



St. Annen-Straße 11 - Sara Opler

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## St.- Annen-Straße 11 - Sara Opler

Sara Opler nee Terkeltaub had lived in the Jewish Seniors' Home at Annen-Straße 1 since 1932.



The Jewish Seniors' Home, Annen-Straße 11, undated photo from the collection of Museum for Art and History of Culture of the Hanseatic City of Lübeck

Sara Opler was born in Chmielnik, Poland on 17 January 1872. In 1916 she and her five children came to Lübeck to join her husband, Hermann Opler (often written as Oppler in Germany). Hermann Opler had lived off and on in Lübeck since 1913.

The two eldest children were born in Ben(d)zin, Poland: Chane Friede (Frieda) on 1 September 1898 and Chaim Yankel (Jacob) on 8 January 1902. Their father, Hermann, was also born in Ben(d)zin on 13 July 1872.



Sara Opler in an undated photo in the private collection of Susan Heimann-Llewellyn, New York

The three youngest children were born in Offenbach, Germany: Israel on 3 March 1905, Etta (Jette) on 5 November 1909 and lastly Leo on 3 February 1912. Leo was four years old at the time of the move to Lübeck. For his siblings the move was not only a move to another city but a

### Inscription at the installation:

HIER LEBTE  
SARAH OPLER  
GEB. TERKELTAUB  
JG. 1872  
DEPORTIERT 1941  
ERMORDET IN  
RIGA

installation  
21 April 2010

change of schools as well.

All the members of the Opler family were considered stateless, even the children born in Germany.

Their emigration to Germany was bound up with many difficulties. For a time during World War I the family was interned in Holzminden and were classified as “enemy foreigners.” Sara Opler, her two daughters and infant Leo had to stay in the “women’s” camp, while Hermann Opler and his elder sons in the “men’s” camp. On top of this Sara’s marriage to Hermann, which was conducted by a Rabbi in Poland, was not being recognized by the authorities, so that Sara and all her children had to use her maiden name of Terkeltaub. Only later were they able to once again use Opler as their family name.

Several years later the couple separated. On Hermann Opler’s registration card his marital status was changed from “Married” to “Single.” A divorce presumably did never occur.

Starting in 1923 Sara Opler and her children lived on the 2nd floor of Marlesgrube 50. The Jewish family Lexandrowitz, who was also currently classified as stateless and had six children about the same ages as Sara Oplers children, also lived at Marlesgrube 50 at the same time.

Hermann Hersch Opler started work as a dealer and earned enough money to buy a small house. In the address books of 1932 and ‘33 he is listed as a production manager at Kleine Gröpelgrube 14. Still later he worked as a labourer and often changed his residence. His last places of residence in Lübeck as of 1939 and 1940 were Huxstraße 110, Königstraße 116, Hartengrube 5 with the Lissauer family und lastly St. Annen-Straße 7. St. Annen-Straße 7 was a building owned by the Jewish Community, in which several flats were available for men, who had been evicted from their residences.

In July of 1941 Hermann Opler was moved “by an order of the government“ to a nursing home in Bendorf/Koblenz. The Jacoby Hospital and Nursing Home was at this point in time the only place where Jews suffering from nervous and mental conditions were still being treated and at the same it became an assembling camp. Starting on 22 March 1942 until 11 November of the same year 573 patients were deported to extermination camps in the east and the Nursing Home was closed. The German National Archives’ Memorial Book verifies that Herman Opler was murdered in Izbica, Poland, south of Lublin, Poland.

Hermann Opler’s name as well as the names of Sara Opler and their sons can be found on various Lists of Names compiled by the Police Authorities before and after 1938. In the “Drawn Up Lists of Stateless Registered Jews in Lübeck” from 1938 only Sara Opler (St. Annen-Straße 11), and her sons, Jacob (Balauerfohr 9) and Leo Oppler (Georgstraße 28) are to be found. The other children had already left Lübeck. Frieda, Israel and Etta were living in Berlin.



Leo Opler in the summer of 1920 as a beach salesperson in Niendorf on the Baltic Sea.

The stateless Oplers were not touched by the so-called “Polish Action“ (a plan to evict all Jews of Polish nationality) at the end of October 1938 but they did not escape the repercussions from it. In the months that followed the Polish Action they found themselves under massive Gestapo pressure, being repeatedly summoned for questioning, during which they were told to leave Germany otherwise they might be sent to a concentration camp. On a 1939 Police review list Sara Opler and Hermann Hersch Opler were listed as “both pursuing emigration,” while Leo Opler had already decided to go to Belgium. On 26.7.1939 he informed the registration office that he was emigrating to Brussels.

