

Friends of Stolpersteine, Herr Steinmetz, Herr Demnig,

I am most gratified to be having this Stolperstein laid today, as the first in my project to sponsor stumbling blocks for victims without descendants. Thank you for being here and a very special thank you to Elfriede Rhode for her kind generosity in searching the address books in the Stadt archives to help me determine the last residence of choice for Julius Hirschberger.

I have been asked many times why I am doing this work, and I struggle to find a way to answer. I have so many feelings associated with the Holocaust that it is difficult to give a clear and precise answer and the more research I do, not only about victims individually but also about the history of what took place from 1933 till 1945, the less able I am to comprehend the horror and the barbarism. I have no words. Just before I traveled to Mainz, the Holy Father, Pope Francis visited New York, where I come from, and in a speech he gave at the 9/11 Memorial Museum, he gave me the words to express my feelings precisely. He said that events of such incomprehensible and horrific terror cause us to experience “a pain that leaves us speechless but screams in heaven.” That is why I am here today and will continue my project for as long as I am able. My personal pain for my family still screams in heaven, just as does the pain for Julius Hirschberger and all the others who have nobody to remember them. I cannot let them be forgotten.

Julius Hirschberger was an educated gentleman of means. He was born in Oberlauringen on 8 September 1878. He was a resident of Leipzig for a time and moved to Mainz in 1908. He appears in the address books living at Gartenfeldstrasse 5 in 1909. A year later a gentleman by the name of Maier Trepp moved into the same building. Thus began a long friendship and possibly business partnership as well. Julius Hirschberger was a merchant and owned a wholesale wine business; Maier Trepp was a traveling salesman. In 1911, both men moved to Schulstrasse 23 and in 1915 to Bonifaziusstrasse 15 – which was renamed Hindenburgstrasse in 1916. They remained at that address, both residing on the same floor, until 1936 when together they moved to Hindenburgplatz 3, both living on the same floor once again. Julius' wine business was also situated on the same floor of the building.

It is not unreasonable to assume that Julius introduced Maier to his sister Selma (Ziporah), who Maier married. One of the couple's children was the famous Mainzer rabbi Leo Trepp.

As Nazi persecution intensified, many Jews sought to emigrate to America by any means

possible. American phone books were searched in an attempt to locate relatives and write for assistance and affidavits of support.

As a high-profile Jewish American and governor of the State of New York, Herbert H. Lehman was the recipient of hundreds of such letters, from relatives as well as those not related. One such letter was from Julius Hirschberger. Though records indicate that he emigrated from Mainz in 1940, the date on his first letter to the governor is 1 October 1939, at which time he was already in Brussels. This letter is particularly poignant and details his horrific suffering.

*His Excellency Governor Lehman of New York.*

*Please excuse if I dare to write to you. My name is Julius Hirschberger. I was born in Oberlauringen, Bavaria and have been living in Mainz from 1908 to 1938; I was a wholesale dealer in wines. This profession was forbidden to Jews by the government, and this affected me of course, too. I am 61 years old my wife died twelve years ago in childbirth; my child died half a year later. I had to flee from Germany and was unable to take a suitcase with me. I own only the clothes I wear. In Germany I was considered a man of comfortable means, but I had to leave all my money and my luggage in Germany. I fled to Brussels Belgium. I was on the road for three days: one night I spent in a swampy wood, the second night in a barn. I had to suffer terrible hardships and was nearly exhausted. I had no shelter from the rain and got drenched. The committee in Brussels assists me; it gives me about 42 – 45 Belgian francs a week. I have to pay for food and shelter. But the money is not enough for my food; I suffer terribly from starvation. I sleep in a cellar near to a vile-smelling gutter. The relief money allows me very often but one meal a day. (a cup of coffee and a sandwich). The stamp for this letter I paid by starving. The place I sleep in cannot be heated; but I would have no money for coal anyway. I cannot imagine what things will be like when winter comes. I have no money for laundry or shoe repairs. I am near a breakdown; I would have ended this awful kind of life long ago – but I do not want to bring sorrow and shame to my family in Germany. In this utter distress I hope for help from your excellency. I dare hope this, because I have the honor to be related to you. I believe my grandmother was born in Rimpar; she was nee Lehman.*

*I would be thankful if I would get enough not to go hungry. I have but the one suit I am wearing. I would appreciate some old clothes. I wore a new wintercoat when I escaped. I therefore do not need a coat. But I would be thankful for warm underclothes. Formerly I was always as charitable as possible; never did I think that I would have to beg the pity*

*of my fellow-beings. It still is hard for me to do so; yet my terrible situation and thoughts of suicide urge this upon me. Your excellency, listen to my entreaty; save a human life. I am in this situation by no fault of mine. Until now I have always been a respected and honorable person. I do not ask much. I only want to save my bare life, and not for me only – life does not mean much to me anymore, but for my family. Please help quickly.*

*Eternally thankfully yours,*

*Julius Israel Hirschberger*

Although Julius may have been very distantly related to the governor, a definite connection was never established, and an affidavit was not given to him. The Lehman family did send him a very small amount of money every month until the war caused a cessation of communication.

Julius was one of five children. His brother Samson emigrated to New York in 1906, but there the trail goes cold and no further information about him could be found by this researcher. Another brother, Hugo, a resident of Wiesbaden, was deported from Frankfurt to Theresienstadt on 1 September 1942. He was murdered on 29 September 1942 in Treblinka extermination camp.

Julius' dear friend Maier Trepp died in Mainz on 1 August 1941. Maier's wife Selma (Ziporah), Julius' sister, was included in the first deportation from Mainz on 20 March 1942 to Piaski where she was murdered.

Another sister, Sabina, was also deported to Piaski on the 20 March 1942, and was likewise murdered there.

We do not know the exact date Julius Hirschberger was taken to the internment camp in Malines. He was deported from there on 24 October 1942 to Auschwitz extermination camp, where he was murdered.

*Dr. Joan Long Salomon*

*Mainz, October 15, 2015*