PRIMARY SOURCES

Louisiana Letters, 1855–1871: The Story of an Immigrant Jewish Family

by

Jay Silverberg*

Meyer family letters:[1]

Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, December 17, 1855
Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, February 17, 1856
Karl Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, December 6, 1864
Regina, Babette, and Karl Meyer to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, [1868]
Caroline Meyer to her family in Germany, August 29, 1868
Abraham Levy to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, December 21, 1868

Emanuel Meyer was nearing his sixteenth birthday when he departed for Louisiana during the winter of 1855, leaving behind his family and everything he had known growing up in the Palatinate region of southwestern Germany.[2] Finally, the family received a letter from Emanuel, and in response his father could barely contain his joy at receiving news of his son's safe arrival in Louisiana:

> We received your letter from Orleans on November 18th and see from it that God Almighty has led you healthily and fortunately to Orleans and that you had a good voyage, praise the Lord, and you were not sick, thank

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> God, which was always what we wanted. Since we have prayed for you day after day and God Almighty has heard us, and since we see in your letter how you arrived in Orleans, [and] that God Almighty led you immediately to such good people [who] embraced you immediately and immediately gave you such a big present, you can see: when distress is greatest, then God is nearest.[3]

Joseph Meyer, a forty-four-year-old butcher, wrote from his home in Lachen, Germany, on December 17, 1855, three

Downtown Clinton, Louisiana, in the mid–nineteenth century. In the foreground is the East Feliciana Parish Courthouse, built in 1840 and one of four pre–Civil War courthouses constructed in Louisiana that are still in use today. Most likely, the photo was taken from the southwest corner of the courthouse square looking east down St. Helena Street. (Courtesy of the Jackson Historic District Commission.)

days after receiving his son's letter. Emanuel had written from the home of his paternal step-uncle, Abraham Levy, 115 miles upriver from New Orleans in Bayou Sara, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana.[4] Joseph Meyer's letter is the first in a collection of correspondence among the extended Meyer family in Germany and America. Their story is typical of many German Jewish families with shared experiences of struggle and triumph. Yet their experiences can be told with more clarity than others in similar circumstances because of an inexplicable quirk of historical fate, if not good fortune, that unfolded in 1975 in Clinton, Louisiana, a community that factored prominently in Meyer and Levy family life during the middle to late nineteenth century.

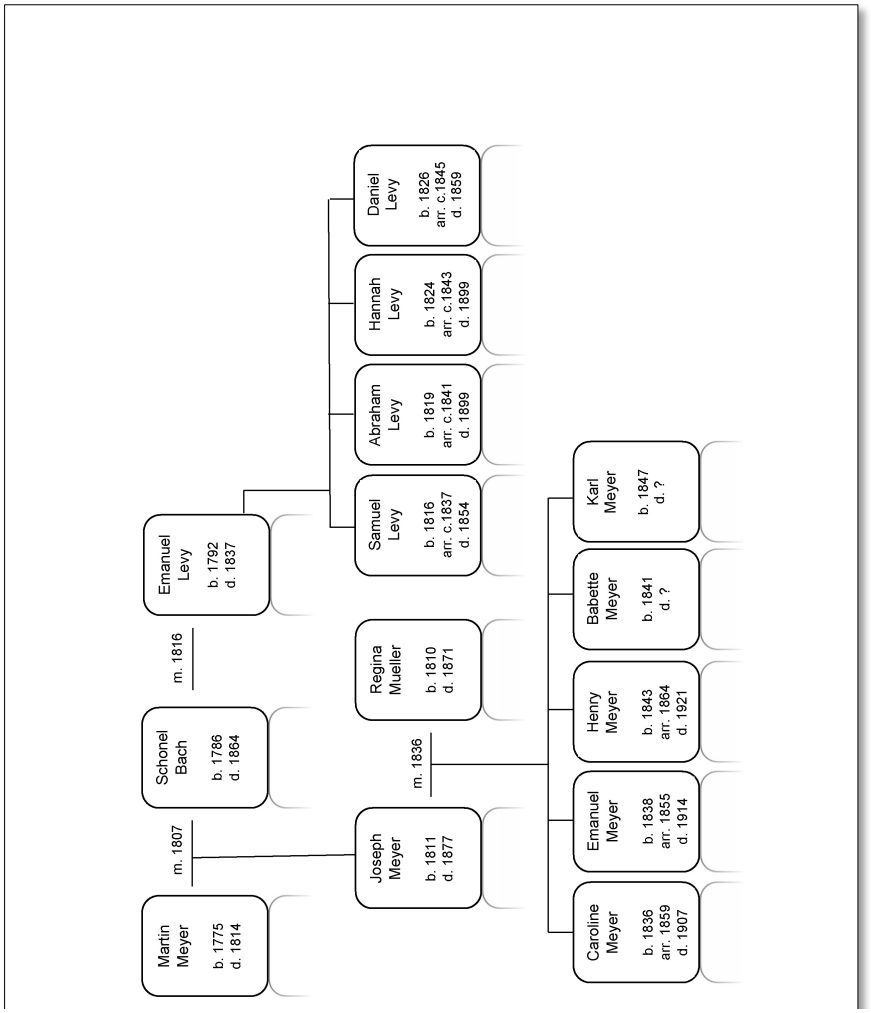
Storefronts in the main business area of Clinton, just across the street from the historic pre–Civil War courthouse and a block away from the equally historic buildings known as Lawyer's Row, were being prepared for demolition. The buildings, one of which was owned for nearly thirty years by Emanuel and Henry Meyer as the Meyer Brothers Store, had stood since the early 1800s. Inside this building remained volumes of detailed Meyer store records and the Meyer family letters, some written to each other after they had settled in Louisiana and Galveston, Texas; others were written in German or Yiddish from family members in Germany. The letters and ledgers likely had been forgotten in the early 1900s when the store closed.[5]

Store records have become standard sources that historians use when writing about pre– and post–Civil War southern general store management. The discovered Meyer documents include the store's day-to-day sales, receipts for shipment of goods, messages between the Meyer brothers and their financiers in New Orleans arguing about payment of debts, as well as notes from customers asking for anything from bacon to bullets, coffee to cornmeal. The store records and letter collection, including 122 pieces of correspondence, are now part of the Meyer Brothers Store Records in the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. The letters reveal details of life between 1855 and

1871, predominantly involving Joseph Meyer and his stepsiblings Samuel, Abraham, Hannah, and Daniel Levy; and among Joseph, his wife Regina, and their children Caroline, Emanuel, Henry, Babette, and Karl Meyer. Forty letters were written from Joseph Meyer's family in Germany to their relatives in Louisiana. Most of the remainder are from either the Meyer siblings to each other; from Abraham Levy, writing in German and English, to his nephews; or from Levy's children and brother-in-law to family members in Louisiana and Texas. The letters, long overlooked by scholars more interested in the ledgers and the family's business interests, have only recently been translated and studied, revealing contents rich in detail about the Meyers' personal and business lives in Germany, Louisiana, and Texas, while supporting previous scholarly research about the motivations of German Jewish immigrants during the mid-nineteenth century.[6]

The letters show their age, with many of the pages torn or otherwise deteriorated. They survived in chronological groups of several months to years with gaps between many of the letters, the longest between letters from Germany lasting three and a half years (1861–1864), and the longest between letters from the United States at six and a half years (1861–1868). Postmarks on some of the letters from Germany indicate that they were sent via ship from Liverpool or Bremen. In some, the writers reference the time it would take for correspondence to arrive at its final destination, frequently a month or more. Some of the letters are simply addressed to "Abraham Levy, Baisara [Bayou Sara], State of Louisiana, America." Those from

Opposite: *The Meyer/Levy family tree. This tree shows the relationships among the letter-writers. The Levy siblings who immigrated to Louisiana – Samuel, Abraham, Hannah, and Daniel – shared a stepbrother, Joseph Meyer, who was the father of the Meyer siblings who immigrated – Caroline, Emanuel, and Henry. Siblings Babette and Karl remained in Germany. (Courtesy of Jay Silverberg.)*


Martin Meyer
b. 1775
d. 1814
m. 1807
Schonel Bach
b. 1786
d. 1864
Joseph Meyer
b. 1811
d. 1877
m. 1816
Emanuel Levy
b. 1792
d. 1837
m. 1836
Regina Mueller
b. 1810
d. 1871
Samuel Levy
b. 1816
arr. c.1837
d. 1854
Abraham Levy
b. 1819
arr. c.1841
d. 1899
Hannah Levy
b. 1824
arr. c.1843
d. 1899
Daniel Levy
b. 1826
arr. c.1845
d. 1859
Caroline Meyer
b. 1836
arr. 1859
d. 1907
Emanuel Meyer
b. 1838
arr. 1855
d. 1914
Henry Meyer
b. 1843
arr. 1864
d. 1921
Babette Meyer
b. 1841
d. ?
Karl Meyer
b. 1847
d. ?

Germany usually include several separate communications from the family, at times some of them writing two or three times in one combined communication. Many are fairly perfunctory, almost matter-of-fact. Family members wrote about their lives as they intersected with events of the day from the significant, such as the economy, war, and social freedoms (or lack thereof), to the routines of business, parenthood, tradition, and religion. Comments indicate that the recipients shared them with each other and referred to them as they wrote replies. The collection does not contain any letters from Emanuel Meyer; Caroline Meyer, the oldest child in the Joseph Meyer family, who immigrated to Louisiana, wrote forty-five of the letters, including the only one in the collection sent from a family member in Louisiana to the family in Germany.

Differences between the sexes are evident in the grammar of the letters, likely reflecting their respective levels of education. The father, Joseph, and son, Karl, wrote elegantly and usually without grammatical issues. The women's penmanship was noticeably worse than the men's, and their language more colloquial. The mother, Regina Meyer, used Yiddish script throughout her letters. The younger daughter, Babette, improved her writing through the years, possibly reflecting her increased responsibilities for managing the family business in Germany. The penmanship and spelling of older daughter Caroline declined as she wrote letters from Louisiana and Texas, and her language became more like standard German, possibly because she spent much of her time with families who spoke German in their homes. Based on his letters, Abraham Levy likely possessed little formal education. His penmanship was almost illegible, and he apparently never received instruction in standard German spelling or grammar. He interspersed English words and sometimes English phrases and sentences in his German letters, typical of immigrants' writing after living in their adopted country for a few years. Nonetheless, despite his difficulty with the written word, the contents are introspective, at times tender, and demonstrate a distinct knowledge for business in his assumed role as patriarch of the family in Louisiana.

The letters from Germany also include flowing salutations—"I greet you many thousands of times" or "sending many kisses"—and invoke the name of God and wishes for good health. Such greetings typified western European letter-writing style of the era.[7]

The letters speak of the Meyer family's work, schooling, religion, family, and friends all within specific communities—the six German towns of Klingenmünster, Lachen, Landau, Neustadt, Speyer, and Aschaffenburg; Clinton, Jackson, and Bayou Sara in Louisiana; and Galveston, Texas. The letters alone, however, barely tell the story without genealogical and historical detail that helps illuminate key aspects in the lives of these German Jewish family members, who follow economic and sociological patterns long established in scholarly research.[8] The importance of historical and genealogical linkages is examined in several scholarly works, notably the groundbreaking research of Carolyn Earle Billingsley. A professional genealogist, Billingsley writes:

> Merely providing genealogical connections adds little to our understanding of antebellum southern society. To reveal the significance of kinship, we must be able to identify the realm of meaningful or effective kinship. With written records such as letters or diaries, that task is fairly simple; visiting patterns, social activities, mentions of names in a diary on a regular basis, business records, gossip about certain people in a letter to one's sister—these types of writings speak to us clearly about who was important in an individual's life.[9]

In his examination of Jewish communities throughout the United States, historian Lee Shai Weissbach argues for a "comprehensive analysis of the experience of America's small Jewish communities as a class" and discusses distinct patterns of social, cultural, and economic acculturation that are apparent in the Meyer correspondence.[10] Specifically, six letters, augmented by details from numerous others, provide a framework for the family's story, supporting genealogical, historical, and academ-

ic perspectives to help explain this family's unstinting desire for business success in their new home, their concern about the changing landscape in Germany, their devotion to each other, their struggles with the traditions left behind in their homeland, and ultimately their earnest desire to acculturate into their American home.

Welcome to America: "One is not rich immediately."

The Levys and Meyers joined the wave of 250,000 German Jewish immigrants between 1820 and 1880 who set off for the one- to two-week trip to Le Havre or Bremen and other European port cities before boarding sailing or later steam-powered vessels destined for Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, Galveston, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, or Savannah

W. J. Bennett, "New Orleans, Taken from the Opposite Side a Short Distance above the Middle or Picayune Ferry," 1841. (Wikimedia Commons.)

on a trip that took a month or more.[11] Most were young, from small towns and villages in southern Germany, fleeing from prolonged upheavals in their native land that tightened the vise of economic, social, and religious oppression that affected Christians as well as Jews. Their condition foretold little future, at least none as good as what America promised. Historian Tobias Brinkmann acknowledges long-standing theories about anti-Jewish legislation and persecution prompting these departures, but he strongly suggests that the main reasons are found in the efforts to end feudal rule in the German states. Reform efforts eventually led to total emancipation of the Jews in 1871, but Brinkmann writes:

> In some territories land reforms dragged on for decades and the situation of many small farmers did not improve. The persistence of traditional regulations and inheritance patterns, coupled with the impact of massive economic transformation, forced large numbers of young Christians in the southwest German countryside to move. . . . Most Jews who occupied niches as cattle traders or peddlers in rural economies were affected by economic change, not least by the departure of their Christian customers and employees.[12]

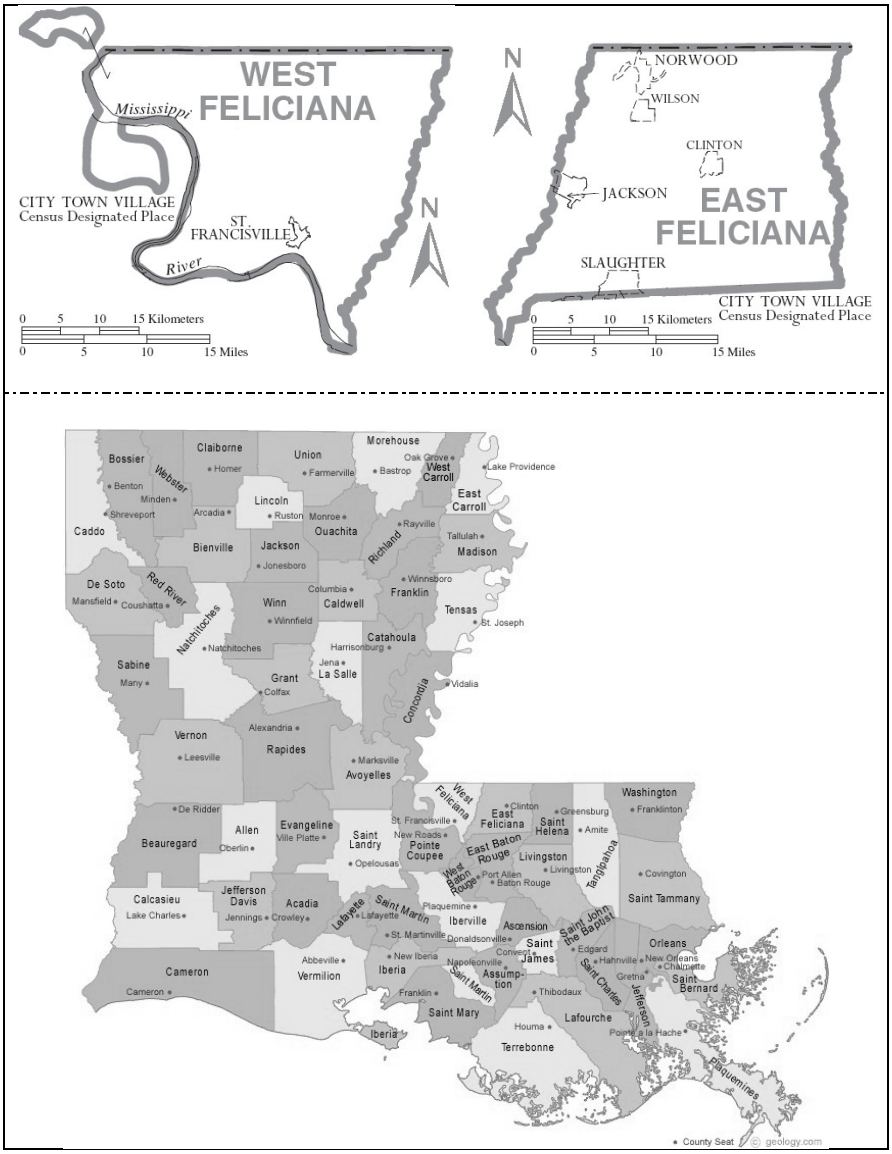
Illustrating Brinkmann's point about Jews struggling with Germany's economic issues, the Meyer family letters frequently reference the family's monetary plight and, conversely, contain very little concerning issues with religious freedom.[13]

