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# JOHANNES DUDENHÖFER & THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

BAUERNHAUSMUSEUM

**HOF HAINA**

LIFE OF A FARMER IN HOF HAINA, GERMANY  
AND HIS GERMAN AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP

# INTRODUCTION

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In 1971, my mother Gisela Kraft-Schneider came to Hof Haina, a hamlet in Biebertal near Giessen, Hesse, for the first time whilst conducting genealogical family research. She discovered that her paternal side originated from one of the four old farmhouses. In 1908, the descendants of the Schneider branch of the family who remained in Hof Haina moved to a newly built fifth farmhouse and rented the former old farm buildings. My mother saved the old farm from its impending demolition by acquiring the property together with her parents Ilse and Artur Schneider and her brother Reinhard Schneider. In the course of almost forty years, my mother arduously collected all sorts of objects typical for rural life in those days. Consequently in 1973, she inaugurated the farmhouse museum (Bauernhausmuseum Hof Haina) in the former residential house.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the name Schneider already ceased to exist in Hof Haina due to female descendants. Christine, née Schneider, married the neighbor's son Johannes Dudenhöfer, who became an entrepreneur with great business acumen. Aside from his farming, he increased his large fortune by lending money to private people, villages and towns. For several years, he even pursued entrepreneurial activities in the nearby mining area, a fact which is well documented. In fact, it is a miracle that the original documents were not only carefully guarded for generations, but they also remained unharmed after the farmhouse of Dudenhöfer's descendants was destroyed by a bombing in 1945.

When my mother passed away in 2011, my brothers and I decided to maintain the museum in the way our mother would have done. Whilst reviewing and rearranging the inventory of the museum, I discovered copies of correspondence between Johannes Dudenhöfer and his friend Nathan Hirsch, who had emigrated to the USA in 1869. Since Johannes Dudenhöfer copied most of his own letters, we could learn about both sides of their friendship. The letters referring to everyday life, seeming almost banal, allow a glimpse into both men's lives: the merchant Nathan Hirsch had the challenge of starting a new life in a foreign world, whilst Johannes Dudenhöfer would find obstacles in his daily farming life accompanied by poor harvests and storms as well as religious and political changes.

Thanks to the information that an American descendant of the Hirsch family who visited nearby Waldgirmes, I was able to get in touch with the Hirsch family in the US. Another lucky moment was when I found an American publication on the Jewish community of Nashville, Tennessee. The research process, still very cumbersome during my mother's lifetime, was significantly facilitated due to the possibility of online databases. Thanks to the help of Dr. Aide Rehbaum, a historian who had already helped my mother with the inventory of the museum, we received comprehensive information of Johannes Dudenhöfer and his friendship with Nathan Hirsch in both the German and American archives.

May this publication be a contribution to help understand life at Hof Haina and its surroundings as well as emigration during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Gabriele Freyer, Hof Haina 2022*

# THE (HI)STORY OF HOF HAINA

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At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Hartmann, Dönges, Dudenhöfer and Schneider families lived in Hof Haina, a small hamlet between Giessen and Wetzlar, which today consists of five farmhouses. Their family trees can be traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, official documents from the year 1727 prove that their family roots go back another 200 years and the farms belonging to their families of origin were built around 1520. Unfortunately, the loss of parish registers during the Thirty Year's War and sparse documentation resulting from this, make further research impossible.

There are records of a settlement which existed much earlier, only approx. 500 m away from Hof Haina, named "Gosslingshausen auf der Hanaue." Presumably, the settlement was deserted, it may have become uninhabitable due to fire. Until today, the original toponyms "Auff altem Hauße" (where the old house was) and "Bei der Brandheck" (close to the burned hedge) are used. Over the centuries, the name "Hof Gosslingshausen auf der Hanaue" eventually turned into the shorter "Hof Haina."

## "JUSTE"

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Johannes Dudenhöfer (1811-1901) was born at the farm named "Juste," which is situated next to the Schneider farmhouse on the right. He was the son of Georg Konrad Dudenhöfer (1781-1821) and Katharine Elisabeth (1785-?), who married in 1810.

The name Dudenhöfer first came to Hof Haina by marriage in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Until today the farm is named "Juste", derived from Jost, the short form of Johannes. The name probably originates from Jost Dudenhöfer, who was born in the third generation in 1689. The first sons of succeeding generations, who lived in that farm, were usually named Johannes.

The books which are kept in the museum give us an impression of Johannes Dudenhöfer's manifold interests. Among them, there are scientific, historical, commercial and religious writings. Besides his books, his legacy consists of



documents, diary entries, and his ledger, in which he meticulously listed income and expenses as well as his correspondence with his friend Nathan Hirsch, who emigrated to America in 1869.

## **"SCHNEIDER'SCH"**

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Christine Schneider (1811-1884), born in the seventh generation and in the same year as Johannes, inherited the Schneider farm. Christine's father Johannes Schneider, deceased in 1814, leaving his young wife behind as well as his three-year-old daughter Christine and son Ludwig, who died in childhood. In 1816, Christine's mother got married for the second time to Ludwig Rauber from Atzbach, and had another daughter named Katharina, who also died young.

