved to Chicago in 1854. Ship's manifests show a Haarbleicher arriving from Hamburg in New York, in 1852 and in 1854. *N. H. Haarbleicher. Bark Rhein.* Arrived 13 October 1852 in New York, coming from Hamburg. Merchant.

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HIS DEATH

Most of the information on Haarbleicher's death comes from the "Chicago Tribune."

"Heyman Naphtali Haarbleicher was found dead in his room in the Williams Block at 8 o'clock yesterday. He had been complaining of ill health for two or three days, but seemed to be all right when he went to bed at 10 o'clock Monday night. As he was a nervous man, and in the habit of taking morphine to put him asleep, it was conjectured by some that his death resulted from an overdose of the drug. Others, who said that he had been gloomy, and had lost money in the recent wheat deal, feared that he had committed suicide. Haarbleicher was one of the oldest members of the Board of Trade, and had a large circle of friends.

"He was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1828, and came to this country about 1852, going to New Orleans. In 1854 he located in Chicago and engaged in the commission business, building up in the course of ten years an extensive trade. He took a great interest in musical affairs, being one of the founders of the Germania Männerchor, and aided in the development of that and other German singing societies.

"When at the height of his prosperity, his wife proved faithless and finally ran off with a doctor. Haarbleicher was very much depressed by the unfortunate occurrence, and took some morphine with suicidal intent, but his life was saved by prompt medical attention. He procured a divorce, and for a long time was morose and reticent; but, though he gave up visiting his friends, for some years he had enjoyed their society in downtown restaurants, and seldom referred to his domestic troubles.

"He nearly lost all his property in speculations, and latterly had been a broker, buying barley for Louis Huck and others. He was well educated of good family, and some years ago one of the most prominent Germans in the city."

PROFESSIONAL CAREER

After settling in Chicago, address books show that Haarbleicher went into partnership with Hermann Zinkeisen (1827-1875), who later was a victim of the sinking of the SS Schiller, a German ocean liner, which hit a reef off of Sicily. In the directory of 1867, Haarbleicher is a commercial merchant.

SOCIAL LIFE

Haarbleicher was one of the oldest members of the Board of Trade. He took a great interest in musical affairs, being one of the founders of the Germania Männerchor. He was also a prominent member of the 'Germania Club' and of the 'German Society of Chicago.' This society was established in 1854 to assist German-speaking immigrants in Chicago. In 1862 Haarbleicher is mentioned as the treasurer of the society, then celebrating its eighth anniversary.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

The 1867 *Chicago Tribune* provides the attempted suicide story in full detail, and the news spread from Chicago to Kentucky and New York.

"A painful rumor gained circulation in certain intimate circles last evening, that Naphtali Herman Haarbleicher, one of our most widely known and respected German citizens, who does a large commission business on Kinzie street, would, in all probability, die the death of a suicide from the effects of a self-administered dose of poison. Haarbleicher was then a well-to-do bachelor of middle age, and began to give serious attention to the subject of matrimony. There was at this time residing

with her brother in this city, a young German lady of exquisite beauty and refinement; in fact, the acknowledged belle of the German elite of Chicago, named Hulda Marion Miller. There existed considerable disparity in their ages, and a rumor was current at the time that she had entered into the bonds reluctantly, and was in a measure forced by her brothers, who desired the connection for pecuniary reasons. The knowledge of her infidelity almost crazed him, and for months he went about without end or aim, neglecting his business and, in fact, a very misanthrope in his demeanor. His wife and her paramour left together for parts unknown. It has since been reported that the pair reside somewhere in Kansas. In the morning he procured a dose of ten grains of morphine, and shortly before noon he swallowed the entire portion."

BURIAL AND PROBATE

After either a successful suicide attempt or an unintentional overdose, Haarbleicher was interred in Graceland Cemetery, in a plot donated by a friend, two months after his death on December 28, 1880. This delay is likely to have been caused by frozen ground from the severe winter that year.

Haarbleicher, at the time of his death, owned little more than the shirt on his back and had debts amounting to about \$13,000. His personal belongings, goods and chattels, appraised at \$68.09 were auctioned and fetched \$38.75. A lawyer petitioned the court, on behalf of friends, asking permission to place a headstone on his grave.

Haarbleicher was survived by at least two of his siblings, living in Hamburg and London, and he had a number of more distant relatives in Germany and England. There is no indication that his relatives were informed of his death.

Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois
P.O. Box 515 • Northbrook, IL 60065-0515
312-666-0100 • info@jgsi.org

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Executive Editor: Peggy Morrow
Design/Layout: Marcia Hirsch
Co-Editor: Dale Amdur
Contributing Editors: Debbie Kroopkin, Scott Meyer, Robin Seidenberg, Celia Wilk
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