Before Emanuel Meyer's arrival in 1855, four of his father's siblings—three uncles and an aunt—arrived in Louisiana between 1837 and 1847. Arriving shortly before 1840, Samuel Levy, the first to immigrate, was twenty-five years old when he settled in Rodney, Mississippi. He opened a store, married Fanny Haas, and waited for his twenty-two-year-old brother, Abraham, who arrived about 1841. Their brother Daniel, about twenty-five years old, and sister Hannah, twenty-three, likely followed Samuel and Abraham between 1842 and 1847.[14] "Leaving the family, the aging parent, relatives and friends

with no guarantee to see the beloved ones ever again must have been the hardest part for the early emigrants," Ursula Gehring-Münzel points out. "Not knowing what would await them in the American wilderness was also a frightening prospect. Therefore it would seem only natural that quite a number of people from the same village or neighborhood set off on this adventure together."[15]

The Levy siblings' father was dead, and their sixty-one-year-old mother lived near other family members in Klingenmünster, Germany. Her net worth, approximately seven hundred florins, supported her basic expenses, but details in the letters suggest that she relied on family members for support.[16] Immigration records for Samuel and Abraham Levy include notes about their military obligations, a likely motivation for both to emigrate. Abraham's conscription record listed him as "insubordinate" and noted in pencil: "to be arrested/brought in."[17]

The family followed the typical chain migration pattern during the mid-1800s that Avraham Barkai, Rudolf Glanz, and numerous others chronicle in their examinations of German Jewish emigration, by which immigrants followed family members and people from the same areas from Germany to America.[18] As tradition held, in 1855 the oldest son, Emanuel Meyer, joined his uncles and aunt in Louisiana. The letters are clear that he was to be followed by his older sister, Caroline, who arrived in Louisiana in 1859, then their brother, Henry, who made the voyage in 1864. Caroline and Henry were twenty-three and twenty-one, respectively, when they emigrated, and they hoped their younger siblings, Babette and Karl, and possibly their mother and father, would join them. As Glanz points out, Jewish emigration for entire families at one time was entirely too expensive, as it undoubtedly was for the Levys and Meyers. Nonetheless, they were joining other German Jews abandoning southwestern Germany, seeking economic, social, and legal equality largely unattainable in their homeland. As Barkai observes, "In many aspects these young emigrants



Maps of West and East Feliciana Parishes, above, and Louisiana parishes, below. On the state map, the Felicianas are in the center, bordered by the Mississippi River to the west and the Mississippi state line to the north. (Wikimedia Commons; Geology.com.)

considered themselves to be—as they often actually were—the pioneer vanguard that was clearing the way for the transplantation of whole families, clans, and even communities."[19]

By 1860, the family had taken full advantage of the opportunities that Louisiana afforded. The Levy family's wealth was nearly equal to some of the richest families in the Gulf South, all thriving in the pre–Civil War, cotton-driven economy in East and West Feliciana Parishes and the surrounding region bordered to the north and east by the Mississippi state line, to the west by the Mississippi River, and to the south by the outskirts of Baton Rouge. The business success of their uncles and aunt provided the foundation upon which the Meyer siblings and at least one other relative were able to leave Germany, join the family in Louisiana, and eventually take their place among the business elite in the Feliciana parishes and Galveston.[20] The first letter from the father, Joseph, offers insight into his family's eagerness to see their oldest child, Emanuel, take advantage of the family's business network and succeed as his relatives had before him:

> Dear Child. One is not rich immediately. If you cannot send anything at the moment, all we know is that we are working day after day if you can only provide for yourself at this time. If you see that you would not like to travel long distances, [then] stay for a while in the area where your people are. You will still earn as much as you need for yourself once people know you a little.[21]

Emanuel's welcome to his new home was not unlike many of the immigrants who preceded him, likely including his uncles who mentored him after his arrival in Louisiana. As his father's letter alludes, Emanuel immediately began peddling goods during an unseasonably warm winter in 1855 along the dusty roads lined with stately oaks and magnolias to the large plantations and farm houses of the Feliciana parishes as the planters prepared to harvest their cotton.[22] A letter from home offered understanding and support:

> [Your uncle] immediately bought you a horse and gave you goods, so that you should immediately head into the country, and [that] will have seemed funny to you because you were still such a stranger, but I believe that would happen to anyone. But you have your dear uncles, where you now have great support, in that they immediately helped you, so that you might amount to something. Dear child! I believe that this first time heading into the countryside was not pleasant for you. But [as the saying goes] all beginnings are hard. But you know that you would also have to slave away at home.[23]

Although peddling was viewed as an inferior occupation in Germany, many of the Jewish immigrants arriving in America depended upon their peddler's pack. Peddling served multiple purposes. It was a stepping stone for the new immigrant who was usually given goods and some money to help him on his way into the countryside by a family member or other Jewish wholesaler; a business strategy by the supporting merchant to

C. G. Bush, "The Peddler's Wagon."
(Harper's Weekly, June 20, 1868.)

extend his network; and a medium by which the immigrant adjusted to American life and culture.[24] The Levys, Emanuel's mentors, had moved from peddling years earlier into the successful operation of four stores in the 1850's, one in Bayou Sara, one each in Williamsport and Livonia across the Mississippi River in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana, and a fourth in Rodney, Mississippi. The Levys' model and Emanuel's experiences would serve him well later when operating his own store during the Civil War and Reconstruction when he hired peddlers on commission to sell Meyer brothers' wares.

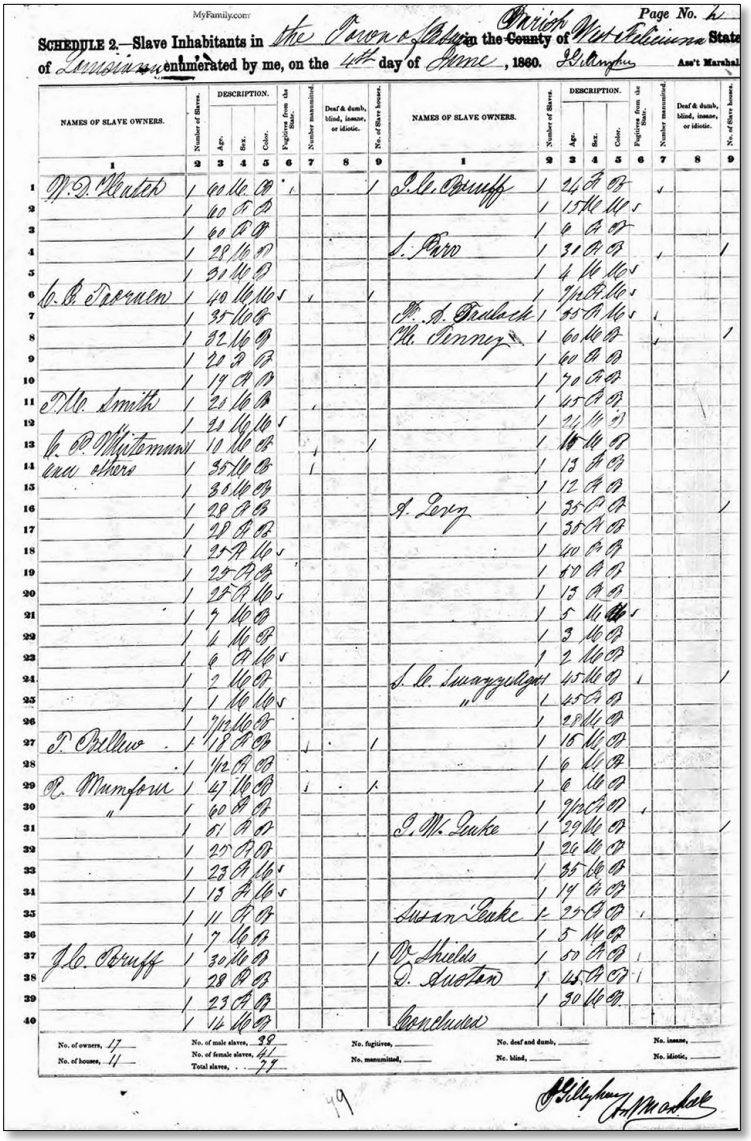
Emanuel was given a pack of goods and a horse when he took to the back roads in 1855. The strangeness had to be, as his father wrote, "funny" if not startling. The letters clearly indicate that when in Germany, Emanuel Meyer and his siblings supported their father's livelihood, butchering cattle, delivering meat, and selling other goods to earn a living. The letters refer to close family acquaintances as primary customers when discussing the Meyers' German business. In contrast, Emanuel's first Louisiana customers were strangers in a land he barely knew. Nonetheless, the young peddler found similarities. As historian Elliott Ashkenazi points out, "For both French and German Jews, the feudal, agricultural society of the antebellum South was similar to the European society they had left." He also writes that both German- and French-speaking immigrants found a common language among their new neighbors.[25] In Clinton, where Emanuel likely spent time selling, or gathering goods for his peddler's pack, he would have found that the majority of male immigrants were from his home country, with nearly half of them close to his age.[26]

Emanuel's father followed his first letter with another two months later, filled with direct references to his son's ability to help support the family through his new business ventures and praise for his uncles' mentoring:

> At noon on Wednesday when we saw your letter, we were so full of joy that we didn't want to eat anything more. . . . You can imagine . . . great joy when we saw that you sent an American dollar in your first letter. . . .

> You can't conceive the joy we had, when you already sold so many goods on your first trip and got such a large sum of money.[27] It is good fortune when one comes to such a strange new land and can immediately fit in with humanity. . . . Now we are also very curious about what articles of goods your business consists of. When you write again, write about that. If [or when] you are used to it, also the business. . . . Dear Maier, just follow your dear uncles.[28] You will also see for yourself that everything they advise you is for a good purpose and [that they] do everything for your benefit [so] that you will certainly amount to something and can be a little helpful to us. . . . You write that you want to send us 50 dollars by Easter. If you can do that already, then it would certainly make us happy that your dear uncles put you in a business so that you can earn something.[29]

From the father's perspective, his son's ability to earn "such a large sum of money" and to "fit in with humanity" left a long-standing impression, certainly as compared to his own family's economic circumstances. Joseph's net worth was about three hundred florin, approximately one year's wages in Germany—about the same as other German Jews from the region but still barely enough to buy a horse. While not destitute, the family was nonetheless beset with difficulties typical of the rural German Jewish lifestyle of the era as indicated from the letters and genealogical research. Men in the family toiled as butchers, cattlemen, coopers, peddlers, and tobacco farmers, and they traded wine grapes, scrap iron, and rags—typical work of German Jews during the nineteenth century.[30] One month's earnings selling rags and linen amounted to about fifteen florin, or about 150 dollars in today's value. In a letter written in May 1859, the father offers an oft-repeated lament: "I have to let you know that business with us is very bad now. Meat is very expensive. One pound here by us costs 13 kreuzer and one can't earn anything from that because beef is very expensive." Further, the letters indicate that Joseph Meyer was



Slave schedule from the 1860 U.S. Census for Bayou Sara, Louisiana, listing Abraham Levy as the owner of eight slaves. (National Archives and Records Administration.)

likely aware of his brothers' business success from other family members who returned to Germany and spoke of life in Louisiana, as well, undoubtedly, as from family correspondence exchanged through the years and not a part of the collection.[31]

While Joseph Meyer toiled in Germany, his younger brother, Abraham, attained social and economic stature in the Louisiana communities of Bayou Sara, Jackson, Clinton, and, in some respects, Galveston, Texas, that bound together the Levys, the Meyers, the Oppenheimers, the Wolfs, the Adlers, the Haases, the Michaels, and the Mayers. Each was inextricably linked through German ancestry, immigration, marriage, and business. The letters demonstrate how the extended Meyer/Levy family life reflected the broader nineteenth-century Jewish immigrant experience from several perspectives. These include slave owning, a good indicator of an antebellum southern family's degree of social status and financial attainment. Several letters in the collection reference African Americans working for the family in their homes and stores, and a slave schedule from Bayou Sara in June 1860 shows Abraham Levy joining his fellow merchants and neighbors in owning slaves. Estate records for his brother Daniel include a forty-year-old enslaved female valued at seven hundred dollars.[32] Jews and slavery have often been studied, and the family's experience is little different from others, as noted scholar Bertram Korn points out. "It would seem to be realistic to conclude that any Jew who could afford to own slaves and had need for their services would do so. . . . Jews wanted to acclimate themselves in every way to their environment. . . . [It] was, therefore, only a matter of financial circumstances and familial status whether they were to become slave-owners."[33] Thus, Jews such as Levy purchased slaves as house servants, just as did others in the middle and upper classes. The use of such servants, whether slaves or immigrants, reflected one's rise in socioeconomic status.

From economic and civic perspectives, Weissbach observes, "The occupational choices made by the heads of these pioneer families tended to facilitate their economic success, and to the extent that their businesses prospered, these individuals

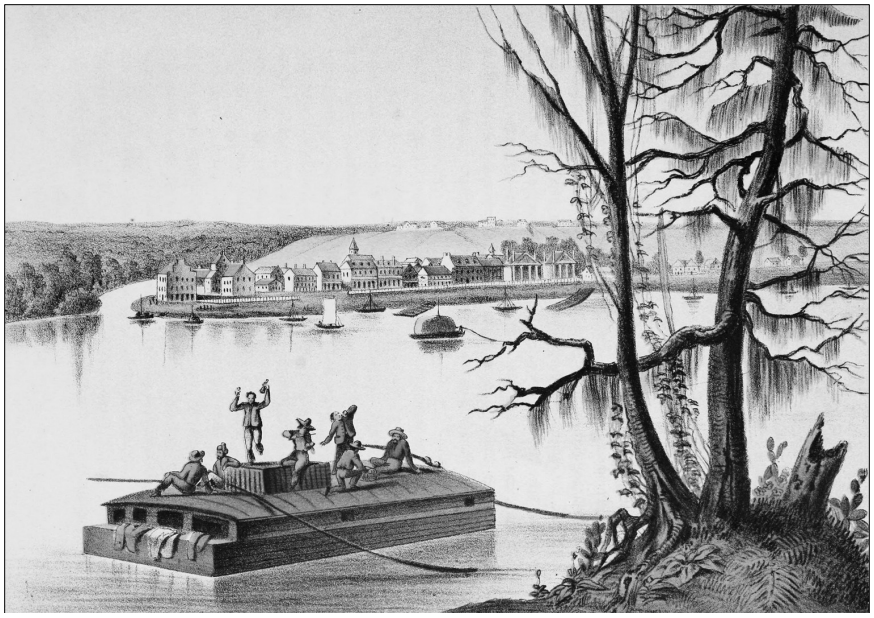
became widely recognized and centrally involved in the day-to-day life of their towns." Hasia Diner suggests that immigrants like the extended Meyer family "decided that despite the promises of emancipation and economic freedom that could be heard in their European homes, America offered better and easier terms by which to work for both."[34]

Life in Their New Home: "A thriving and bustling place"

Once in America, the family and their fellow émigrés followed a pattern in which, as Barkai notes, they became "at least in the first, formative period up to the Civil War, an ethnic group that was, socially, highly homogenous and cohesive."[35] Naomi W. Cohen asserts that the new immigrants tried to ensure that generations of Judaic tradition and ceremony "had to be interpreted in ways that would not obstruct their acceptance as Americans."[36] The Levy siblings who were the first in their family to emigrate melded quickly into their new home, a place that was rapidly becoming one of the key economic regions of the United States. The parishes of East and West Feliciana ranked fourth and eighth respectively among Louisiana's forty-seven parishes in total wealth in 1850, with Clinton and Jackson established as regional banking and commercial centers. Clinton's theatrical organizations hosted well-known North American and European actors, and the two communities were home to recognized educational institutions—Centenary College in Jackson and Silliman Female Institute in Clinton. Two of Abraham Levy's sons and one of his nephews attended Centenary, his oldest son graduating in June 1881.[37]

Each of the Levy siblings married after arriving in Louisiana. By the time Emanuel Meyer arrived in 1855 and the letters began, his relatives were well-established merchants in the region. In 1860, the Levy family was worth a combined $42,400, the third wealthiest family among their three hundred Bayou Sara neighbors. Only a banker's family ($56,000) and another dry goods merchant's family ($50,000) exceeded the Levys' personal and real estate holdings. Ten percent of the families in East Feliciana were multimillionaires in modern-day dollars,

including the Levys.[38] Abraham Levy's wife, Yette, contributed about twenty-five thousand dollars (approximately $700,000 in today's value) to their joint estate after the death of her first husband, Israel Adler.[39] While the extended family was not among the planter elite, their economic and social standing placed them well within, if not above, the middle class and far removed from the plain folk of the region.[40] Dun reports describe Abraham Levy's business and personal travails during a thirty-year period, one in particular describing him as a "married, acute, [shrewd], illiterate, money-making, [unprincipled], successful Jew worth 75–100 [thousand]."[41]



Bayou Sara, Louisiana, and the Mississippi River in the 1840s.
St. Francisville is on the ridge in the background.
(Lithograph by Lewis Henry. Wikimedia Commons.)