In 1833, Christine and Johannes got married, both at the age of twenty-two. Together, they ran both farms until their children took them over. Between 1834 and 1854, Christine and Johannes had twelve children and they had twins twice. Only eight of their children reached adulthood: Johannes, Ludwig, Georg, Katharina, Elisabeth, Luise, Marie and Karoline. They, in turn, had 20 children, six of them died at an early age.

The name Schneider appeared in Hof Haina through marriage. It is not clear whether the first member of the Schneider family married into the original Zorn or Nesselthorner family.

# FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN JOHANNES AND NATHAN

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The most significant source of Hof Haina's history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are the letters that Johannes Dudenhöfer exchanged with his friend Nathan Hirsch for more than 20 years. It is most likely that both men met as young boys. Nathan came from Waldgirmes, 4 km away, and was the son of Hennel Goldschmidt and the Jewish livestock trader Joseph Samuel Hirsch. In his position as livestock trader, Joseph Samuel Hirsch certainly visited Hof Haina regularly.

Nathan was born as the second of five children on February 20, 1811, in the same year as Johannes. The crossbeam over the door of his parental home in Kreuzergasse (today named Kreuzerstrasse) exhibits "1828 erbavet von Josep Hirs vnd desen Ehefrav Hennil" (1828 built by Josep Hirs and his wife Hennil). According to records from 1808, his uncle of the same name, Nathan Hirsch, lived in Friedensstr. 18.

On December 2, 1838, Nathan married Röschen (Rosa) Süssmann. In 1869, Röschen (53), Nathan (58) and their seven children Joseph (27), Regina (26), Hannah (22), Dora (21), Sigmund (17), Samuel (16) and Rickie (15) emigrated to Nashville, Tennessee. A few years earlier, Nathan's younger brother Samuel, two years his minor, emigrated to America with his whole family and lived in Baltimore, Maryland.

## JEWISH LIFE IN HOF HAINA'S SURROUNDINGS

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According to official records, Jews are known to have settled in Königsberg (4 km away) as early as 1640. It is a known fact that Jews from Waldgirmes had to pay protection money to the public office of Königsberg, thus to the Landgrave of Hesse as well as the Count of Solms. At that time, Jewish life differed from the life of Christians as was chronicled in Königsberg's penal records. As an example, Jews had to pay a fine if they merchandised livestock or meat, washed clothes or cut wood without permission on Sundays.

Due to the fact that Jews were denied membership of guilds and not authorized to purchase land, they usually had to earn their living as merchants, peddlers or money lenders. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of Jewish people in Hesse lived in small villages in the countryside and not in towns. As of 1823, compulsory school attendance was introduced, therefore Jewish children would go to Christian elementary schools, since they could rarely afford a Jewish teacher.

Many country Jews were very poor and had difficulty raising money for protection or for other taxes. We know from records that in 1808, Nathan Hirsch's uncle paid 23 Guilder (Gulden<sup>1</sup>), 50 Weißpfennig (Albus<sup>2</sup>) protection money. Both his father and uncle were citizens of Waldgirmes without local civil rights. As so-called secondary citizens, they had no rights within the village, no right to buy land, which is why they had to pay to be able to use pasturelands. They were also forbidden from holding public office.

However, in the year 1842, the Grand-Ducal County Council Giessen decreed that a board made up of the three Jewish families who paid the highest taxes in a village must convene in order to appoint a chairman. In Waldgirmes, Nathan Hirsch had been a member of this board. In 1858, 32 Jewish families lived in Waldgirmes, who gathered in a private prayer room at Heimann Grünewald's home.

Before registry offices were established, Jewish weddings, births and deaths were recorded in so-called "Civil Registers" by mayors. According to an old tradition, Jewish religious services could take place only if at least ten male adults gathered. Therefore, Jews from several country villages would join to establish a community, where a 13-year-old boy was already considered an adult and therefore as a full member after his Bar Mitzvah. Before Rodheim had its own synagogue, male adults of the few Jewish families attended religious services in Vetzberg. A report from 1856 states that there were only ten men from Rodheim who would visit the synagogue in Vetzberg, which existed until the 1890s. Rodheim possessed a synagogue from 1897 until 1928. The building was sold to a neighbor in 1929, who modified the appearance of the former synagogue. To this day it is used as a residence.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guilder>

<sup>2</sup> The Weißpfennig (literally white penny; latin - denarius albus) was a form of silver groschen of the late middle ages. It was also known as an albus or a Rhenish groschen (rheinischer Groschen).  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weißpfennig>

The Jewish cemetery, the place of eternal rest, is of particular significance. According to Jewish law, graves may not be reused, as the peace of the dead may not be disturbed. In Jewish faith, the tombstone ("Matzevah") is of great importance, because it symbolizes the obligation not to forget the dead. Although the Jews from Rodheim would go to services in Vetzberg, their deceased were buried at the Jewish cemetery in Waldgirmes, mentioned for the first time in 1702. As of 1847, Salomon and Nathan Hirsch endeavored to extend the cemetery, fully occupied by then, which took effect in 1863.

Once restrictions on religious rights were repealed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of Jews moved to towns with a higher percentage of Jewish population. At this point, for example, the number of Jewish citizens tripled in Giessen, the nearby town, where four factories belonging to Jewish merchants were situated. Nevertheless, Jewish people would only very slowly find entrance into the bourgeoisie. Nathan Hirsch and his family emigrated in 1868, so they did not experience this development.

