

Lazarus and Jette

Lazarus Gutmann is born the son of a cattle dealer in 1822 in the town of Hengstfeld, in the kingdom of Württemberg in south west Germany. He is vaccinated against smallpox in 1829, he receives good marks at school which he attends through age 14, and fulfills his military obligation in 1843 at age 21. A few years later he develops a close relationship with 15-year old Jette Gutmann (apparently unrelated) who lives with her five sisters and her father, Mendel, in the town of Jochsberg some thirty miles to the east. She becomes pregnant, and in September of 1849 she gives birth to their son Abraham.

In October of 1850 (Abraham is already a year old) Lazarus files an application for permission to move to Jochsberg and to marry Jette, neither of which is as straightforward as we might think today. First, to be allowed to marry, he has to formally establish that he is unmarried, that he has the resources to support a wife and family, that he is not responsible for any outstanding financial or other obligations, and notices of the proposed marriage have to be publicly posted in both of their home towns. As for his relocating to Jochsberg, it is complicated by the fact that it's in a different kingdom (Bavaria), and he needs permission both to leave Württemberg and to obtain citizenship in Bavaria. Another complication arises from an edict promulgated in 1813, according to which the number of Jewish households in each town in Bavaria is restricted to those present in the Matrikel (registry list) prepared at that time. In order for a Jew to marry and establish himself in any town he needs to possess one of the numbered entries in the Matrikel, which he must either inherit or otherwise acquire from an existing resident.

Lazarus submits documentation to bolster his application, and states that he owns 375 florins in cash and property (perhaps a few thousand dollars in today's currency) and that he has no outstanding debts. Jette's father Mendel appears before the commission to support the application, promising to cede to Lazarus his business as a feather dealer, half his house and his number in the Matrikel, in return for Lazarus' assurance of lifelong support. Mendel declares, "*I came to this decision because my wife has died this year, I am already 67 years old and need to be nursed by a child.*" But the community of Jochsberg is consulted and state that they oppose Lazarus' request because "*dealing in feathers will not be sufficient to support a family*".

Over the next few months Lazarus submits additional documentation, and in March of 1851 the Jewish Welfare Fund (representing the Jewish community of Jochsberg) is asked for their opinion. They, too, oppose Lazarus' settlement, stating that "*all members declared that this man is known to be poor and is therefore unable to maintain a family, and will sooner or later become a burden to the community*". The statement is signed by a group of ten representatives of the welfare fund, including Mendel's two brothers, Benjamin and Isaac. Two weeks later the district office declares its decision to refuse Lazarus' petition, noting that he may file an appeal. Two months later, in May of 1851, Jette gives birth to Lazarus' second son, Gustav.

No new entries appear in the record for over a year, but in July of 1852 Mendel appears before the board once again, pleading with them to reconsider their decision. He reiterates his promise to turn over to Lazarus his business, half his house and his number in the Matrikel, adding, "*I believe in a positive decision, the more as my daughter already*

has two illegitimate children from petitioner who would be made legitimate" - his signature on the statement appears shaking and frail. The Jewish Welfare Fund in Jochsberg is consulted but once again they respond negatively, stating "*that dealing in feathers and eatables does not support a family of five persons, that the alleged property of Gutmann is not verified*", and adding that "*he does not recommend himself by his moral conduct*". The issue is not just the adequacy of Lazarus' future business, they clearly consider him a scoundrel and a liar and they want nothing to do with him, despite the desperate pleas of their neighbor Mendel. The board once again refuses the petition, noting that the decision can be appealed within four weeks, and Mendel's signature appears even more shaking than before. But there was no appeal and the decision stood.

The following year Jette and the guardian who had been appointed for her two sons (whom Lazarus readily acknowledged) sued Lazarus for birth expenses and child support. Both were granted by the court, which Lazarus paid, and he expressed his intention to emigrate to America.

Jette Gutmann never married and she raised her two sons alone. The younger Gustav grew up to marry and raise a family in the nearby town of Leutershausen, he became my great grandfather. His older brother Abraham also married and raised a family in the same town, I've located and contacted several of his descendants on Long Island and in Georgia, third cousins whom I'd never known about.

Lazarus did not leave for America but returned to Hengstfeld where, in 1855, he married Lea Rosenfeld from nearby Mergentheim and raised five children. I've also managed to trace several descendants of these children living in New York and Connecticut, newly discovered half-third cousins that I'm in touch with.