Bayou Sara, where Abraham Levy and other Jewish immigrants first settled, was ideally situated for economic success. Commerce, especially cotton from the surrounding planters, flowed into town via the West Feliciana Railroad, which termi-

nated not far from the busy local port that served as a daily destination for the steamboats taking trade and passengers to and from the Felicianas. St. Francisville sat on the bluffs overlooking its neighboring community, astride the Mississippi River. Of the early immigrants in the family, Abraham Levy recognized the advantages that access to the river and rail provided to ply his trade and visit family. In his examination of the nineteenth-century economic and political environments in and around New Orleans, Scott Marler uses the Levys as an example of a family that understood the importance of expanding its business networks regionally—and thus its opportunities for success. He and Ashkenazi show immigrants' mutual dependence on relatives and fellow immigrants as business associates to achieve financial success and independence.[42]

"If St. Francisville is stronger on the ornamental, Bayou Sara is out of sight ahead of her on the practical, for she does all the business, and a great deal of business is done, too," wrote J. W. Door in 1860, a New Orleans *Daily Crescent* correspondent who used the nom de plume "Tourist" for his "Louisiana in Slices" column. "It is a thriving and bustling place, and contains some of the most extensive and heavily stocked stores in Louisiana, outside of New Orleans." Door's dispatch specifically mentions A. Levy & Co., dry goods merchant.[43] This setting, coupled with the fact that slaves constituted nearly two-thirds of the population, may help explain the comments from Joseph Meyer to his son about the strangeness of moving into the countryside and fitting in among a "humanity" that the new immigrant did not know and whose disparate economic circumstances had to be eye-opening when compared to the life he had discarded in Germany.[44]

As the years passed, the family's success in Louisiana became a focal point for the Meyers in Germany, who continually requested financial assistance. Indeed, the letters indicate that Emanuel sent considerable sums of money to his parents, not unlike other immigrants who wanted to help family back in Germany.[45] Yet the letters also disclose that the brothers and uncles struggled to find a balance in their level of financial sup-

port for family left behind. In May 1859, one set of letters is clear in its intent but apparently had little effect. The mother, Regina, wrote her son, Emanuel, and brother-in-law, Abraham, about plans for her daughter, Caroline:

> You will know . . . when someone in Germany has a daughter and with little money one cannot in the prevailing times [do anything] more. I believe when she comes to America she will be able to do more. Now my dear brother-in-law if you would send money, you could thus do so that she would embrace you and your dear brother. If it is God's will, as quickly as possible because you know how it is with us and continues to be worse every day.[46]

Caroline, in fact, left for Louisiana in November 1859, about a year after her emigration had been delayed because her help was needed in the family cattle business. Her father had written his son two months prior, admonishing him to be mindful of his sister's welfare, because, after all "you will know when your sister comes to you that she doesn't want to [live] her life with nothing."[47] In the letters that follow her departure, the apparent income disparity between the families in Germany and Louisiana boiled into a months-long, acrimonious spat. For his daughter's voyage, Joseph Meyer borrowed 125 florins, nearly a half-year's wages, to be paid within eighteen months of her departure. With no money apparently coming from Abraham Levy, the expectation clearly was that Emanuel would send funds to repay the debt.[48] One year after Caroline's departure, her brother, Henry, wrote to his siblings:

> We received your letter of August 1st and see from it that things are going well for you and that you, dear sister, like it very much, which makes us very happy. We were also very happy that our brother is providing so well for you and he will soon start a business. Dear brother Maier, since it has already been four months since we received a letter from you too, and since you wrote us that you wanted to send us some money that made us very happy. Since four months have gone by,

> however, and we haven't received the money, now there is nothing else we can do except remind you once again to keep your promise. . . . [S]ister knows after all that we borrowed the money . . . and it has to be paid back as soon as possible. . . . I don't know anything to write except that business is now bad and so I remain hopeful.[49]

The family in Germany had begun paying modest interest on the debt, but the issue festered to the point of embarrassment. Babette, another Meyer sibling, wrote to her brother Emanuel six months after Henry sent his letter:

> Three months before our Caroline was away from here, you wrote us our sister should come to you in America, and if we don't have the money, we should borrow it, which we importantly did, from Wolf Maikammer, for two months. Why? Because we believed you would keep your promise and up until today you haven't yet kept it . . . which really mortifies our parents because he asks father for it each time he goes to Maikammer. As a result, father no longer has the heart to go to Maikammer and I don't at all for which I am ashamed and we can't pay it from our earnings and if you don't send it, then we will sell a field, which we need to have in this bad time. My dear brother, keep your promise as soon as possible. When you write again, then don't [write] anymore that you want to borrow money because people are laughing about that.[50]

Unfortunately, the letters in the collection leave unresolved the question of whether the debt was repaid, yet the exchange underscores the themes of family ties and obligations that Barkai discusses. He points out that immigrants frequently confronted their misgivings about leaving behind deeply held social and cultural, if not family, traditions to start anew in America. Nonetheless, the tug the immigrants felt from family in Germany seldom overcame the pressures of assimilating into their new environment.[51] In later years, Emanuel would have a reputation as a hardened but perceptive busi-

nessman, thus the simplest explanation about the travel debt may be that he believed that caring for his sister after her arrival was payment enough, even knowing the shame it may have caused his father, something not unlike experiences of other immigrants.[52] In fact, a year before his sister left for Louisiana, Emanuel had sent the family an unspecified amount of gold as well as one hundred guilders, slightly less than the borrowed 125 florins but still a considerable sum of money.[53] Further, Ashkenazi points out that Emanuel's business was struggling during the period when the letters about the debt were written, as he juggled debts owed for merchandise with his concerns about the potential for war, the cotton crop, and his personal needs.[54]

Perhaps Emanuel thought his responsibilities had been met, or that his family's needs were not as profound given that their living costs had been reduced because of his departure and that of his sister. Further, the letters indicate in Emanuel a level of detachment from family affairs not untypical of immigrants who, as Naomi Cohen points out, viewed their migration as "a readiness to break the hold of a rigid community which one did not choose but was born into."[55] Emanuel's sister Caroline and brother Karl express their concern and surprise in several letters at not hearing from their brother and scold him for not writing the family.[56]

As for Abraham Levy, he was dealing with issues that undoubtedly were more important to him than sending money to Germany, even though he could afford to do so.[57] His brother, Daniel, was ill with typhoid fever and died in September 1859, leaving a wife, three children, and property and personal holdings worth nearly one hundred thousand dollars (about two million dollars in current value), which Abraham inherited.[58] Two months after his brother's death, he welcomed the arrival of his niece, Caroline. Soon after her arrival, Caroline became caregiver to her uncle Daniel Levy's widow and three children. The letters show that she lived in Bayou Sara, with frequent

Leopold Mayer, nephew of Abraham Levy, cousin of Emanuel and Henry Meyer, and great-grandfather of the author. Mayer ran a store in Jackson, Louisiana, which Levy likely provided to him. Levy also paid for Mayer's passage to America and for his tuition to Centenary College in Jackson. In the 1890s, when Mayer and his wife died two years apart, Levy cared for the couple's three young children. Mayer's story illustrates Levy's commitment to helping his relatives immigrate, obtain livelihoods, and thrive in America. It also typifies the social and family networks on which immigrants frequently relied. (Courtesy of Jay Silverberg.)

references to her role within the Levy family and her closeness to other relatives and friends. Nine months after Caroline's departure from Germany, her mother wrote:

> Dear Caroline, you should know that I always pray that the Almighty God should keep you well and bring you great fortune so that I may still come to experience much joy for your sake. You write that your dear uncle and aunt are so good to you. That certainly gives me great joy because I know that you have worked so hard at home and I see in your letter that . . . now you don't have to.[59]

Caroline's environment differed greatly from the life she had left in Germany. "In the years before the American Civil War, wealthy and middle-class whites dominated Clinton's society

St. Helena Street in Clinton, Louisiana, during the mid–nineteenth century. The Meyer Brothers store was most likely out of the frame, next to the stores to the right of the photograph. The proprietor of the H. L. Mayer store, seen in the center, was not related to Emanuel and Henry Meyer. (Courtesy of the Jackson Historic District Commission.)

and economy," wrote Virginia Elaine Thompson. "By building railroads, establishing strong mercantile houses and developing a varied corps of artisans, Clinton's elite made the town the center of a booming cotton region."[60] As her letters indicate,

Caroline quickly shed the drudgery of German life once she was exposed to the status of her family and her newfound access to the fineries previously unavailable to her. She asks her brothers for shoes, dresses, and sewing materials and occupies her time with child care and social events—all starkly different from supporting her father's butcher business or toiling in the family's tobacco fields in southwestern Germany.

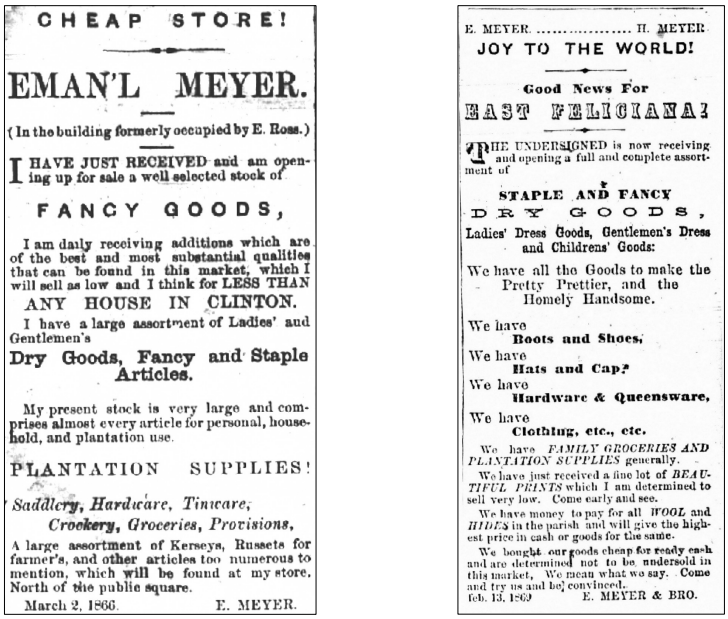
During the Civil War, the Meyer/Levy family remained intact, and while the collection includes forty-two letters written between 1860 and 1865, only three make specific reference to any war-related activity. Letters from Caroline to her brothers mention an army unit departing from Bayou Sara and that she was knitting for soldiers, and they inquire about a family friend serving as a soldier.[61] Neither Emanuel nor his cousins joined the Confederate military. Instead, they continued in business making money during the Civil War despite intense fighting in and around Clinton and Bayou Sara that left the latter, riverfront community in ruins.[62] Ashkenazi writes that Emanuel's business "during the war involved as much peddling with a horse and wagon as retail sales," while he worked diligently to meet his business obligations.[63]

In 1868, Caroline moved to Galveston, where she wrote thirty-one of the forty-one letters in the collection. Her caregiver duties were needed in Texas because her Uncle Daniel's widow, Elise, had married Louis Michael, a business partner of the Levy brothers. Michael had relocated his new family to become store manager for Greenleve, Block & Co., a dry goods store on "The Strand" in Galveston's business center. Abraham Levy's brother-in-law, Leopold Oppenheimer, started as a clerk in Levy's Bayou Sara store and also worked for the Greenleve store, which he ultimately owned and renamed Block, Oppenheimer & Co., one of the most prominent stores in the region before its abrupt bankruptcy in May 1887.[64] Abraham Levy likely helped to steer these relationships that had begun before the Civil War through his business connections with the store founder, Abraham Greenleve, and Greenleve's business partners.[65]

Caroline, the most prolific letter writer in the collection, enjoyed life in Galveston. She continually asked her brothers to send her clothes to attend various social affairs and mentioned getting dresses from her cousin's Galveston store. She wrote about the weather, her days at the Galveston beaches, and in 1869 one of two great fires in downtown Galveston; neither fire affected the family store.[66]

Henry Meyer, Caroline and Emanuel's younger brother, arrived in Louisiana in 1864 and began working in New Orleans as a clerk for D. Blum, Stern & Co., a Jewish dry goods wholesaler that supplied his brother's Clinton store. "Henry had a less abrasive personality than his older brother and developed confidence in Emanuel among the New Orleans merchants from whom Emanuel bought," according to Ashkenazi.[67] Eventually, Henry moved to Clinton, and by 1870 the Meyer Brothers Store was one of the most prominent among a dozen stores in town. The brothers paid $3,250 for the store property and sold their goods to Clinton residents and the farmers and planters in the region, as well as to a large number of black sharecroppers. They also bought cotton from local growers for a New Orleans factoring firm, A. Levi & Co., which their uncle, Abraham, had used years before.[68] According to Thompson, "The key to the success of the large number of merchant houses and skilled artisans was immigration. . . . German immigrants were particularly well represented among Clinton's merchants as well, and many of them were Jewish."[69]

The brothers settled into the Clinton community, married local Jewish women, owned homes, became involved in community affairs, and managed their store. Emanuel paid his bills, kept the store operating, and remained a step ahead of his creditors, teetering at times on the verge of insolvency. In 1875, the brothers' uncle, Abraham, had to step in to negotiate considerable debt repayments that threatened the Meyers' business.



CHEAP STORE!

EMAN'L MEYER.

(In the building formerly occupied by E. Ross.)

I HAVE JUST RECEIVED and am opening up for sale a well selected stock of

FANCY GOODS,

I am daily receiving additions which are of the best and most substantial qualities that can be found in this market, which I will sell as low and I think for LESS THAN ANY HOUSE IN CLINTON.

I have a large assortment of Ladies' and Gentlemen's

Dry Goods, Fancy and Staple Articles.

My present stock is very large and comprises almost every article for personal, household, and plantation use.

PLANTATION SUPPLIES!

Saddlery, Hardware, Tinware, Crockery, Groceries, Provisions,

A large assortment of Kerseys, Russets for farmer's, and other articles too numerous to mention, which will be found at my store, North of the public square.

March 2, 1866. E. MEYER.

E. MEYER ..... H. MEYER

JOY TO THE WORLD!

Good News For

EAST FELICIANA!

THE UNDERSIGNED is now receiving and opening a full and complete assortment of

STAPLE AND FANCY

DRY GOODS,

Ladies' Dress Goods, Gentlemen's Dress and Childrens' Goods:

We have all the Goods to make the Pretty Prettier, and the Homely Handsome.

We have
Boots and Shoes,

We have
Hats and Caps

We have
Hardware & Queensware,

We have
Clothing, etc., etc.

We have *FAMILY GROCERIES AND PLANTATION SUPPLIES* generally.

We have just received a fine lot of *BEAUTIFUL PRINTS* which I am determined to sell very low. Come early and see.

We have money to pay for all *WOOL* and *HIDES* in the parish and will give the highest price in cash or goods for the same.

We bought our goods cheap for ready cash and are determined not to be undersold in this market. We mean what we say. Come and try us and be convinced.

feb. 13, 1869 E. MEYER & BRO.