## EMIGRATION

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The explosion of the population, partible inheritance, taxes and poor harvests sometimes forced entire villages to emigrate. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were three waves of emigration: from 1845-1857, 1864-1873 and 1880-1893. Due to the Civil War in America, emigration stagnated as of 1860.

For most people, the main reason to emigrate was an economic necessity. For many of those who wished to emigrate, the prospect of political equality and religious tolerance drove their motivation to apply to the government for emigration certificates.

Königsberg is an example of just how poor the rural population was: the moment the state mining industry was privatized, innumerable workers became unemployed. In 1863, the school in Königsberg counted 18 beggar children. Due to poverty, some villages had to support the needy. Emigration from Waldgirmes to America began in 1819, however the village community had to bear the costs in part for those who emigrated.



Between 1845 and 1855, 100 inhabitants left Rodheim, fifty more left in 1880, among them, members of the Dönges and Dudenhöfer families. Between 1848 and 1860, Königsberg registered approximately 100 people who declared America as their destination. The reason given in their request for release from their subordinate relationship was their "hope to make a better living."

By 1880, approx. 100,000 people of the Jewish population in Germany emigrated to America. Often, all the relatives collected money to pay for the passage. Once in America, they usually began as peddlers until they were able to open their own stores, such as the Hirsch family did, and so, within just one generation, were able to rise to the middle class.

There was much to consider once the decision to emigrate was made: the potential emigrant had to publish his intentions in a newspaper so that any creditor may collect his money. He had to have finished military service as well as have paid 10 % of his assets to the State Treasury for the emigration certificate. Those who did not have the money, had to borrow it from money lenders. According to law, a spouse was not allowed to emigrate without his family, so that village communities did not have to provide for those left behind. If anyone without capital wished to leave the country, that person could always look for an American bondsman. However, the immigrant risked being held in bonded labor by a plantation owner.

On April 9, 1868 Johannes Dudenhöfer made an entry in his general ledger that he had lent 70 thaler<sup>3</sup> to Nathan Hirsch from Waldgirmes, which the latter had reimbursed on June 15, 1869, four months before his departure. He had probably required the money to bridge the time needed to sell his property.

Emigration agencies would advertise in the journals of the towns Giessen, Wetzlar and Braunfels, offering to organize emigration as well as sell tickets for the passage by ship. A passage cost between 55 and 60 thaler per person in the tween deck or steerage, the lowest category. As a comparison: in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, a five person-household needed about 3 ½ thaler per week to survive. Thus, a passage for a family of five would cost between 192.5 and 210 thaler, which would normally cover their cost of living for over a year. The passage cost 110 thaler in second class and 150 thaler in first class per-person. Children under 10 years old could travel for half the sum. Steerage passengers had to bring their own mattresses and bed linen.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thaler> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche\\_Mark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Mark)

By about 1880, emigrants traveled on sailing ships, which were anything but comfortable, as they normally carried cargo. There was space on tween deck to transport goods from America to Europe. On the way back, room was available for emigrants, thus representing additional business for shipping companies. As "cargo", emigrants had to remain below deck for weeks, usually tightly packed, without daylight or fresh air.

Generally, one would arrive in Bremerhaven two or three days before departure. One could stay in the emigrants' house, where also Jewish religious services were held.

It was recommended to pack linen, clothing, shoes, bedding in barrels and the most essential household items. Money was to be exchanged for gold and kept in a small leather pocket worn around the neck, so as to exchange it for dollars after arrival in America. Emigrants were advised to buy guns and tools once in America and not before.

Nathan and his family embarked on a steamship named "Donau" belonging to the shipping company Norddeutsche Lloyd. The steamer carried a crew of 100 men and 350 passengers. Food was included in the price. The passage was hazardous: In mid-19<sup>th</sup> century up to 50 percent of the passengers died; there was always the risk of contracting serious infections such as dysentery, typhoid fever or oral thrush.

The entire Hirsch family arrived in New York on September 11, 1869, landing in Castle Garden, the southern tip of Manhattan. Over 8 million immigrants landed here between 1855 and 1890 before this immigration control point was moved over to Ellis Island. Immigrants were questioned about their nationality and profession; one could exchange money, purchase rail tickets and arrange all sorts of things for the beginning. Job openings were also provided.

Details given by immigrants were written down by ear, without looking at passports or certificates of residence. According to the passenger list, Nathan and his wife Röschen traveled with only four instead of seven children: Joseph (27), Dora (21), Samuel (16) and Rickie (15). However, it does not mention Regina (26), Hannah (22) and Sigmund (17). The passenger list does not specify the children's exact ages. It is possible that the parents saved some money on tickets for their youngest children, as children under ten years old had to pay only half the fare for the passage. In the same year, 136,200 people emigrated via Bremerhaven alone.

Joseph, the eldest son, had emigrated before the family did, which is indicated in the Nashville Jewish Community Archives. After having stayed in Texas and Louisiana, he arrived in Nashville, Tennessee in 1868, at the age of 26. Nashville had acquired municipal law in 1806 and became the capital of Tennessee in 1843. Joseph founded his business "Hirsch & Co." together with Sam(uel) Löwenstein, who later became Regina's (Joseph's sister) husband. At 98 N. College St. (today: Third Avenue North), they sold boots, shoes, fabric and notions. Joseph probably traveled back to Germany in 1869 to pick up the rest of his family and bring them to Nashville.