*Advertisements for the Meyer store in Clinton, Louisiana. Note the addition of Henry's name in the second ad, following his move to Clinton and new partnership in the company. (*East Feliciana Patriot*, March 2, 1867, and February 27, 1869, courtesy of Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.)*

Emanuel and Henry also became leaders of Clinton's B'nai B'rith Feliciana Lodge No. 239, which included their uncle and cousins as members. Bayou Sara Lodge No. 162 likewise boasted active family members.[70] "The class of men who joined the B'nai B'rith paralleled those who joined the Odd Fellows and Masons. Drawing primarily from the ranks of small merchants, it probably helped young men make good business contacts and establish their reputation for civic-mindedness," Diner writes.[71]

As evidenced in the letters, the family's struggle with circumstances in their rapidly changing environments posed ongoing conflicts with long-held tradition, specifically the

marital status of the sisters, Caroline and Babette. As they became increasingly exposed to modern secular society, America's new immigrants desired to sever the ties that had once connected them religiously, legally, and socially to their lives in Germany.[72] At least from the perspective of family in Germany, Emanuel and Henry were not doing nearly enough, per their brotherly responsibilities, to properly ensure their sisters' well-being, and their inattentiveness prompted family members in the homeland to admonish them for their behavior.

Brother Karl, then seventeen years old and fulfilling his military obligations, wrote in 1864 about a marriage of a friend in which the bride received five thousand florins (about fifty thousand dollars in current value) from her brothers. His anger is directed at his brothers Emanuel and Henry:

> First of all I want to give you the news about my happy arrival in Lachen. . . . You can easily imagine the joy that our family had with me.
>
> Our joy changed into great sadness today when we received the letter from you and Heinrich [Henry] in which you [withdrew] promises—which I never expected of you. . . . I don't need to mention anything at all about sister [Babette] because you have not thought at all about her. . . .
>
> However, I see that you [two] are not offering anything for your sister. . . . Now I am asking you brothers to provide for your sister, because after all it is also an honor for you two if [you] provide the same. . . . I will offer everything in order to provide for sister Babette in a short time because I can't see her running around this way. So I ask you all to send 600 dollars soon for Babette. . . . I don't want to enjoy a single kreuzer from it, but instead I will make every effort to provide for myself and our dear parents, since they did not have as much. . . . Once again, don't forget the above . . . and provide it soon because it is a [dishonor] for all of our relatives that the brothers have married and the sisters are running around so and get gray hair. . . .

> As I hear, your family is well. . . . So, dear Em, once again I ask you to send 600 dollars for Babette since I know that this is not much in America & then I will soon provide for dear Babette.[73]

The result of this letter is unclear, at least in the months after it was written. Two years later, in 1866, Caroline was engaged to be married, but her fiancé died, prompting the expected words of support and condolence from family in Germany as well as the hope that she would eventually find a husband. The conflict between German and American customs flared again, however, about three years later when Henry's marriage unleashed another torrent of anger, embarrassment, and conflict. Karl, his mother Regina, and his sister Babette repeated Karl's earlier comments almost verbatim, and after learning of Henry's planned nuptials, Regina wrote her sons, reminding them that their older sister, Caroline, remained unmarried. Her other letters usually ended with an expression of love. This one did not:

> With dripping tears, we read from Heinrich that you did the same as your brother Meir when you also got married without even letting us know anything about it. . . . Meanwhile, you let [Caroline] run around single and we have to be ashamed in front of everyone and keep our eyes lowered since everyone is saying she will have to work in America until she is old and gray.[74]

Twenty-three-year-old Babette added emphasis in this same letter's margin: "Much luck with all your plans. Excuse us. Hoping for a good answer." She continued:

> You [two] have put her far away so that you don't have her before your eyes anymore. This is really nice of 2 brothers not to provide anymore for a sister. . . . Isn't it true, dear sister? . . .
>
> What's loveliest is, Heinrich got engaged as a 24-year-old boy, when he really should still have been a stranger to such things. We were surprised about Emanuel, who was already more of an adult than Hein-

> rich. But they will, I believe, come to regret it yet, but it will be too late. . . . I would be ashamed if any of our relatives knew. . . . You all can now use sister Karolina [Caroline] as a maid. Now you can do it this way: Brother Emanuel can for a few months. After that, Heinrich. That is really nice of brothers.[75]

In his one attempt at placating his American siblings, Karl writes below Babette's last line, "If sister Babetta and our dear mother have offended you, then please excuse them." Yet even this is followed by the usual request for funds.[76] This kerfuffle about Henry's engagement also led to cross words between him and Caroline, who wrote her brother from Galveston. Not one to withhold emotions, Caroline provided a tart comment in another letter asking her brother Emanuel about his wife. "What is Rose doing? Paper must be quite expensive at her house since nothing is heard from her."[77]

Again, the letters from 1864 to 1865 do not resolve the question about whether the brothers ever sent money to repay travel debts, or for their sister's dowry, or how the spat about Henry's engagement was resolved. In later years, however, the letters indicate little evidence of lingering anger, especially from the mother, who was quite pleased with photos of her grandchildren sent to her from the Meyer siblings. Did they have the money to send? In the mid-1860s, the answer is probably not, or at least not as easily as the family in Germany assumed. Richard H. Kilbourne notes that in 1865, the family lacked the financing that a competitor had and depended on credit extended from their key cotton dealer in New Orleans, Abraham Levi, to finance their inventory of merchandise and manage the day-to-day operations of the store. Simply put, the six hundred dollars for a dowry, or about nine thousand dollars in today's currency, was a considerable sum for brothers struggling to manage their business during the Civil War era. Their family in Germany likely had little concept of how much such a sum meant to Emanuel and Henry.[78]

The brothers' business prospects improved in succeeding years, based on their store ledgers and Dun credit reports that note in November 1869 their good character, sense for business, and annual store revenue of about four thousand dollars. Advertisements in the *East Feliciana Patriot* highlight groceries, dry goods, linens, and imported goods for ladies, men, and children. Still, their success largely depended on loan repayments from customers who paid for their goods based on the anticipated worth of the next year's cotton crop. The merchants borrowed money from their cotton dealers in New Orleans and delayed payment to their suppliers. "Emanuel's talent for holding his wholesale vendors at bay was truly remarkable," Kilbourne writes. "He made partial payments, he made excuses, but he also always responded promptly to the complaints of his creditors with reassuring words." A Dun report from September 1870 observed, "Doing good bus[iness] got prompt on their payments," a clear reference to the Meyers paying their debts. Emanuel also bought a home in 1870, for which he paid $3,500, an indication that the brothers had established a foothold and likely viewed their responsibilities to their German relatives as being of lesser and lesser importance.[79]

Acculturating into America: "I really have a good homeland."

The Meyer letters, coupled with genealogical and historical detail, support the oft-discussed acculturation of immigrants into their adopted American home. Ashkenazi writes specifically about the family:

> The distinctive nature of the Meyers' approach to business was Emanuel's willingness to run a store through the difficult time of the Civil War and then under almost impossible financing arrangements with [Abraham] Levi. The Meyer brothers persevered and succeeded because they exercised frugality in both business and personal habits. As so often happened in the small towns of Louisiana, Jews found a place for themselves by practicing self-denial in the face of southern values dominated by the conspicuous consumption of the planters. . . . [T]hey were willing . . . to accept depriva-

> tion with the expectation of future gain, as were other Jewish immigrants.[80]

Especially the letters written after the Civil War indicate that the Meyers and their relatives followed well-established immigrant patterns, demonstrating their adeptness in adapting to their new environment in order to fit in. They relied on each other for emotional and economic support during the difficult years of Reconstruction in a network not always available to other immigrant families. The men in the family often wrote about their business affairs, whether good or bad, and exchanged greetings and news from business associates.

Two letters from 1868, mailed together on the same day, exemplify how the Meyers relied upon Abraham Levy and the network he had established. Eight family members, including the Meyer brothers, established businesses with the elder Levy's financial support and close friendships throughout the region. In a six-page letter, Levy writes three pages in German to his nephew Henry and three pages, mostly in English with some German interspersed, to nephew Emanuel. The first letter is written on stationery from a New Orleans firm that imported foreign and domestic dry goods and had employed Henry Meyer before he moved to Clinton to work full-time in the brothers' store. The owners were among Levy's long-time associates and likely attended to his personal and business needs when he visited New Orleans. The focus on business, specifically the payment of debts related to cotton shipments, is a common topic of the letters the men exchanged. Their business success revolved around cotton prices and the prompt shipment and receipt of the bales in New Orleans. Emanuel was continually bewildered, if not financially impacted, when bales of cotton were judged to be inferior and the price lowered when it was shipped from Bayou Sara. The elder Levy makes reference to "A Levi," the family's long-time partner in the buying and selling of cotton, as well the names of firms outside of Louisiana, indicating that the Meyer and Levy business interests extended regionally. Levy also references his travel plans and those of other family members who moved frequently between

the Felicianas, New Orleans, and Texas, reflecting the common bonds of family, friendship, and business. Levy adds a personal touch to end each letter, indicating his fondness for his nephews and their families, if not his place in their lives as mentor and patriarch.[81]

The Levy House, still standing in Jackson, Louisiana. Abraham Levy lived here for about twenty-five years after 1871. Built in the early 1800s, the house was once part of a school before being converted into a private residence about midcentury. It was moved in the 1970s to the grounds of nearby Asphodel Plantation and served as an inn and restaurant before it was moved again to its current location in Jackson, where it holds a private residence and offices for a motion picture production company. The house was used for filming on the 1958 film The Long Hot Summer. *(Courtesy of Jay Silverberg.)*

The brothers also likely modeled their social involvement after their uncle, whose diverse business and community interests included ongoing support of the Jewish Widows and Orphans Home in New Orleans and a stint as a postmaster, a political patronage position commonly held by merchants

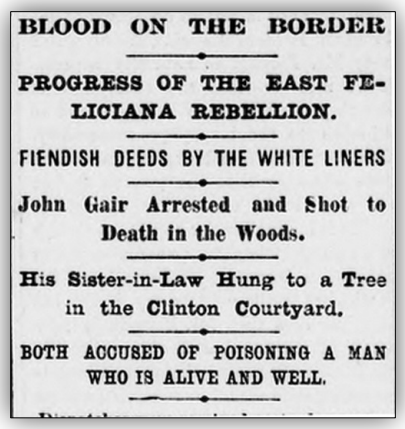
eager to have residents visit their stores. Although their daily lives were likely consumed with business, Emanuel and Henry also occupied important roles among their peers. In addition to their leadership roles in Clinton's B'nai B'rith lodge, they raised money for a Jewish charity in Clinton, sending tickets to suppliers and then unsuccessfully trying to charge them $2.50 per ticket against their accounts, and followed their uncle in sending their daughters to the Silliman Female Collegiate Institute, one of the region's preeminent girls' schools.[82]

The letters include few references to politics or government in Louisiana or abroad, yet Emanuel and Henry did become politically involved and were connected to one of the more wanton acts of the day, the 1875 murder of John Gair, a black Republican leader during Reconstruction, and the hanging of his sister-in-law, Babe Matthews. The treachery and violence of the post–Civil War period in Louisiana had a particular hold on the Felicianas that carried through to the 1876 presidential election. While the historical record is unclear about the brothers' complicity in the murders of Gair and his sister-in-law, Henry Meyer is named in a congressional investigative report as a member of the posse of at least forty men who chased Gair from Clinton to Baton Rouge.[83]

The events were precipitated by the alleged attempt by Gair's sister-in-law to kill the white Clinton doctor for whom she worked; she was reportedly coerced by a Gair associate to lace a bucket of water with poison. She was apprehended and questioned, pointing to Gair as the mastermind in the plot. Vigilantes took up arms and headed on horseback for Baton Rouge, where Gair was reportedly hiding. They found him and returned with him to Clinton, where members of the posse shot and killed him and left his body beside the road. His sister-in-law was hung from a tree on the Clinton courthouse square according to contemporary reports.

From various accounts, Gair had upset the established political leadership in the region. He was reported to be the leader of an uprising during the summer of 1875 and had

been forced to leave the area. Statements are unclear about whether his death was politically motivated, in particular if Democratic leaders had contrived a plot to have him killed. In any case, no one in Clinton was ever brought to justice for the two deaths.



BLOOD ON THE BORDER

PROGRESS OF THE EAST FELICIANA REBELLION.

FIENDISH DEEDS BY THE WHITE LINERS

John Gair Arrested and Shot to Death in the Woods.

His Sister-in-Law Hung to a Tree in the Clinton Courtyard.

BOTH ACCUSED OF POISONING A MAN WHO IS ALIVE AND WELL.

Headline from the October 15, 1876, issue of the New Orleans Republican, *announcing the murders of John Gair and his sister-in-law, Babe Matthews, in Clinton, Louisiana. (Library of Congress.)*

The Meyer brothers also appear on a list of Democratic community leaders reporting on November 22, 1876, "that at the late election held in this parish on the 7th of November, 1876, there was a perfectly peaceable election. The canvass was remarkably quiet and during the whole canvass we have not heard of a single case of outrage for political purposes."[84] In fact, in East and West Feliciana and other parishes throughout Louisiana, black voters were threatened and told to stay away from the polls. Governor Henry Clay Warmoth, whose taste for intimidation was widely known, told a national reporter, "I don't pretend to be honest. . . . I only pretend to be as honest as anybody in politics and more so than those fellows who are opposing me now. . . . [Why], damn it, everybody is demoralized down here. Corruption is the fashion."[85]

In their studies of violent incidents in Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Tennessee, Paul Berger, Daniel Weinfeld, Stuart Rockoff, and Leonard Rogoff find that some Jews en-

gaged in issues of black social and political equality during Reconstruction.[86] Nonetheless, even in terms of support for popular Democratic aims, "Most sources suggest that Jews stayed out of the complicated and often violent politics of Reconstruction," Rockoff writes in his detailed examination of Jewish leadership in Ascension Parish, about seventy miles south of the Felicianas.[87] Thus Henry Meyer's direct engagement with the Gair posse is contrary to typical Jewish actions of the era. Yet the evidence here supports the growing contention that Jews were involved in Reconstruction politics. Although the letters end in 1871, before these events unfolded, newspaper accounts mention the Meyers and two other family members as part of Democratic Party committees. Julius Freyhan and Morris Wolf served on the Elect Samuel Tilden executive committee in West Feliciana Parish.[88] Morris Wolf was Hannah Levy Wolf's son, and the two men were brothers-in-law and business partners. Evidently they agreed with the majority of their white neighbors in opposing Reconstruction and supporting the Democratic Party, and they acted as opportunists who mixed business with political engagement.

Religion is another common theme in the letters. By the mid-1850s, Jewish families in the region likely numbered no more than one hundred, and the family members counted themselves among the earliest of these.[89] Yet being Jewish in America was much different than in their homeland. The first synagogue in their region was not established until 1901 in St. Francisville, twenty-five miles from Clinton. Nonetheless the letters show that the families in Louisiana gathered for Jewish holidays, exchanged traditional Judaic greetings with each other, and received the same from their relatives in Germany. The Meyers joined other Jewish merchants in closing their stores for Rosh Hashanah, a pattern Jewish merchants frequently followed. Caroline wrote about attending the 1868 opening of Galveston's Congregation B'nai Israel.[90] In February 1860, Karl wrote:

> Dear brother, you wrote me asking if I have learned anything since you left home. I have done my utmost

> because I am leaving school at Easter and will have my bar mitzvah 80 days after Easter. I would [like to] learn even more, though, because I am thinking of going to school in Neustadt in the summer if we have the strength because business with us is very bad right now. Dear, dear sister, no day, no hour, no minute passes that I don't think of you all, my dear sister. I remember especially every Sabbath when I put on my beautiful shawl that you bought me as a reminder of you.[91]

The letters from Germany frequently refer to the role of God, reinforcing the Meyers' Jewish identity, and there are similar references to God in letters from America. Participation in the B'nai B'rith symbolized social association with fellow Jews.

The letters also show the emotional conflicts between the family's bonds to the land of their birth and their adopted American home. The Franco-Prussian War dominated several letters in 1869 and 1870, as the siblings exchanged concerns about brother Karl's military obligation, yet letters from Germany mention little of the government turmoil undoubtedly affecting the family there. Babette worried about how work would get done with Karl gone and their father ailing, and Caroline, reading daily dispatches about the war on the front pages of the Galveston newspaper, expressed concern about her brother's well-being, a sentiment she had introduced some years earlier when she told her siblings how discouraged she was about Karl ever being able to emigrate because he was in the German Army.[92]

One letter in particular, the only extant from America to Germany, encapsulates the emotions of separation from the immigrants' families in Germany and the comfort of knowing what they had achieved. Caroline had been gone from Germany for nine years when she wrote a few weeks before Rosh Hashanah on stationery from her cousin's Galveston store, Greenleve, Block & Co.:

> Most valued parents and much-loved siblings,
>
> [I am writing] to inform you that I am very well and hope the same of you all, which is always the main

> issue at this time of year, and I hope to God that it will continue to be so and that we will have a better summer than last year.
>
> Now, my dears, how are things where you are? I hope that you received my letter of last month and that I convinced you all that everyone here is healthy. . . .
>
> My dears, I have also received letter[s] from my dear brothers very often. They, along with their families, are in the best of health, thank God. . . .
>
> Now, my dears, I think we're having New Year's celebration in three weeks, and for this I bid you all a cordial farewell, and happiness and joy for your children and children's children, and hope that we will still exchange letters with each other for a hundred years, or will possibly even see each other personally if we both now get some luck. Now, my dears, I really have a good homeland now but I wish to God I could again have the happiness of being in your dear midst.[93]

The letters end in 1871, the same year the Meyer siblings' mother, Regina, died and a year before their sister Babette finally married. Their brother Karl returned home from the Franco-Prussian War and eventually married. By the 1870's, Emanuel and Henry Meyer were established in their dry goods store in downtown Clinton. They raised their families in homes only blocks apart and not far from their store.[94] The letters from Germany often reference the photos of the brothers' children and the personal milestones the family in Germany could only experience through the words of a letter sent from five thousand miles away.

Caroline eventually married a Clinton grocer named Rudolph Carow, who had been born in Berlin in 1830, but their life together was troubled. Carow's store on the town square in Clinton burned down in 1878, and he lost the building and its entire contents, none of which were insured. With the help of other merchants, he opened a new store, although soon he and Caroline left Clinton for Baton Rouge, where Carow's new business failed. In 1893, he took his own life. According to a report in the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, he wrote to his rabbi saying

that his life was in shambles and that he was broke, and he asked the rabbi to use insurance from B'nai B'rith and the Knights of Honor to take care of his wife.[95] Carow's story is a reminder that immigration to America did not inevitably lead to success: even in this hard-working and well-connected family, some members succeeded, others did not.

The ensuing years also were unkind to the Felicianas and their region. Weissbach asserts that Jewish communities that remained vital were able to grow economically and demographically in the decades after the significant Jewish immigration periods of the mid- to late-1800s.[96] Unfortunately, as the boll weevil began decimating the region's cotton crop, the Felicianas' economy rapidly declined. Mississippi River flooding eventually caused Bayou Sara's demise. The critical linkages that Diner describes as "multiple migrations, youthful founders, . . . and the connectedness between family and community formation," which bound Jewish families to the region for nearly fifty years, frayed and largely disappeared.[97] Abraham Levy died in December 1899 in Jackson, Louisiana, at eighty years old, his passing noted by his B'nai B'rith lodge brothers on the front page of the *Bayou Sara Times-Democrat*. His sister, Hannah, had died in New Orleans eleven months prior at age seventy-eight. Her last forty years were spent in New Orleans near her children, Morris Wolf and Sarah, who married Julius Freyhan, one of the more noted Jewish leaders of the time in the Gulf South.[98]

By 1900, the entire Meyer/Levy family was all but gone from the Felicianas, as were many of the Jewish families who had settled there more than fifty years earlier. The first generation of the family to be born in the United States had moved

Graves of Abraham Levy and Henry Meyer,
Jewish Cemetery, Clinton, Louisiana.
(Photographs by Tara Marie Photography, courtesy of Jay Silverberg.)

their families, their businesses, and their lives to the larger cities of Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and New York. Emanuel Meyer had moved to Alabama, where, in his later years, he managed a newsstand in a Selma hotel lobby.[99] His brother Henry retired to a northern Louisiana community. Both lived with family members in their later years before their deaths in 1914 and 1921, respectively. Their widowed sister Caroline died in 1907 in New Orleans. Meyer and Levy family members occupy nearly one-third of the burial plots in the Jewish section of the Masonic cemetery, about one mile from downtown Clinton.

The Meyer Brothers Store was kept in the family and sold to Henry Meyer's cousin, Jonah Levy, who also was Abraham Levy's son.[100] He became mayor of Clinton the same year he declared bankruptcy, resulting in the eventual closure of the store in the early 1900s—and hidden within its walls, the letters that help to narrate the story of a family's linkages in America and Germany despite the strains of immigration. The Meyers, Levys, and their relatives followed familiar patterns showing

how critically important chain migration was in establishing an economic and societal foothold upon which the family would base its business and personal success. To some extent, this is also a story of rootlessness. These people maintained various links as they spread out and moved for economic opportunity, to find Jewish marriage and business partners, to retire, or to move to larger Jewish communities. It is a quintessential saga of American Jewry.

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Meyer family letters:

Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, December 17, 1855
Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, February 17, 1856
Karl Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, December 6, 1864
Regina, Babette, and Karl Meyer to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, [1868]
Caroline Meyer to her family in Germany, August 29, 1868
Abraham Levy to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, December 21, 1868

NOTE: The text of the letters appears exactly as in the translators' rendering of the original German and Yiddish documents, except that paragraph breaks have been inserted where they improve clarity. Some words, characters, and even entire passages in the letters are difficult to read or to translate because of deterioration, tears, holes, and folds in the documents; bracketed ellipses indicate sections of the letters that are illegible. Editorial insertions, including translators' interpretations, are enclosed in brackets, with question marks inserted where the translators are uncertain in their attempt to decipher handwriting or words.

Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, December 17, 1855

Lachen, December 17, 1855

Dear Son Mayer,

We received your letter from Orleans on November 18th and see from it that God Almighty has led you healthily and fortunately to Orleans and that you had a good voyage, praise the Lord, and you were not sick, thank God, which was always what we wanted. Since we have prayed for you day after day and God Almighty has heard us, and since we see in your letter how you arrived in Orleans, [and] that God Almighty led you immediately to such good people [who] embraced you immediately and immediately gave you such a big present, you can see: when distress is greatest, then God is nearest. This gave us very great joy: that you now immediately have money again, because your travel money was so little. When you also sent us an American [dollar?] from your present [. . .] we should enjoy looking at it [. . .]. We're doing that, too, which God Almighty knows.

I have to write you that this letter that you wrote from Baisara [Bayou Sara] on November 6th was received by us on December 14th and from it we saw that you found your uncles and aunts so healthy and [that they?] were so happy and immediately bought you a horse and gave you goods, so that you should immediately head into the country, and that that will have seemed funny to you because you were still such a stranger, but I believe that would happen to anyone. But you have your dear uncles, where you now have great support, in that they immediately helped you, so that you might amount to something. Dear child! I believe that this first time heading into the countryside was not pleasant for you. But [as the saying goes] all beginnings are hard. But you know that you would also have to slave away at home, though [. . .] that [. . .] hard to you. God will help, and when you write again, write how you like the climate and how things went for you on your trip.

Dear Child. One is not rich immediately. If you cannot send anything at the moment, all we know is that we are working day after day if you can only provide for yourself at this time. If you see that you would not like to travel long distances, [then] stay for a while in the area where your people are. You will still earn as much as you need for yourself once people know you a little. You

know that your father is still working, that he always sees that he is also earning something. He sends the meat to Kirrweiler and Maikammer, as you do as well.[101]

Now I have to write to you about Germany. Business is coming along as ever. Every week, we and Mayer slaughter 2 pieces, and a pound of meat [. . .]. We just slaughter[ed] a [. . .] that cost 50 [florin] and [. . .] quarter weighs 70 pounds; a pound of skin costs 2 [or 12?] florin. A pound of [Taschlich?] costs 16 florin.[102] Today we just slaughtered a cow of [. . .] that cost 20 [standard?] thalers for almost [. . .] 90 florin. Today, father has the [. . .] to Wolf from Maikammer. We sold that for 8 florin. Now I have to tell you that Mother and Heinrich are staying in Münster [probably Klingenmünster] with Grandmother, that Grandmother is now very happy, and she is still very healthy and can walk as well as she did 10 years ago.[103] Now I have to tell you how the fruits are with us. A hundred pounds of grain cost 8 thaler. Spelt costs 7 thaler. Barley 6 thaler, 30–40 cents. A [. . .] of potatoes costs 36 cents. The tobacco business is bad this year. We still have ours. I remain your father forever. Many thousands of greetings.

[Joseph] Mayer.

Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, February 17, 1856

L[ache]n, February 17, 1856

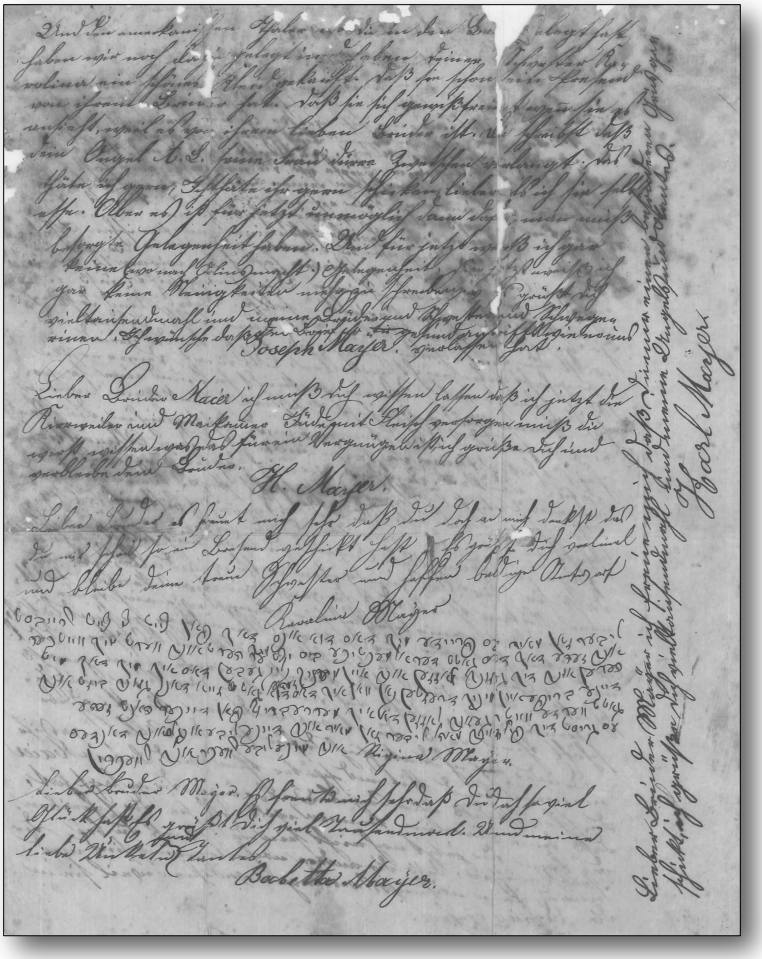
Dear Son Maier,

Your letter that you wrote on January 11th, 1856 arrived here on February 14th and from it we see that you are healthy, thank God. That made us very happy. At noon on Wednesday when we saw your letter, we were all so full of joy that we didn't want to eat anything more. You write that you have hardly received any answer to your letters [that] you have written to us. We have received all of your letters, and found the dollar inside your letter that you wrote from Orleans. You can imagine [. . .] great joy when we saw that you sent an American dollar in your first letter.

The second letter, which you wrote on November 6th in Baisara [Bayou Sara] at your Uncle A. [Levy's] home, we received on December 14th and immediately sent off a letter, so that you would be sure to receive an answer soon, dear Child, so that you would not live in any [uncertainty?]. I think you will have received the letter. You can't conceive the joy we had, when you already sold so many goods on your first trip and got such a large sum of money. It is good fortune when one comes to such a strange new land and can immediately fit in with humanity—for that one can thank God Almighty. Now we are also very curious about what articles of goods your business consists of. When you write again, write about that. If [or when] you are used to it, also the business. You will certainly be happy to do that.

Dear Maier, just follow your dear uncles. You will also see for yourself that everything they advise you is for a good purpose, and [that they] do everything for your benefit [so] that you will certainly amount to something and can be a little helpful to us—which are also in your thoughts if God Almighty keeps you healthy and brings you luck. You write that you want to send us 50 dollars by Easter. If you can do that already, then it would certainly make us happy that your dear uncles put you in a business so that you can earn something. Dear brothers, I thank you all for everything you are doing for my child now and in the future. Dear Maier, you write that your uncle D. [Levy] has said to you that your Karolina [Caroline] wants to come. If she should write you for now that cannot yet be. You yourself will know that the others are all still little and one cannot demand anything of them because they are still going to school.

And the American dollar that you put in the letter, we added to it and bought your sister Karolina [Caroline] a pretty dress, so that she already has a present from her brother, [and] so that she will certainly be happy when she looks at it because it is from her dear brother. You write that your uncle A. L. [Abraham Levy] is asking his wife for prunes. I would be happy to do that. I would rather send them to her than eat them myself. But for now it is



Second page of the February 17, 1856, letter from Joseph Meyer in Lachen to his son Emanuel in Bayou Sara, Louisiana. This letter illustrates how the family combined multiple messages into a single letter. Joseph's portion ends mid page with his signature, followed by messages written and signed by various family members including his wife, Regina, who wrote in Yiddish. (Courtesy of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.)

impossible because for that, one has to have a procurement opportunity. For now I don't know of any opportunity at all ([anyone]

who is heading to Orleans). For now, I don't know of any more news to write. I greet you and my brothers and sisters and sisters-in-law many thousands of times.

I hope that the letter finds them as healthy as us when it left us.

Joseph Mayer

Karl Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, December 6, 1864

Lachen, December 6, 1864

Dearest Brothers,

First of all I want to give you the news about my happy arrival in Lachen. I [report?] that our family is well and in good spirits. You can easily imagine the joy that our family had with me.

Our joy changed into great sadness today when we received the letter from you and Heinrich in which you [withdrew] promises—which I never expected of you. [. . .]. Above all, you ought to have thought of your sister Karolina in America, because before you two provided for her, I would really not have believed it of either of you both to [. . .]. However, you moved sister Karolina far from you, because you think that far away is good for the [shoes? shoe sales?] I don't need to mention anything at all about sister [Babette] because you have not thought at all about her, that she is older than you and H.

Recently I heard that Beer from Billigheim is marrying a girl from Ingenheim, whose brothers sent her 5,000 florin. However, I see that you [two] are not offering anything for your sister. I really believe that you would have received the same [. . .] in 4 or 5 years. Now I am asking you brothers to provide for your sister, because after all it is also an honor for you two if [you] provide the same and the [. . .] circumstances of our parents that one cannot give any daughter [anything] from it. I will offer everything in order to provide for sister Babette in a short time because I can't see her running around this way [selling meat?]. So I ask you all to send 600 dollars soon for Babette however far away (please don't

believe it is for me). I don't want to enjoy a single kreuzer from it, but instead I will make every effort to provide for myself and our dear parents, since they did not have as much as [Grandma]. Since you, dear H., asked about me at the end of your letter, I'll do the same with my congratulations at the end, but I ask you again if it is possible to calculate back until our sister is provided for. I congratulate you warmly and wish you much luck in your project. Once again, don't forget the above [. . .] and provide it soon, because it is a [dishonor] for all of our relatives that the brothers have married and the sisters are running around so and get gray hair.

Dear [Emanuel], the [. . .] also applies to you. As I hear, your family is well, which is always [. . .]. As you know, I was in Aschaffenburg for 10 months, but during this time did not receive a single line from you all, then soldiers or brothers or relatives in America had always received letters.[104] So, dear Em, once again I ask you to send 600 dollars for Babette since I know that this is not much in America & then I will soon provide for dear Babette. Now enough, or much too much, for today. Now I am ending the [. . .], but not in my heart. I greet you and kiss you all warmly many thousand times. Something else to mention—probably you, dear Emanuel, will be responsible for this [. . .] so that Heinrich [can] come to this big [wedding?]. Excuse me if I have been so [. . .] to one of you.