In 1870, after the family's arrival, the Hirsch brothers founded another wholesale and retail business for "Dry Goods" on Union Street, together with their father Nathan. Shortly after, the store moved to 72 N. College St. and traded under the name "N. Hirsch & Co.". Products ranged from pants, carpets, fabric, boots, coats and trunks in every size. In 1871, the store expanded to street numbers 68 and 70 and traded under the name "N. Hirsch & Co. Trade Palace" from then on. In 1878, Sigmund and Samuel became partners in the "General Store," which in the meantime had moved to 56-60 N. College St. At that time, Joseph, Nathan's eldest son, ran the "Globe Clothing Palace".

In 1879 "N. Hirsch & Co." had to file for insolvency, as was published in the New York Evening Post on December 31, 1879. Liabilities amounted to approximately \$ 75,000 – 80,000. Their principal creditors were in New York and Cincinnati. The newspaper article did not mention how or why the business went bankrupt. Perhaps the yellow fever epidemic which had spread in large parts of Tennessee the year before did have an effect on the country's economy. What is clear though is that Nathan subsequently retired from business.

Samuel Hirsch continued business after N. Hirsch's collapse and became the significant owner of "The Palace." According to Nashville address lists, Nathan's former business traded under the name "Hirsch Bros. & Co." in 1880. This was the time when Nashville counted 43,350 inhabitants and celebrated its 100th anniversary. "Hirsch Bros. & Co." could still be found in the address lists until 1886; afterward, Sam Hirsch spun out the successful millinery unit and partnered to operate it with his brother-in-law Leopold Jonas, husband of Rebecca ("Rickie"). "L. Jonas & Co." employed a large number of drummers (salesmen) who traveled throughout the southeast of the United States via boat, train or horse to call on customers.

The business belonging to Nathan and his family, one of the earliest and biggest Jewish stores in Nashville at that time, can be seen as a precursor of today's department stores. The numerous family members were esteemed citizens of Nashville. As an example, Joseph was President of a Jewish charity, became Vice President of the Concordia Club and the Reform Synagogue of the Ohabai Shalom Congregation in Nashville. Nathan's descendants, the family branches Hirsh, Fox, Loventhal, Marks, Jonas, Lowenstein and Frank are spread all over America.

# CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN JOHANNES AND NATHAN

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The letters exchanged between the two friends Johannes and Nathan since the emigration are incomplete, a fact we know through a list kept by Johannes. Johannes re-wrote some of his letters before sending them off, so that fortunately letters from both sides exist.

Altogether, there are sixteen letters left, twelve letters that were written by Johannes and four by Nathan between 1869 and 1892. All of them are structured in a similar way: starting with their own health condition, giving an account of occurrences in the family and how mutual friends and acquaintances were doing. Then, they would usually describe the weather or the harvest, specify prices for agricultural products and discuss exceptional developments in politics or in the country.

It is noticeable that Johannes hardly ever mentioned the names of his children's or grandchildren's spouses. Maybe he did not wish to unnecessarily confuse Nathan, as he did not know them anyway. However, there is practically nothing to be read about Nathan's children in his letters. In one of his letters, Nathan mentioned that he was keeping contact with other friends as well as with Christine and Johannes' children, especially with Elisabeth in Waldgirmes and Luise at Obermühle.

## JOHANNES' FAMILY

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Quote in original Hessian German:

*"Wir dachten, wenn Nathan Hirsch und seine Frau und Kinder jetzt wohl hierwehren und kenten bei uns sein. Sie wierten sich freuen. Katherine und Liesabete gefellts Gott sei dank bies jetzt noch gut in dem neuen Ehestand. Was weiter folgen wiert, das kann man jetzt nicht wissen. Wier hoffen alles Gute!",*  
meaning: "We thought, if only Nathan Hirsch and his wife and children could be here with us. They would be happy. Katherine and Liesabete are fine with being married, until now, thank God. What will happen in future cannot be foreseen. We hope for all the best!"

## JOHANNES SENIOR (MAY 30, 1811 – MAY 04, 1901)

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Johannes wrote Nathan that he would retire once all his children were married. Then in February 1884, after Christine passed away, Johannes decided to retire and hand the farm over to the younger family members. Although he continued to live in the "Schneider'sche Hof," he also kept the front room on the first floor of the "Juste Hof," as he wrote in his letter. After Marie got married, it was clear that she would take over her parents' farm together with her husband Friedrich. Johannes happily emphasized how well they got along with each other, there were no disputes or arguments.

In 1886, Johannes had a severe case of zoster, a form of Herpes Zoster, also known as shingles. His daughter Marie nursed him back to health. Katharina, a daughter who lived in the neighboring farm "Hans-Korts" was not as fortunate: she also became ill and died, as we learned from the letters.

How well Johannes recovered can be read in a further letter, in which he mentioned that he no longer suffered from lung problems and was still able to walk to Giessen (10 km) and to Königsberg (4 km) or to Hohensolms (7 km) the very next day, at the age of almost 80.