Regina, Babette, and Karl Meyer to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, [1868][105]

REGINA TO HENRY

Today I received your letter. With dripping tears we read from [. . .] Heinrich that you did the same as your brother Meir when you also got married without even letting us know anything about it. You would have certainly believed if you had let the matter be prolonged that you certainly would have received the large necessary [. . .], but it would have been nice if something had been said since [you] would have provided for your sister. Meanwhile, you let her run around single and we have to be ashamed in front

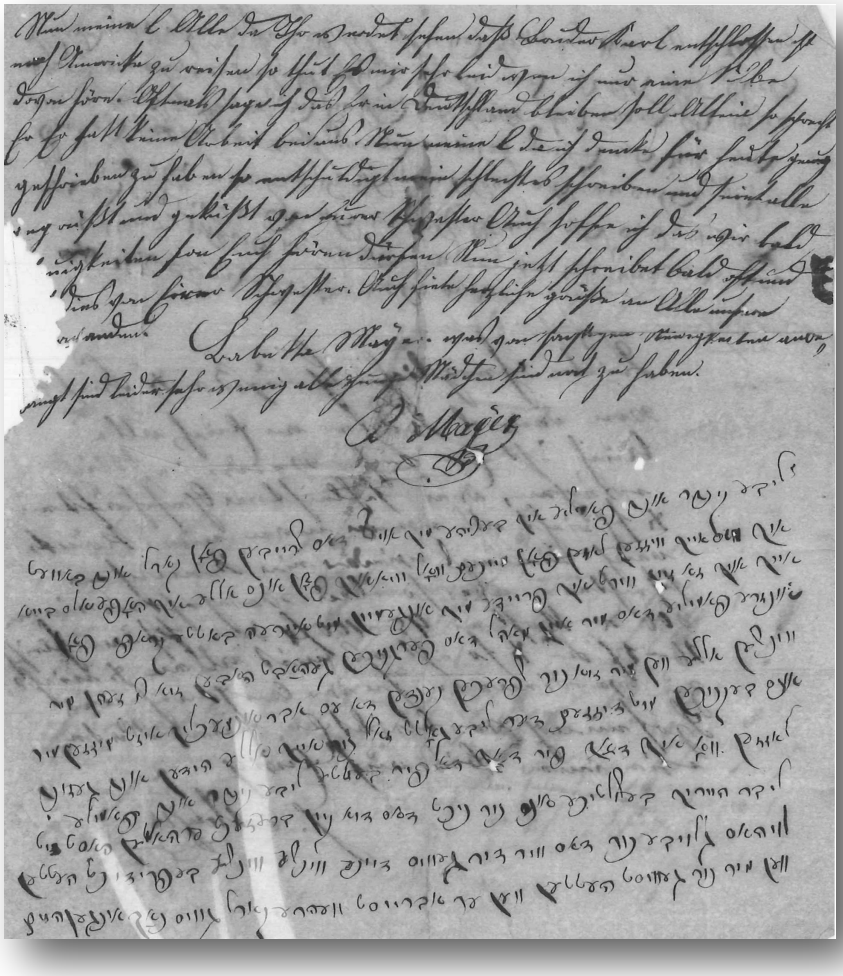
of everyone and keep our eyes lowered since everyone is saying she will have to work in America until she is old and gray. After that, she can go around begging in America.

Her brothers are not concerned about her. Just think what a great sorrow this is for [your] parents and siblings. I am just ashamed to go out among people, but probably this did not cause you any sorrow either. Can't you remember how [vehemently?] I entreated you all? Now you should just think about not causing so much sorrow. You should have thought about making your parents happy and providing for your sisters. It would have been nice if we had known the matter. [If we could have said] brothers have provided for their sisters. Now I think you will certainly send 600 dollars for Babette and not let the matter slip out of sight and certainly send it when you receive this letter. [Your] brother Meir waited until he was 26 years old, but you do not search for your [. . .] at all to [take advantage of?]. Now I [. . .] don't know any other news for today and I finish with my writing.

Regina Meyer

KARL TO HENRY AND EMANUEL

If sister Babetta [Babette] and our dear mother have offended you, then please excuse them, for our dear mother is very angry and upset since you, dear Heinrich, did not ask her for advice & Babetta now thinks all is lost. Once again, I ask you all to provide what I wrote you about & then everything will be forgotten. The only thing is that I'm very sorry that you all didn't ask sister Karolina & [that] you, dear Heinrich, were [married]. For now, I won't say anything to anyone until [it] is exposed by other people later. Dear brother Heinrich, I certainly believed I would often receive a few lines from you in [Jacksonburg?], which was not the case. I arrive here [for the first time? on the 1st of the month?] and now have to hear this again already, and don't know how long it will last. But I expect to make sister Babetta a bride in this time. I ask you just to provide what I wrote you about. Once again, I



This page and opposite: *"With dripping tears we read . . ." Yiddish letter from Regina Meyer in Germany to her son Henry in Clinton, Louisiana, probably in 1868. The German portion at the bottom was added by Henry's sister Babette. (Courtesy of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.)*

apologize on all of our behalf, because, dear Heinrich, you yourself will perceive that you have done wrong.

Once again may you be greeted and kissed and with that, I remain your loyal brother forever.

K. Mayer

Hoping for an answer soon. Excuse our poor handwriting.

BABETTE TO HENRY AND EMANUEL

I refer to the notes of brother Karl and our dear mother. When we received the letter today and saw in it that our dear parents have raised such virtuous sons and have accomplished fine results and have asked them nicely for advice, that really makes me happy – so that I might be ashamed if a stranger should see in at such a time [that] there is such a group of ignorant young people. I could almost die of grief when I think of my sister who is now almost 32 years old and has been hurt by her brother so greatly behind the light. You [two] have put her far away so that you don't have her before your eyes anymore. That is really nice of 2 brothers, not to provide anymore for a sister. That really needs to be inserted into all newspapers beforehand. Unfortunately, no one has to suffer from this except for sister Karolina, who has been [there] for years and unfortunately did not have any recourse [or shelter] anymore except with strangers. Isn't it true, dear sister? We have nice brothers in America who provide nicely for their sisters.

Really, they can no longer remember in what poverty [their] parents raised them and really believed that the brothers did their duty as brothers and children. What's loveliest is, Heinrich got engaged as a 24-year-old boy, when he really should still have been a stranger to such things. We were surprised about Emanuel, who was already more of an adult than Heinrich. But they will, I believe, come to regret it yet, but it will be too late. If you [two] want brother Karl to travel to America too, your father-in-law probably has another daughter that he should immediately make obligatory for them.

Oh, I really thought brother Heinrich must be crazy, to throw away his youth in such a way. I would be ashamed if any of our relatives knew. We are really not permitted to have any enjoyable hour on earth anymore. No sooner is brother Karl home for a few days, then we already have to have great trouble again. A person really does not need to wonder about you all. You all did not ask your parents for advice. Now I am ending my letter and greet you all many times. You all can now use sister Karolina as a maid. Now you can do it this way: Brother Emanuel can for a few months. After that, Heinrich. That is really nice of brothers.

Babette Mayer

My dears, before [. . .] this, there is something else to mention: I am really very sorry that I have to write and send off such letters to brothers.

Much luck with all your plans. Excuse us. Hoping for a good answer.

Caroline Meyer to her family in Germany, August 29, 1868

Greenleve, Block & Co.
Wholesale Dry Goods,
Strand Street
Galveston, Tex., August 29, 1868

Most valued parents and much-loved siblings,

[I am writing] to inform you that I am very well and hope the same of you all, which is always the main issue at this time of year, and I hope to God that it will continue to be so and that we will have a better summer than last year.

Now, my dears, how are things where you are? I hope that you received my letter of last month and that I convinced you all that everyone here is healthy, God be praised.

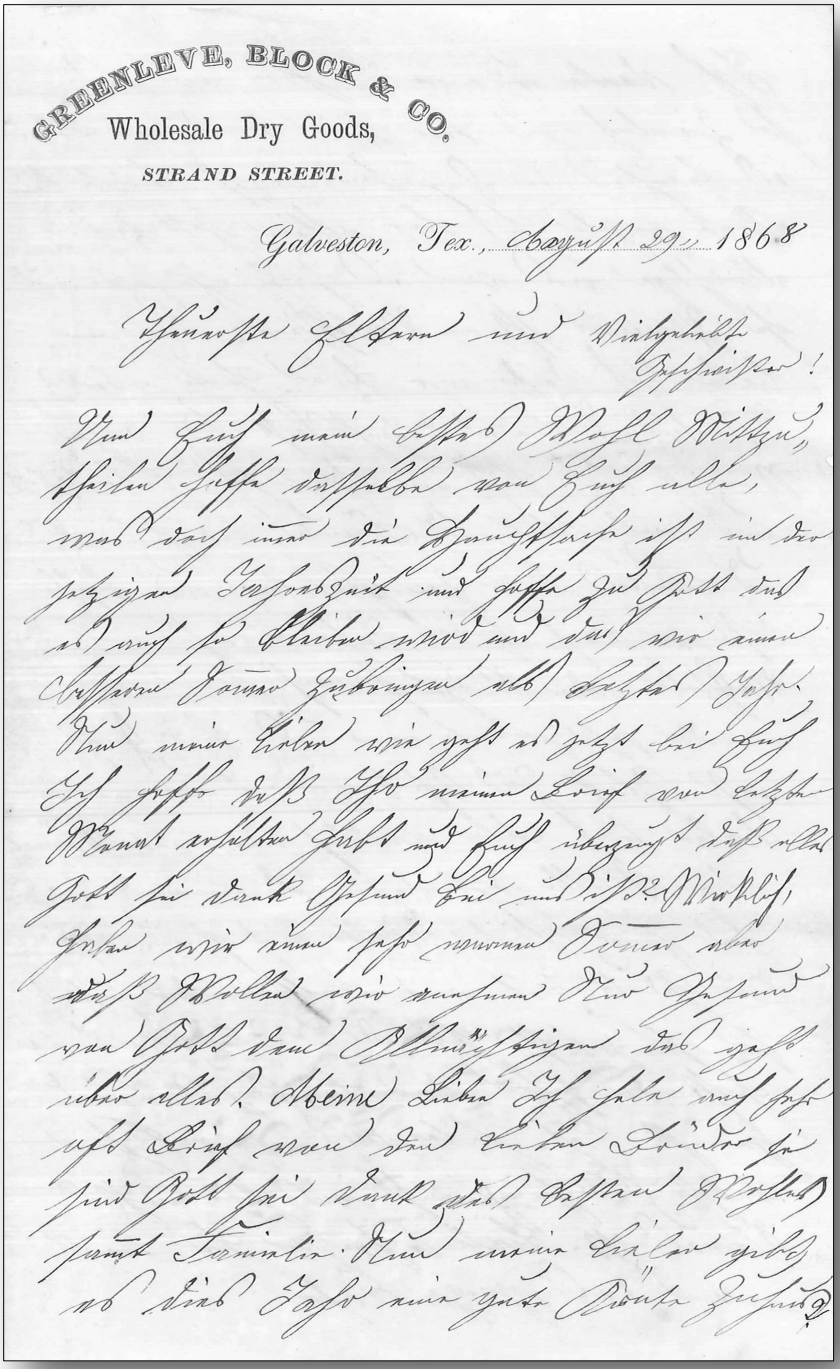
We are really having a very warm summer, but we'll accept that from God Almighty—Just healthy—that's all-important. My dears, I have also received letter[s] from my dear brothers very often. They, along with their families, are in the best of health, thank God. Now, my dears, is there any good cabbage at home

this year? I think—and, as I hear—it is going to be pretty good here. We can use it, after all, because there has hardly been any harvest here for a long time. Only God Almighty knows when it will be time. Whoever trusts in Him is never abandoned.

Now, my dears, I think we're having New Year's celebration in three weeks, and for this I bid you all a cordial farewell, and happiness and joy for your children and children's children, and hope that we will still exchange letters with each other for a hundred years, or will possibly even see each other personally if we both now get some luck. Now, my dears, I really have a good homeland now but I wish to God I could again have the happiness of being in your dear midst. Just patience. God will help, who has already helped so often.

Now, sister Babetta [Babette], have you already made your [. . .] dress? I already made mine last week, which is nothing new here. Dear sister, here people make them all year long. I've often wanted to send you the [. . .] from my [. . .], in order to compare yours with mine. I am not quite as [glossy-haired?] as you. That comes from being in this country. Now, my dear, I hope that I hear special news from you soon, and now you still have to do as many lovely tasks as when I was home.

Opposite page: *Letter from Caroline Meyer, August 29, 1868. Caroline, who settled in Galveston, Texas, in 1868, was the most prolific writer in the collection, responsible for forty-five letters. This letter is the only one in the collection sent from America to Germany. (Courtesy of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.)*



GREENLEVE, BLOCK & CO.

Wholesale Dry Goods,

STRAND STREET.

Galveston, Tex., Sept 29, 1868

Do you still remember the [. . .] that you knitted? I still have mine safely stored. I feel happy when I look at it. Now, my dear, I've written everything necessary. I'll write more when it is a little cooler. Now, my dear parents and siblings, once again I wish you a good New Year as you would wish for yourselves, and kiss each other for me many times. Farewell and may you be greeted and kissed. The one who wishes that is your daughter and sister.

Caroline Mayer

Hope to hear from you soon. Say hello to everyone who asks about me.

Abraham Levy to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, December 21, 1868

LEVY TO HENRY MEYER

D. Blum, [Stern] & Co.
No. 63 Custom House St.

Office in New York, No. 57 Murray Street
New Orleans, December 21, 1868

Dear Henry

Today I received your letter of the 18th of this [month] here. I believed I would be in B. Sara [Bayou Sara] today. However, since I didn't get to [Corpus Christi], I am going [there] tomorrow evening and will be in B. Sara on Wednesday. Also, I expect Louis will be here today from Galveston.[106] All will be coming to Jackson and also to Clinton. In regard to the bill that you owe, I believed—and it is also the case—that Louis settled it with his bill last summer before he left. That's what Louis told me. So if Louis comes today I'll ask him and [I] also want to see Dr. Flescher about it. Now, how is it going with my bills that I turned over to you all in Clinton? How is it [going] with A. J. [Hanly]?[107] You all told me that L. A. [. . .]'s cotton will be on it on the 20th of this [month]. You wrote me [didn't you?] that [. . .] wants to pay for his cotton. I hope that you are [trying?] to get all the money for me, as much as possible, since I want to pay all my debts, so that I get everything in order. How is business? Good, I hope. Louis and I will go to

Clinton when we go to Jackson. Otherwise, nothing new except I very much hope everyone is well. Greetings to all the family from your uncle.

A Levy

Be so good as to write now to Bayou Sara how it's going with all the oats & cotton bills that I gave you all for collection. Also, I am going to see Dr. [Flescher] this evening. Greetings to Emanuel & wife and children.

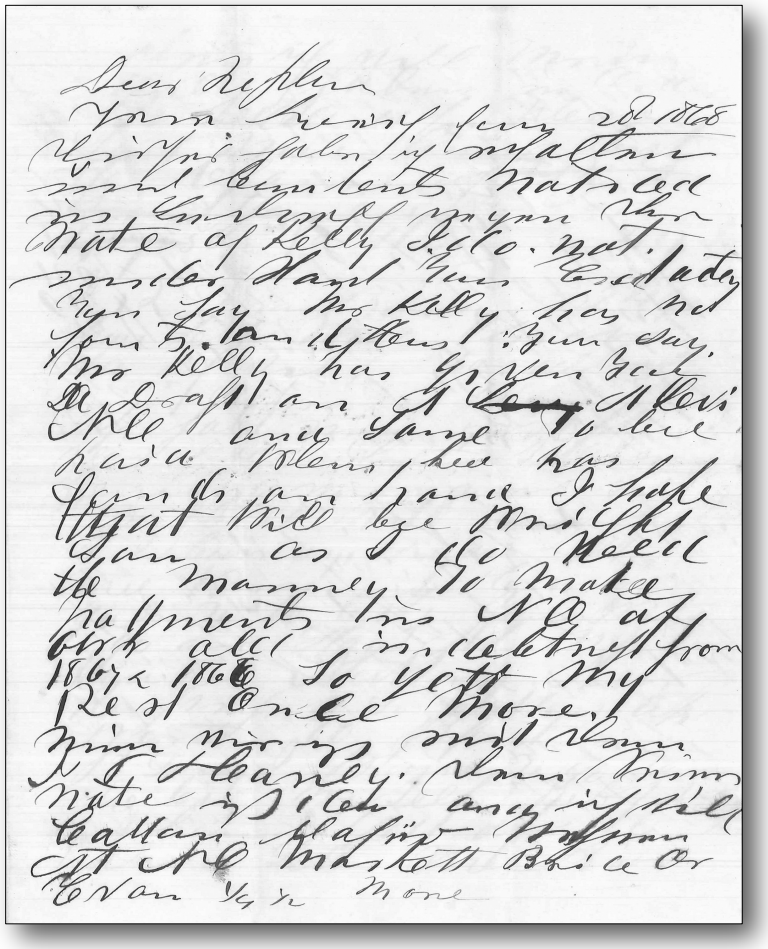
A L

LEVY TO EMANUEL MEYER[108]

Dear Nephew,

I received your letter of the 20th of this month, 1868, and [. . .] naturally in regard to Kelly's cotton I. do. nat. understand you. Yesitatey [Yesterday] Yuu say Mr. Kelly has no fonts [funds] and then Yuu Say Mr. Kelly has given You A Draft on A ~~Levy~~ A Levi NO [New Orleans] [. . .] & hee paid [when?] hee has funds on hand. I hope that will be Meight son [mighty soon] as I do need the money to make payments in NO of over all indebtnes [indebtedness] from 1867 & 1866 to gett my Rest Once more.

Now, how is it with A. [J]. Hanly, because his cotton is [. . .] and I want to take cotton [fabric?] for it at the New Orleans market Or even ¼ ½ more *because I want to have my money* in Order to Settle up. Please let me know about the claime of ~~T R T N. and Gambry &~~ for ~~427 50~~ R L Brown 427.50 I R Montgomey [Montgomery?] 128.44. Please let me know *since I want to have all of that in order. You all told me that I can settle both of them. How is it [going] with Mr. Hall's cotton, in other words with A. J. Hanly?* Please Lett me [know] if Henry is going to [M?] City[.] You will go and stay At My house. Nattey [Nothing] New [. . .] So. La. Catton ahr [South Louisiana cotton are] worth 80 pounds in B Sara. I wand [want] to go to the City my Self *next Sunday* if I kan Gett of [off]. So please Lett me Know all about it. Sent [Send] your letter by the mail Reider [rider] or by mail. I will go to Jaken [Jackson] *on Monday*. Or if [I] Can To Day if nat *Monday*. ma bee [Maybe] I will pay you a Viskit.



"I. do. nat. understand you."
Abraham Levy alternated in his letters between German and broken English, as indicated in this passage from a letter dated December 21, 1868, written from New Orleans to his nephews in Clinton, Louisiana. Addressing his nephew Emanuel, Levy discusses business concerning A. Levi, the Meyers' cotton broker in New Orleans. (Courtesy of the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge.)

All my famly is Well hlen [when] I Left them Last Thurstay. Trape Me Lanne [Drop me a line] if You all Wallt [would] Like To See Henry bfor hee goes to the City. Nattng Els New [Nothing else new]. Fonly [Fondly] your Unkel

A. Levy

NOTES

The author is a descendant of the families writing these letters. The Meyer siblings were his grandmother's cousins; Samuel, Abraham, and Daniel Levy were her great uncles; and Johanna Levy was her great aunt. Abraham Levy likely paid for the passage of the author's great-grandfather, Leopold Mayer, in 1872 and established him in business in Bayou Sara and Jackson, Louisiana, where he and his wife, Addie, became parents to three children who were orphaned in 1897, briefly leaving Levy as the youngsters' caretaker.

The author wishes to thank the translators of the letters: Barbara Guggemos, who translated the German and organized the letter set to include both the German and Yiddish translations; and George Plohn, who translated the Yiddish sections of the letters. A Southern Jewish Historical Society grant helped defray the author's costs for these translations.

[1] The letters referenced here are from the Meyer Brothers' Store Records, Mss. 2909, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Special Collections, Hill Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (hereafter cited as MBSR and LLMVC); In addition to the Meyer store records, MBSR contains correspondence from Abraham Levy's brother-in-law, Leopold Oppenheimer, and son, Emanuel Levy; Louis Michael, who married Elise Levy, the widow of Abraham Levy's younger brother Daniel; Solomon Wolf, a Meyer cousin; and Tim Taylor, a friend of Emanuel Meyer. The Bertram Groene Collection at the Center for Southeast Louisiana Studies, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana, includes records from the Meyer Brothers store but no family letters.

[2] *Germany* in this article, especially in references prior to 1871, refers to a sociocultural concept rather than a political unit. Germany, as a state, did not exist until 1871.

[3] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, December 17, 1855, MBSR.

[4] Joseph Meyer and the Levys—Abraham, Samuel, Daniel, and Hannah—had the same mother, Schonel Bach. Joseph was her child with her first husband, Martin Meyer, and the Levy siblings with her second husband, Emanuel Levy. The letters continually refer to the Levy siblings as "uncle" or "aunt" without any reference to "step" brother, uncle, or aunt.

[5] Parish records indicate that the store was in Clinton at least from 1834, with multiple transactions regarding the property occurring before the Meyer purchase. Property records, Book Q, 188, East Feliciana Parish Clerk of Court. The story of the building demolition and

donation was told to the author in Clinton, Louisiana, on May 9, 2014, by Anne Reilly Jones, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bob Jones, who donated the records to Louisiana State University.

[6] Materials from MBSR, not including the letters, are referred to in Elliott Ashkenazi, *The Business of Jews in Louisiana, 1840–1875* (Tuscaloosa, 1988) and Richard Holcombe Kilbourne, Jr., *Debt, Investment, Slaves: Credit Relations in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, 1825–1885* (Tuscaloosa, 1995).

[7] Barbara Guggemos, who translated the letters, and Diana Matut of the Department of Jewish Studies at Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, provided the analysis. The use of the term *Yiddish* to describe the Meyers' language is problematic, as properly speaking, Yiddish is an eastern European, Polish-inflected language that is markedly different from the German-inflected "Western Yiddish" commonly spoken by Jews in central Europe. Indeed, it is still more complicated in this case, as Matut explains in an e-mail to the author on June 22, 2015: "The language of the Yiddish-script letters captures the transitional moment in the history of Western Yiddish, when its speakers moved toward German. While the spoken language contained [fewer] elements of Western Yiddish, and High German (or a local dialect thereof) became the standard of everyday conversation, all written forms adapted to this situation as well. Starting from being Western Yiddish in Yiddish letters, language development continued to various transitional forms (not Western Yiddish anymore, not standard German yet), but still written in Yiddish letters. Yiddish script usually was the last frontier before the complete change to German in Latin letters. In writing, therefore, a certain retarding moment can be observed, depending on gender, age and class. Sometimes the language of this transitional moment is called 'Judeo-German,' albeit it would be more correct to call it—depending on the level of transformation—either 'Western Yiddish remnants' or 'transitional German in Yiddish script.'" Matut also pointed out that the salutations follow patterns in the Yiddish *brivnshteler*, guides used during the period to teach writing skills. Although a more precise term such as those Matut offers might be preferable, with these considerations noted, this article will use the simpler and more familiar *Yiddish*.

[8] The author used his own genealogical research as well as information from the Civil Registry Office, Bad Bergzabern, Germany, and the State Archives, Speyer, Germany, gathered by Stefan Jamin of Landau under the supervision of Roger Lustig, a genealogical researcher in Princeton, New Jersey. Lustig provided translations of Meyer family documents. The Levy family and extended relatives are referenced in several books: Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger: A Study of Jewish Life in the Small Community* (New York, 1957); Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*; Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*; Scott P. Marler, *The Merchants' Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth-Century South* (New York, 2013); Anny Bloch-Raymond, *From the Banks of the Rhine to the Banks of the Mississippi: The History of Jewish Immigrants and Their Individual Stories*, trans. Catherine Temerson (Santa Maria, CA, 2014), Kindle edition.

[9] Carolyn Earle Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens, GA, 2004), 23. Rudolf Glanz notes that he reviewed many German Jewish biographical works that failed to provide "a complete picture of the situation of the family of the emigrant who is the biographical subject." Ricky L. Sherrod writes, "Increased emphasis on kinship relationships and the use of genealogy are heretofore underutilized tools that the historian can employ to create a robust narrative of southern history during the antebellum years, the Civil War, and Reconstruction." Rudolf Glanz, "The German Jewish Mass Emigration: 1820-1880," *American Jewish Archives* 22 (April 1970): 51; Ricky L. Sherrod, "Plain Folk, Planters, and the Complexities of Southern Society: Kinship Ties in Nineteenth-Century Northwest Louisiana and Northeast Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 113 (2009): 3.

[10] Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America* (New Haven: 2005), 4.

[11] Passenger lists indicate that at least four members of the family departed from Le Havre destined for New Orleans. "Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820–1902," Records of the U.S. Customs Service, 1820–ca. 1891, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (hereafter cited as NARA). A Jewish immigrant's trip to Le Havre is detailed by Stefan Rohrbacher, "From Württemberg to America: A Nineteenth-Century German-Jewish Village on its Way to the New World," *American Jewish Archives* 41 (1989): 151. See also Julius Weis, *Autobiography of Julius Weis* (New Orleans, 1903).

[12] Tobias Brinkmann, *Sundays at Sinai* (Chicago, 2012), 14.

[13] For additional information on the German Jewish immigrant experience, see Glanz, "The German Jewish Mass Emigration," 65; Rudolf Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana* (New York, 1970): 1–85; Steven M. Lowenstein, "The Rural Community and the Urbanization of German Jewry," *Central European History* 13 (1980): 218–236; Rohrbacher, "From Württemberg to America," 151; Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore, 1992); Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley, 2004): 83–87; Brinkmann, *Sundays at Sinai*, 14–17; Hasia R. Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven, 2015).

[14] Information regarding the years of arrival of Levy family members has been compiled from a variety of sources. Passenger lists indicate that Hannah (Johanna) Levy arrived in New Orleans on December 30, 1847, and she appears in the 1850 U.S. Census as part of her brother Samuel's household in Mississippi; a German conscription record indicates that Samuel had left for the United States by 1837. Arrival dates for brothers Abraham and Daniel are from parish court records. "Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820–1902," NARA; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Jefferson County, Mississippi; Conscription records, 1817 book, Civil Registry Office, Bad Bergzabern, Germany; West Feliciana Parish Clerk of Court, minute book 12, June 17, 1851, 335 and minute book 1, May 29, 1858, 396.

[15] Ursula Gehring-Münzel, *The Emigration of German Jews to America in the 19th Century* (New York, 2000): 9.

[16] The letters refer to several monetary types of the period in Germany, including florins, kreuzers, thalers and guilders. Estimating values of German currency from the nineteenth century in current values is inexact, thus current-day estimates are based on several sources. These include Weis, *Autobiography of Julius Weis,* 3; Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward, *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture Since 1550* (Burlington, VT, 2007): 189–191; and measuringworth.com, which provides historical comparisons of currency values. Weis was born in Klingen, one mile from the Meyer home in Klingenmünster. In his autobiography, published in 1903, he wrote that one florin was worth about forty cents, or about $11 in today's value. From Weis's information and the measuringworth.com website, the author estimates that the annual wage in the Palatinate in 1860 was about 277 florins, or 16,641 kreuzers (one florin equal to about sixty kreuzers), or $110–200 in today's value. Cowan and Steward's research, while referencing other European locations during a period ten to fifteen years after the letters were written, provides additional context regarding the Meyer family's financial status. The costs for 2.2 pounds of various foods, as listed in *The City and the Senses*, are as follows: beef (fifty kreuzers); pork (fifty-six kreuzers); potatoes (four kreuzers); sugar (forty-two kreuzers); salt (thirteen kreuzers). Additionally, a letter dated May 18, 1859, references a pound of meat costing thirteen kreuzers. Cowan and Steward also mention that an unskilled carpenter earned about forty kreuzers, or less than one florin, per day.

[17] Conscription records, 1819 book, Civil Registry Office, Bad Bergzabern, Germany. Hasia Diner identifies fear of conscription as a leading motive for German Jews to emigrate. Diner, *A Time for Gathering,* 46.

[18] Glanz, "The German Jewish Mass Emigration," 52; Avraham Barkai, *Branching Out*: *German Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820–1914* (New York, 1994): 1–14, 39, 87. See also Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States, 1830–1914* (Philadelphia, 1984): 13; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 161; and Anton Hieke, *Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South* (Boston, 2013): 49, 54.

[19] Barkai, *Branching Out*, 39.

[20] The letters indicate that family in Louisiana helped to pay for the Meyer siblings' immigration. Further, Abraham Levy likely paid for the immigration of a nephew in 1872, based on archival records from Centenary College, then in Jackson, Louisiana, that show that Levy also paid for the young man's tuition. Barkai states, "In more than one sense, German-Jewish immigrants indeed constituted an economic sub community. A network of business and family relationships, within the place of residence and with other parts of the country, proved to be an equal or even more effective, cohesive factor of Jewish solidarity as religious or social contacts." Records and Matriculation Book of Centenary College of Louisiana, 1852–1907, 82, Centenary College of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections, Shreveport, LA (hereafter cited as CCLASC); Barkai, *Branching Out*, 87.

[21] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, December 17, 1855, MBSR.

[22] James Marston, a prominent plantation owner in the Felicianas, logged daily temperatures in his diary. Marston (Henry and Family) Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

[23] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, December 17, 1855, MBSR.

[24] For background on southern Jews and peddling, see Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana*, 104–121; Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation,* 22; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 67–103; Barkai, *Branching Out*, 44–46; Hasia Diner, "Entering the Mainstream of Modern Jewish History: Peddlers and the American Jewish South," *Southern Jewish History* 8 (2005): 1–30; Marler, *The Merchants' Capital,* 105–106; and Diner, *Roads Taken*.

[25] Ashkenzai, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 158, 159.

[26] Virginia Elaine Thompson, "Southern Small Towns: Society, Politics and Race Relations in Clinton, Louisiana, 1824-1880" (Ph.D dissertation, Rice University, 2003), 34.

[27] Lewis Atherton states that peddlers who traveled on foot or horseback carried limited merchandise. One peddler had $200 in goods when he was found dead on a Louisiana roadside. Lewis E. Atherton, "Itinerant Merchandising in the Ante-bellum South," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 19 (1945): 35-49.

[28] Emanuel Meyer's family refers to him in the letters by his given name, Emanuel, as well as Mayer, Meir, and Maier, variations of the name Emanuel according to the translators.

[29] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, February 17, 1856, MBSR. Here and in many other letters, the Meyers used the German word *Ostern*, or *Easter*, rather than *Pesach*, or *Passover*; in some later letters, however, beginning in the late 1860s, they occasionally used *Pesach*. The usage suggests their balance between Jewishness and assimilation, as well as indicating that Christian holidays were normally recognized, even by Jews, in their acculturated region of central Europe.

[30] Birth, marriage and land records for numerous members of the Levy and Meyer families were found in the Civil Registry Office, Bad Bergzabern, Germany, and the State Archives, Speyer, Germany. These records helped to confirm the relationships between the families, their occupations, places of residence and other details referenced in the essay. Hasia Diner indicates that 80–90 percent of German Jews made their living in some form of petty trade. In contrast, Rudolf Glanz references *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* (1847), in which a report states that families from an area about forty miles from Landau "possess a fortune of four or five thousand florins. A landed proprietor in the neighborhood of Arnsheim raised 12,000 florins through the sale of his possessions" before emigrating. Diner, *A Time for Gathering,* 11; Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana*, 19–20.

[31] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, May 15, 1856, and May 18, 1859; Babette and Karl Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, March 19, 1867, MBSR.

[32] Abraham Levy to Emanuel Meyer, December 24, 1861, and December 27, 1861, MBSR. In these two letters, Levy asks Meyer about fencing work he asked "boy" Ben to complete. Slave schedules, Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana; property records and succession of Daniel Levy, Box 61, July 11, 1860, West Feliciana Clerk of Court. The census schedule shows seventeen men owning seventy-nine slaves—thirty-eight males and forty-one females. Levy is shown as owning five females, aged fifty, forty, thirty-five, thirty-five, and thirteen, and three males, aged five, three, and two.

[33] Bertram Wallace Korn, *Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865* (Elkins Park, PA, 1961): 26. See also Clara Solomon, *The Civil War Diary of Clara Solomon: Growing Up in New Orleans, 1861–1862*, ed. Elliott Ashkenazi (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000); and Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

[34] Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America,* 221; Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 35. On the economic motivation of immigrants, see Rohrbacher, "From Württemberg to America," 153; Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 65; Hieke, *Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South,* 45; and Bloch-Raymond, *From the Banks of the Rhine*, locs. 200, 212.