At that time, approx. 20 percent of the population suffered from tuberculosis, an infectious disease caused by bacteria, which mainly affects the lungs. In the 1880s, almost 120,000 people died of tuberculosis every year in Germany.

Johannes' children and grandchildren were very dear to him, how dear, we can tell by the fact that when his grandchild needed an operation due to a lump in her throat, Johannes walked to the clinic in Giessen twice to visit her. When she died shortly thereafter, she was transported to her funeral in a hearse from Giessen to Rodheim. The whole village was present to express their deepest sympathy and Johannes wrote he had never seen the church so full of people, most of them even cried. Johannes hoped and prayed for God and Jesus Christ's assistance for the child.



## CHRISTINE (DECEMBER 22, 1811 – FEBRUARY 27, 1884)

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Johannes also mentioned in his letters that Christine repeatedly had problems with her legs as of the beginning of 1870. Acute pain prevented her from being able to sleep. She died on February 27 at the age of 73 after a severe attack. Johannes wrote Nathan that all the children had seen and been with her before she passed away. She was buried in Rodheim, and Johannes arranged for the most beautiful marble tombstone with golden lettering to be set on her grave for 215 marks.

As we have already mentioned, the tombstone plays a fundamental role in Jewish faith which is why Nathan suggested that Johannes have a beautiful tombstone put up for her.

Upon Christine's death and Johannes' decision to pass on the farm to the younger generation, we can read about how he divided his inheritance in 1886: The whole land was auctioned, anyone was able to bid. Bidders had to pay the sum of 3 to 4 annual targets for the land. The targets made up a total of 30,449 marks, after which Johannes expected another 34,000 marks. He had already received 45,000 marks from Marie and Johannes for the "Schneider'sche" and "Juste" farms. His children would inherit all this money, minus the dowries already received. He kept 1000 marks for his own funeral.

Johannes explained his financial situation in detail to Nathan, because farm laborers from Waldgirmes had spread rumors that the inhabitants at Hof Haina had no assets. One of those laborers had emigrated to America and after he returned, he told everyone, drunk as he was, "die Auswärtigen wehren lauter Lumben," Hessian German for "all foreigners were rogues".

## FARM, HARVEST AND WEATHER

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Besides cultivating grain, Johannes also grew peas and potatoes. Straw and hay were further sources of income. Money could also be gained with livestock, so he listed prices for ox, beef, veal, mutton and pork in his letters. He also mentioned the prices for eggs, butter and prunes which were probably sold on the market.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as far as his grandson Otto could remember, "Hof Haina" started an improved three-field economy, meaning crop rotation, leaving one field fallow.

In 1872, there was hardly any fodder. Johannes wrote Nathan that he wasn't affected, but people were gathering grass and leaves in the woods for the animals. Johannes listed prices for livestock and grain in detail.

In 1872, harvest was good, and he could bring it in dry. The year after, however, a lot of harm was caused to the harvest by mice. In 1874, Johannes listed prices for grain in detail.

In 1881, Johannes was not able to send Nathan prunes, as requested, because the trees were damaged by freezing temperatures in the winter. Even his plum trees with mid-sized stones were barren. Johannes had infertile trees over a length of 25 meters and wrote Nathan that he didn't expect to be able to harvest any fruit for the next 10-15 years. In 1883, Johannes declared he himself would take care of farming at the "Schneider'sche Hof" until all children were married (see above).

Harvest was difficult due to great amounts of rain. Johannes deplored the trees damaged by the cold as well as the masses of water in the past years as "judgment over the world." At the turn of the year 1882/83, many German towns by the Rhein, Main and Ruhr rivers suffered catastrophic floods. Donations were collected in New York and Philadelphia for Germany, amounting to \$100,000. A year later, terrible floods hit America so that donations were collected in Germany. The German Empress alone sent 1,000 marks to America.

In 1885, Johannes wrote Nathan that he had meanwhile leased his land in Rodheim. In that same year, a good harvest was achieved. In autumn, there were heavy storms and before Christmas, much snow and cold temperatures were recorded.

In 1890, hail caused serious damage in Königsberg, also destroying the whole harvest. Königsberg's head forester and bailiff sent a request for donations. Nathan transferred 50 marks to Königsberg and recommended that people in Königsberg also write to people in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who had emigrated from Königsberg. There were about 30 families who were well-off. Nathan wrote to a few people to encourage them to donate.

In January 1892, Johannes noted that rye and wheat perished in the winter, barley and oats fortunately resisted the frost.

## NATHAN'S FAMILY AND HIS BUSINESS

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In his letter dated December 30, 1885 Nathan mentioned that meanwhile, he had 22 healthy grandchildren who were being brought up in a German way. Nathan (74) still looked after the business every day. He had 50 employees, salespeople or so-called drummers, apart from family members who worked in the store.

Nathan's state of health was good, except for his cough. Two years later, he was no longer able to walk properly and still suffered from a persistent cough. His wife also felt weak, *"still taking care of the household, even if she doesn't do any work herself"* (in Hessian: *"bekümmert sich aber immer noch um die Haushaltung, wenn sie auch nichts arbeit"*).