[35] Barkai, *Branching Out*, 22.

[36] Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation*, xi.

[37] Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., "Mechanisms of Planter Power," *Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 39 (1998): 19–44; *New Orleans Christian Advocate*, June 9, 1881; Thompson, "Southern Small Towns," 9, 12; Minutes of Trustees' Meetings, Centenary College, 1840–1906, 205, CCLASC.

[38] Louisiana, v. 5, v. 18, v. 22; Texas v. 13, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School (hereafter cited as BLHC); Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana; Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*, 6.

[39] Elliott Ashkenazi writes that Yette Levy's first husband, Israel Adler, was a business associate of Abraham Levy and Abraham Levi, the family's cotton broker in New Orleans. After Adler's death in 1851, Levi urged that Yette and Levy be married. Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 80, 102.

[40] Numerous entries are contained within the Dun reports indicating the Levys' business success despite the various economic challenges of the day. Census schedules for Louisiana, 1850–1880, list only one member of the extended families, Henry Oppenheimer, who was Abraham Levy's brother-in-law. The schedules show that Oppenheimer, who at one point was in the dry goods business with Levy, owned a horse and four cows worth $95. For further discussion of economic stratification in Louisiana, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Chicago, 1949); Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., *Pistols and Politics: The Dilemma of Democracy in Louisiana's Florida Parishes, 1810–1899* (Baton Rouge, 1996); and Samuel C. Hyde, Jr., ed., *Plain Folk of the South Revisited* (Baton Rouge, 1997).

[41] Louisiana, v. 5, West Feliciana Parish, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, BLHC. The notation "mf." indicates that Levy was estimated to be worth between seventy-five and one hundred thousand dollars.

[42] Marler, *Merchants' Capital*, 106; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 105.

[43] J. W. Door, *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, May 21, 1860.

[44] Raleigh Anthony Suarez notes that the Bluff region, including East and West Feliciana, ranked third in total slave population in 1850. The region's 26,531 slaves amounted to 68.3 percent of the population, and in no other region was slavery so predominant in the

population. Raleigh Anthony Suarez, Jr., "Rural Life in Louisiana, 1850–1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1954), 16.

[45] On immigrants supporting family in Europe, see Barkai, *Branching Out,* 39, and Diner, *Roads Taken*, 6, 21.

[46] Regina Meyer to Emanuel Meyer and Abraham Levy, May 18, 1859, MBSR. The mother's comments constitute one portion of a larger letter that her entire family sent to Meyer and Levy in Louisiana.

[47] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, April 30, 1858, MBSR.

[48] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, April 30, 1858, and September 23, 1859; Caroline Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, November 6, 1859; Regina and Henry Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, May 1, 1861, MBSR. On the day of her departure, Caroline wrote her ship name as the *Lemuel Dyer*, then in different ink wrote *Fanny Fern*, the ship that would take her and a traveling companion to New Orleans, where she arrived on December 29, 1859. The letter is addressed to Abraham Levy in Bayou Sara with instructions to give it to Emanuel Meyer. The *Lemuel Dyer* arrived in New Orleans a few days after the *Fanny Fern*. "Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New Orleans, Louisiana, 1820–1902," NARA.

[49] Henry Meyer to his siblings, November 20, 1860, MBSR.

[50] Regina and Henry Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, May 1, 1861, MBSR.

[51] Barkai, *Branching Out*, 154, 155.

[52] Julius Weis, who was born one mile from Klingenmünster, immigrated in 1844 and went on to become a prominent New Orleans businessman. He wrote about returning home in 1857. During the trip, farmers visited Weis and asked that he pay debts of less than one hundred dollars that his father owed them. When Weis told his father the debts had been paid, his father said, "I am now happy that I can die without any debt hanging over me." Weis, *Autobiography of Julius Weis*, 15–16.

[53] Joseph Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, May 18, 1859, MBSR.

[54] Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 77.

[55] Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation,* 42.

[56] Immigrant families viewed the departure of a family member as a way to improve their own economic well-being, despite the emotional implications of a loved one leaving home. Bloch-Raymond, *From the Banks of the Rhine*, loc. 403.

[57] The Levys were well-established in the community pre– and post–Civil War. The Dun records for Bayou Sara noted in July 1866: "A Levy is said to be the most honest Jew in our town. . . . [W]e know him to be honest, prudent and of good bus[iness] capacity." A February 1868 note indicates: "A Levy said to be wealthiest man in the place." Ashkenazi devotes much of a chapter titled "Country Stores and Cotton" to the Meyer family, discussing in detail Emanuel Meyer's ongoing struggles with cotton sales, his financial handlers, and the operation of his store, which in 1872 had an inventory valued at $15,000 and which Ashkenazi describes as "of average size." Louisiana, v. 22, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, BLHC; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 89.

[58] U.S. Census Mortality Schedules Index, 1850–1880, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, July 7, 1860; Inventory, Succession of Daniel Levy, Box 61, July 11, 1860, West Feliciana Clerk of Court.

[59] Regina Meyer to Caroline Meyer, September 2, 1860, MBSR.

[60] Thompson, "Southern Small Towns," ii-iii.

[61] Caroline Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, July 29, 1861, September 18, 1861, and December 17, 1864, MBSR. The 1864 letter mentions Emanuel's travels to Matamoros, Mexico. It is likely he joined other merchants in trading there because Civil War blockades had restricted their ability to sell or obtain goods in Louisiana.

[62] In reference to A. Levy & Co., an R. G. Dun & Co. correspondent noted on November 15, 1865: "have resumed business. Made money during the war. An excellent businessman, responsible and reliable." Louisiana, v. 22, West Feliciana Parish, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, BLHC.

[63] Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana,* 73.

[64] Materials on the business dealings of the firm prior to bankruptcy can be found in the Greenleve, Block & Co. store records, 1865–1883, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX, and in Texas, v. 13, Galveston County, R. G. Dun & Co., Credit Report Volumes, BLHC. The bankruptcy of Oppenheimer, Block & Co. is detailed in a filing dated May 25, 1887, with the Fifth Circuit Court of the United States, Eastern District of Texas, Galveston, between Howard National Bank and Oppenheimer, Block. The filing describes the firm's precipitous decline in two years, from assets of more than $1 million in 1885, to assets of $181,000 in 1887, to debts of more than $400,000 in 1887.

[65] A Dun reporter's note mentions "A Levy of NO a special partner" in reference to Greenleve, Block & Co. Texas, v. 13, Galveston County, BLHC.

[66] Caroline Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, February 24, 1869, July 15, 1869, November 12, 1869, and January 1, 1870, MBSR.

[67] Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 91, 97.

[68] Property records, Book V, 231, East Feliciana Parish Clerk of Court; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 98; Karl Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, December 6, 1864, and December 17, 1864, MBSR.

[69] Thompson, "Southern Small Towns," 26.

[70] B'nai B'rith Lodge No. 239 records, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati (hereafter cited as AJA).

[71] Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 110. See also, Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 90; Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*, 141–151.

[72] Barkai, *Branching Out*, 88.

[73] Karl Meyer to Emanuel and Henry Meyer, December 6, 1864, MBSR.

[74] Regina, Babette, and Karl Meyer to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, [1868], MBSR. Although no date is on the letter, it is likely from 1868 based on events it mentions. The January 8, 1866, letter discusses Caroline's engagement.

[75] Regina, Babette, and Karl Meyer to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, [1868], MBSR.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Caroline Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, January 20, 1870, MBSR.

[78] Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*, 141–151; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 98. An R. G. Dun & Co. evaluation in 1865 indicated that the credit rating for E. Meyer was 3–2 —between Good and Fair. The only other rating for Meyer came in 1871—a 3½ , or Fair. Louisiana, v. 33, Mercantile Agency Reference Book, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, BLHC.

[79] Louisiana, v. 5, East Feliciana Parish, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, BLHC; Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*, 141–151. MBSR includes details regarding an insurance policy related to Emanuel Meyer's purchase of his Clinton home.

[80] Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 101.

[81] Abraham Levy to Henry and Emanuel Meyer, December 21, 1868, MBSR. Various records indicate that Abraham Levy's business reach extended to his nephews Emanuel Meyer, Henry Meyer, and Leopold Mayer; his brother, Daniel Levy; his brothers-in-law Leopold and Henry Oppenheimer; and his business associates Louis Michael, who married his brother Daniel's widow, and stepson Leon Adler.

[82] The records of the Jewish Children's Home in New Orleans contain annual reports showing that Levy and other family members contributed money to the home. Jewish Children's Home records, 1870–1981, Manuscripts Collection 180, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, New Orleans. Levy's brother Daniel also served briefly as a postmaster, appointed June 26, 1858. City directory, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1868; U.S. Appointments of U.S. Postmasters, 1832–1971, June 29, 1869, Ancestry.com, accessed June 8, 2015. Silliman Institute attendance records are listed in Betty Lou Cain and Mildred P. Worrell, *Silliman* (Clinton, LA, 1990), 48, 194. *Silliman* also reproduces an 1883 tuition receipt for Emanuel Meyer's daughter, Mathilda.

[83] Hearing Before the Select Committee on the Recent Election in Louisiana, January 17, 1877, 44th Cong., 262, 402, 461, 481. A witness was asked to list the names of the men involved in the Gair incident. Among those he names are an "H. Meyer." In additional testimony about those subpoenaed to testify before the committee, another witness lists a "Henry Meyer, in New Orleans so far as anything could be found out about him." The committee apparently had no success in serving any of the subpoenas for the men named in the Gair incident.

[84] *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, November 25, 1876, which references the Meyer brothers in the list of men reporting on the election. The election of 1876 was a crucial one. On the national level it pitted Rutherford B. Hayes against Samuel J. Tilden. Tilden, the Democratic governor of New York, won a majority of the popular vote, but the results were disputed based on alleged fraud in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina. The election went to the U.S. House of Representatives, which reached a compromise. All twenty electoral votes in dispute, and therefore the election, went to the Republican, Hayes. In return, federal troops still present in those three states, the last of the former Confederacy to be occupied by the

military, would be removed. In essence, Congress would no longer defend the rights of African Americans in the South, and Reconstruction would come to an end.

[85] Quoted in T. Harry Williams, "The Gentleman from Louisiana: Demagogue or Democrat," in T. Harry Williams and Estelle Williams, *The Selected Essays of T. Harry Williams* (Baton Rouge, 1999): 195.

[86] Paul Berger, "Midnight in Tennessee: The Untold Story of the First Jewish Lynching in America," *Forward*, December 29, 2014; Daniel R. Weinfeld, "Samuel Fleishman: Tragedy in Reconstruction-Era Florida," *Southern Jewish History* 8 (2008): 31–76; Stuart Rockoff, "Carpetbaggers, Jacklegs, and Bolting Republicans: Jews in Reconstruction Politics in Ascension Parish, Louisiana," *American Jewish History* 97 (March 2013): 39–64; Leonard Rogoff, "A Tale of Two Cities: Race, Riots, and Religion in New Bern and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1898," *Southern Jewish History* 14 (2011): 37–75. For additional information about the violence in the Felicianas, see Hyde, *Pistols and Politics*.

[87] Rockoff, "Carpetbaggers, Jacklegs, and Bolting Republicans," 40.

[88] *West Feliciana Sentinel*, August 30, 1876.

[89] This estimate is based on membership records and minutes of the B'nai B'rith Lodge No. 162, Bayou Sara, Louisiana, MBSR, and B'nai B'rith Lodge No. 239, Clinton, Louisiana, AJA.

[90] Ben Kaplan, who interviewed two descendants of the Levy family while researching a 1957 book on Jewish life in small towns, asserts that the Meyers and Levys maintained a semblance of Judaism. This assertion is supported by the May 4, 1878, edition of the *Clinton Patriot-Democrat*, which reported that Abraham Levy, then living in Jackson, Louisiana, accompanied by several relatives and friends, erected a headstone and footstone at his wife's gravesite in the Jewish section of the Masonic cemetery outside of Clinton. Yette Levy had died the previous year, and it is likely that Abraham was following Jewish tradition in placing the markers within the year after her death. Kaplan also notes that the families met for high holy days in a public school building. An additional indication of the family's connection to Jewish life is included in a letter from Charles Wessolowsky, who wrote on April 6, 1879, after a visit to Galveston, that L. C. Michael of Greenleve, Block & Co. was vice president of B'nai Israel, Galveston's Reform synagogue. Michael married Daniel Levy's widow, Elise, moved his family to Galveston, and helped manage the family store there. Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger*, 80–81, 83, 86; Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878–1879* (Macon, GA, 1982): 80–84. On the challenges of maintaining Jewish tradition among German Jews in small-town America, see Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation,* 5; Ashkenazi, *Business of Jews in Louisiana*, 103; Thompson, "Southern Small Towns," 27; and Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 228.

[91] Karl Meyer to Emanuel and Caroline Meyer, February 20, 1860, MBSR.

[92] Caroline Meyer to Emanuel Meyer, August 27, 1870, MBSR; *Galveston Daily News*, July 29, 1870, August 1, 1870, and August 3, 1870.

[93] Caroline Meyer to her family in Germany, August 29, 1868, MBSR.

[94] A map probably drawn in the 1850s and held by the East Feliciana Parish Clerk of Court in Clinton, Louisiana, shows property the Meyer brothers owned one block from each other. See also, Louisiana, v. 5, West Feliciana Parish, R. G. Dun & Co. Credit Report Volumes, BLHC.

[95] *East Feliciana Patriot*, January 19, 1878; *Baton Rouge Advocate*, January 4, 1893.

[96] Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 47, 87.

[97] Diner, *A Time for Gathering*, 59.

[98] Abraham Levy obituary, *Bayou Sara Times-Democrat*, January 1, 1900; Hannah Levy obituary, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 11, 1899; cemetery headstones in the Jewish section of the Masonic Cemetery, Clinton, Louisiana. Members of the Levy and Meyer families are included on burial lists provided by Benjamin Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger*, 163–167.

[99] Emanuel Meyer's descendants had a prominent role during the twentieth-century effort to integrate southern universities. In 1962, as editor of the University of Alabama student newspaper, *The Crimson White*, Melvin Meyer, Emanuel's great-grandson, defended an editorial supporting James Meredith's admission into the University of Mississippi and advocating the peaceful integration of the University of Alabama. His life and those of his family in Starkville, Alabama, were under constant threat from the Ku Klux Klan and other reactionary groups for nearly a year. The *Starkville News*, which was operated by his father, Henry F. Meyer, was forced out of business by the controversy. See Dina Weinstein, "Melvin Wali Ali Feiler Meyer: A Student's Struggle with Insider/Outsider Status in Civil Rights-Era Alabama," *Southern Jewish History* 16 (2013): 215–243.

[100] Property records, Book H2, 190–191, East Feliciana Parish Clerk of Court; Kaplan, *The Eternal Stranger*, 163-167.

[101] Joseph refers to himself in the third person. The small towns referenced here are southwest of Lachen.

[102] The apparent reference to *Tashlikh*, a ritual associated with Rosh Hashanah, is unclear. The ritual involves gathering at a river to empty one's pockets and cast crumbs into the water, a symbolic cleansing of the year's sins. Perhaps he is referring to bread.

[103] Probably a reference to Joseph Meyer's mother.

[104] Karl indicates in other letters that his military unit was based in Aschaffenburg.

[105] The correspondence frequently includes letters from several family members written on the same paper and mailed together. In this letter, the mother, Regina, her daughter Babette, and son Karl write individually to Emanuel and Henry regarding their concern about Henry's marriage. The year this letter was written has been estimated based on the topic it covers. Babette Meyer references her brother becoming engaged at twenty-four years old. Henry was born, according to his headstone, on December 25, 1844, thus the most likely year for the letter is 1868.

[106] This is likely Louis Michael, who married the widow of Abraham Levy's brother, Daniel, and moved to Galveston. Levy eventually moved from Bayou Sara to Jackson, where his home is currently used as a private residence and business.

[107] An A. J. Hanly is listed in the 1871 New Orleans city directory (p. 146) as an auditor for U.S. Customs. Levy's business interests at times extended beyond the boundaries of the United States, and this may be a reference to an issue with Customs. Hanly is not listed in the directories from 1868–1870.

[108] This letter from Abraham Levy was written partly in English and partly in German. The portions that have translated into English appear in italics. The letter was included with Abraham's letter to Henry dated December 21, 1868.