In 1885, Nathan included an envelope in his letter to Johannes, asking him to write a long letter with plenty of information from home. All he would need to do is take it to the post office. Nathan asked Johannes once again in 1887 to send him an answer soon, as more and more companions, friends and acquaintances were dying, therefore news from home was becoming scarce. Johannes answered one month later, saying that losing weight and problems with walking were normal at their age, especially as Nathan had already walked enough throughout his life.

In 1888, Nathan and Röschen celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. He was in good health, his cough had also disappeared. In 1889 however, Nathan became seriously ill and could not urinate for 22 days. The doctors he consulted did not want to operate due to his advanced age. Finally, his family doctor provided relief with a specific instrument. Four people had to hold him down during this painful procedure. He needed two months to recuperate and then stated that he felt old and weak. Before carrying out the operation, for which he earned almost \$1,000, the doctor did express his concern that Nathan might end up delirious.

In 1890, Nathan told Johannes about a pleasant dream he had, in which he met Christine and enjoyed a good conversation with her. Nathan's family was fine at that point; Röschen and he himself felt weak, however he still saw to business on days when he felt well.

## AMERICA

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*"Es war im Staht Dennise (Tennessee) eine sehr gute Ernnde, iberhaupt in ganz Amerika. Fū (Vieh) ist hier sehr billig."*

Hessian German for: *"We had a great harvest in Dennise (Tennessee), in fact in all America. Livestock is very cheap here."*

Unfortunately, there is no letter written by Nathan Hirsch which describes the family's passage. There may have been one which got lost. Even Johannes did not refer to it in any of his letters.

In 1870, drastic things happened in America. Nathan wrote about a great drought and the fact that the prices for cattle had gone down because of it. In desperation, towns prayed for rain.

More of Nathan's and Johannes' friends had emigrated to America. In his letter dated 1881, Johannes sent his greetings to friends who are not named in detail. In 1885, Nathan said that the harvest was very good and livestock very cheap in America. 1887 was the hottest summer since Nathan lived in America, and winter was taking its time. Nathan discovered that Americans could not tolerate the cold.

Johannes answered that he was critical of the predominantly German-born socialists executed in America because they were spreading trouble in the world and, in his view, did not have any religion. He wished for the socialists to return to God and His Word. (Among Johannes' books is a booklet by Adam Neuer "Deutschthum in law and customs. Description of the Behavior of the German Conservatives in the Reichstag toward the Socialist Act of 1879.")

In 1890, Nathan reported there were very many poor people in America. If everyone was provided for, no one would have to beg. In the same year, harvest was very poor. We learned that mainly wheat, rye, barley and oats are grown in "Denise" (Tennessee), but most people live off maize. Bread and cake could be baked and maize cooked as a vegetable. Nathan found maize very nourishing. German rye bread could be purchased in the city. Also, grapes grew in Tennessee. In 1890, the first potato harvest was very bad because of the drought and people hoped that the second harvest would be better. Nathan anticipated that there would not be a lot to export to Germany that year. Two years later, in 1892, the harvest in America was so successful that mainly vegetables and fruits, such as grapes, could be exported to Germany.

## GERMANY

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Johannes wrote Nathan in 1870 about the "unjust" war of France against Germany:

*"All of the sudden, Napolion (Napoleon) declared war against Germany. Because of the Prince of Hohenzollern for accepting the crown in Spain. The Prince of Hohenzollern announced that no German blood should be spilled by accepting the crown of Spain. Napolion (Napoleon) was not happy with that, he demanded of our King that he confirm in writing that no Prussian prince would ever accept the crown of Spain. So our King said he would not sign the note even if the French messenger insisted. Toward the King he then declared an unjust war against Germany, without reason! (...) Thank God the war has not come to German grounds. The big Napolion (Napoleon) miscalculated, he believed that the German princes were on his side (...)."*

The German King announced the first Penance Day on July 27, 1870.

In 1874, Johannes wrote that although wages were high in the mining business, the workers were dissatisfied. In both Europe and in the United States, the so-called Founders' Crash<sup>4</sup> happened at the same time. Wages increased, but there was a shortfall in revenues. Protective tariffs were claimed because more goods were imported than exported.

In the Lahn district as well as in the Hinterland (part of Hesse-Darmstadt), iron ore mining declined dramatically due to rising freight costs. At the same time, textile and crop prices plummeted due to cheap imports from the USA. In addition, farmers faced increasing costs for machinery and fertilizers. It was not until 1880 that the crisis was overcome.

In 1885, Johannes reported that France was arming against Germany. Nathan took great interest in political developments and asked how German middle class were coping with high taxes and duties. In his opinion, the Franco-Prussian War had mainly helped aristocracy, not the citizens, nor the farmers. He compared prices on both sides of the Atlantic and blamed Bismarck for the high burdens that the "low" class had to pay.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic\\_of\\_1873](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1873)

Nathan was informed about the "good old" crown prince's throat condition and that Germany was concerned because of this illness (in 1887). One month later, Johannes commented on this: "the old German Emperor is 91 years old and his son has cancer of the throat." Johannes hoped for God's help. He believed that Bismarck and Moltke, resp. 73 and 87 years old, were too old.

When Nathan lamented that the poor workers had to pay taxes and duties, Johannes compared their situation with his own, and saw himself at a disadvantage; farmers paid wages for their costly farm hands and maids and taxes on crop, however, workers did not have to pay any taxes on wage, or hardly any.

In 1890, Nathan wrote that he read about a great amount of poor people in letters from Germany. Poverty continued to increase in 1892, due to bad harvests in Germany and increasing food prices. Bread and potatoes then cost twice the normal. Misery was so great that a 100-200 people died of hunger every day. Also, a cholera epidemic was rampant in Germany.

In a letter which is not preserved, Nathan apparently asked Johannes who in the area needed help the most urgently. In his response, Johannes recommended to donate 50 marks to Salomon and Mehle who lived in Waldgirmes.

## END OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

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We can tell by looking at Johannes's list that there must have been more letters after that, which unfortunately no longer exist. Nathan passed away two years after his last letter, in 1894 at the age of 83. His wife Röschen followed four years later in 1898, at the age of 82. Both lie buried in the Temple Cemetery in Nashville.

Johannes Dudenhöfer died on May 4, 1901, a few days before his 90th birthday and was buried in the cemetery of Rodheim. His tombstone as well as that of his son-in-law Friedrich Feiling are now located in the small cemetery of "Hof Haina" which was laid out after consolidation of land in 1935.



## BALTIMORE – THE FAMILY OF SAMUEL HIRSCH/HIRSH

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Thanks to Allan Hirsh and his cousin Gilbert Fox, gaps in research were closed. The men from both families (Nashville and Baltimore), who were almost the same age, kept in touch until the end of their lives.

We learned from Allan Hirsh in Baltimore, Maryland, that his great-grandfather Samuel, Nathan's younger brother by two years, was the first to arrive in America. Samuel, who was a livestock trader in Germany like his father<sup>5</sup>, emigrated with his wife Branetta Löwenstein and children Hannah, Nannie, Sara, Joseph, Etta, Louis, Mollie and Isaac to Cumberland, Maryland, in 1865. Samuel, who changed his name from Hirsch to Hirsh after his arrival in the USA, traded in wool and furs in Cumberland for 30 years. He passed away in 1895 and is buried in Cumberland just like his wife Branetta, who died in 1904.

We have further details of three of his eight children. One daughter, Mollie, married her cousin Samuel Hirsch in Nashville, Tennessee on February 7, 1883, where she lived from then on with her husband and family. Another daughter married in Areola, Florida. All the other children lived close to their parents, who enjoyed having 39 grandchildren.

Joseph, Samuel's fourth of eight children, was born in Germany on September 1, 1850 and already finished school at the age of 15, when the family emigrated to America. When he turned 18 in 1868, he opened up a clothes store in Piedmont, West Virginia. Some 20 years later, he returned to Cumberland and founded a tailor shop. In 1911, Joseph built a three-story commercial building in downtown Cumberland to which the thriving clothing business<sup>5</sup> relocated. Joseph married the German Lena Bamberger, with whom he had three children. His two sons worked in the business with him. Joseph became Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce of Cumberland and was a Member of the City Council for several years.

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<sup>5</sup> Please note: this piece of information was found here:  
<https://geneanet.org/pfdm?lang=en&n=hirsch&oc=4&p=Samuel>

# MY SINCERE GRATITUDE

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I wish to thank Dr. Aide Rehbaum, who helped me with this difficult research in two languages, on two continents. I am also grateful for the support of the descendants of the Hirs(c)h family, who generously provided information on their family history (Allan Hirsh, Gilbert Fox, Caroline Gries and David Fox). In addition to all of those who are committed to local history and who contributed pieces of information (Manfred Schmidt, Karin and Rolf Keil, Brigitte Heer-Dudenhöfer, Dieter Schmidt, Helmut Failing, Norbert Nossek, Elke Lepper), I would also like to express my thanks to the city archive and district archive of Giessen, the historical archive of the town of Wetzlar, the community archive in Biebertal, the National Archives in Darmstadt, Wiesbaden and Marburg, the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven, the archives of the German Homeopathic Union in Karlsruhe and finally, the central archive of the Protestant Church in Hessen and Nassau, who all supplied us with material.

Lynn Fleischer, registrar at the Annette Levy Ratkin Jewish Community Archives, who provided Gilbert Fox's contact and went through her own documents to look for records on Nathan Hirsch and his family, proved wonderful support. Also, I owe particular thanks to Don Seiler, registrar at Dickinson College, for allowing to print several photographs out of the stock of an American amateur photographer and former student of Giessen University, Charles F. Himes. Fortunately, he also travelled to and around the Giessen area in 1890 and captured everyday scenes of country life, for eternity.

Finally, I would like to warmly thank Gisela Christiansen and Katrin Schröder for proofreading the German version, as well as Claudia Kuhn for her translation into American English and Carin Farnung and David Fox for proofreading the English version.

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# PHOTOS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

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Hof Haina in front of Dünsberg mountain



Schneider's farm ("*Schneider'sche Hof*") with porch and balusters (porch originating 1734), barn, pigsty and former manure heap (on the right)





View from the "Schneider'sche Hof" to the "Juste Hof"



Books belonging to Johannes Dudenhöfer



Johannes Dudenhöfer (1811-1901)



Christine Dudenhöfer, née Schneider  
(1811-1884)





Schneider's farm "Schneider'sche Hof"



Nathan Hirsch parents' house in  
Kreuzergasse, Waldgirmes



Passage from America to Germany, 1890  
(Charles F. Himes)





1	Henry Philipp	42	m	America	
1	Richard Bauer	25	"	Hamburg	
9	Carl von Lichtenau	21	f	Wilhelmsburg	
130	John H. Fröber	41	m	Charleston	
5	Henry Heider	61	"	"	
2	Anna	55	f	"	
2	August Wittenberg	35	m	"	
4	Paul von Dahlen	30	"	"	
5	Adolf Bremer	42	"	"	
6	Anna	32	f	"	
7	Friedrich Lichtenhal	35	"	"	
8	Adolph Müller	24	m	Parish	
9	August Koser	30	f	St. Louis	
136	Nathan Heider	27	m	Darmstadt	
1	Röschen	36	f	"	
2	Joseph	27	m	"	
3	Samuel	9	"	"	
4	Dora	19	f	"	
5	Reba	8	"	"	
6	Leopold Spornstein	15	m	"	
7	Carl Kellermann	24	f	Bischoffheim	
8	Mathilde Friedl	20	"	Hildesheim	
9	Rebecca Schling	62	"	Hannover	8-11
141	John Nagels	24	m	New York	
1	Carl	27	f	"	16-15

Extract from the passenger list on the "Donau", including Nathan's family



Sitting from left: Regina, Nathan, Röschen, Rebecca (Rickie)  
Back row from left: Samuel, Dora, Sigmund, Hannah and Joseph



N. Hirsch & Co. / Trade Palace, Nashville belonging to Nathan Hirsch and his family, one year before becoming bankrupt, approx. 1878. Pictured in the N. Hirsch entrance from left to right, are believed to be Sigmund (1852-1902), Joseph (1842-1917) and Samuel Hirsch (1853-1930)



Department store in Nashville belonging to L. Jonas, Nathan Hirsch's son-in-law

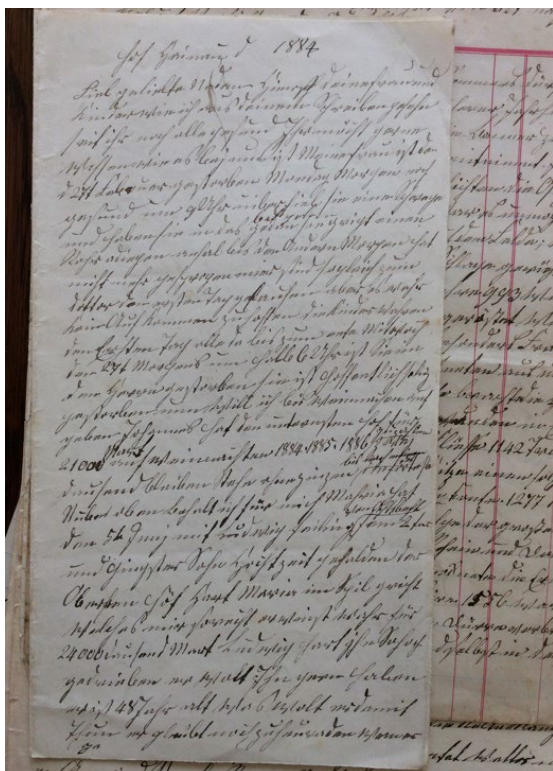




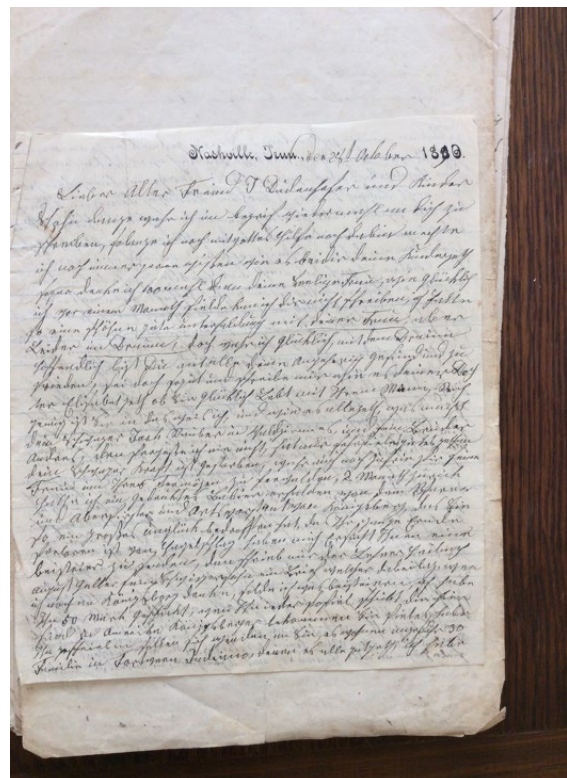
Johannes Dudenhöfer (1811-1901)



Nathan Hirsch (1811-1894)



Johannes' letter to Nathan in 1884



Nathan's letter to Johannes in 1890



Unknown man on the road from Vetzberg to Krofdorf  
with the hill Gleiberg in the background (Charles F. Himes 1890)



Church of Rodheim with cemetery and marble crosses





Tombstone of Nathan and Rosa Hirsch



Tombstone of Johannes Dudenhöfer



Tombstone of Friedrich Feiling



Family picture of Samuel Hirsch, Nathan's brother, and his family