In October 1938 Jacob Opler was expelled from Germany and found refuge in Paraguay. Sometime later he went to Argentina.

In 1939 Etta and her husband, Heinrich Heimann, left Berlin, Germany, emigrating to the USA. Bertha and Dora Lexandrowitz mentioned their friends and at one time neighbours in a 14 May 1940 letter to their sister, who had fled to Shanghai:

*“Etta Oppler-Heimann sent us a nice letter from New York. She has given birth to a daughter. Her name is Susan.”*

In the meantime the eldest daughter married. Frieda Saalfeld nee Opler informed the registration

office on 31 January 1940 that she was leaving Lübeck and moving to Berlin-Charlottenburg. She had the opportunity to go into hiding somewhere near Berlin and indeed was a Holocaust survivor. She died shortly after the war in 1946 or '47. Her daughter, Evchen, was exempted from deportation since her father was not Jewish but she became a forced labourer and worked at a Siemens factory. Evelyn Saalfeld (she used the family name Saalfeld even though Willy Saalfeld was not her father) married an American soldier, who himself was born in Germany and went with him to the US in 1948. She died in the 1990's during a trip to Morocco.

On 27 November 1941 Sara Opler wrote what would be her last letter to her daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter Susan. She addressed the letter to "Herrn u. Frau Dr. Heimann (Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Heimann), 245 Ft. Washington Ave, New York, USA." She did not write the letter herself, due to unknown difficulties, but rather dictated the letter to Dora Lexandrowitz (born 1908), her daughter's friend, and who, like Sara, had received her "Evacuation Order." After living together for many years in the same building at Marlesgrube 50 Dora also had to seek shelter at St. Anne-Straße 11 due to being forced to sell her parental home.

*Lübeck, 27.11.41*

*Meine lieben Kinder, mein geliebtes Enkelkindchen -*

*Euren l. Brief vom 22.10. habe ich durch Frida erhalten u. bin glücklich daraus Euer Wohl zu ersehen. Hoffentlich seid Ihr alle weiter gesund u. der l. Hugo hat auch geschäftlich Erfolg. Dies wünsche ich Euch vom Herzen. Zu gern hätte ich mein süßes Enkelkindchen selbst gesehen, aber wer weiss, ob dies im Leben nochmal der Fall sein wird. Ja, meine lieben Kinder, dies ist vorläufig ein Abschiedsbrief für Euch, denn meine Adresse wird sich ab 4.12. wohl ändern. Ich bin aber noch nicht in der Lage Euch die neue Anschrift mitzuteilen, seid versichert, dass ich Euch sobald ich nur kann, davon Mitteilung machen werde. Ich vertraue auf den l. G'tt, wie er unser Schicksal lenkt, soll es ja zum Guten sein. Dora Lex geht auch mit mir u. viele andere auch noch.*

*Frida und Evchen werden Euch sicher Ähnliches berichten. Sorgt Euch nicht zuviel, wir hoffen auf ein gesundes Wiedersehen.*

*Liebe Etta, ich habe den ganzen Sommer keine Post von Jacob gehabt. Bitte schreibe Du ihm u. Israel einen netten Brief u. sage ihnen, dass meine Gedanken Tag u. Nacht nur bei meinen l. Kindern sind. Von Leo hatte ich Post. Er ist gesund.*

*Das eine Auge tränt bei mir schon während des ganzen Sommers, sonst fühle ich mich aber G'ttlob gesund u. hoffe alles zu überstehen. Am 7.4. habe ich zuletzt den Arm beim Gardinenaufstecken gebrochen, aber jetzt ist alles wieder gut. Ich habe mich schon auf meinen 70. Geburtstag gefreut, den ich bei Frida und Evchen erleben wollte. Nun werde ich ihn in traurigen Gedanken wohl für mich alleine erleben müssen. Ohne Kinder! So ist das Leben. Aber den Mut u. die Hoffnung will ich nicht verlieren.*

*Besonders grüsse u. küsse ich meine innigstgeliebte Susan, die ich zu gern im Leben noch persönlich gesehen hätte um mich an ihr zu erfreuen. Ich wünsche Euch u. ihr vom Herzen nur das Allerbeste. Seid versichert, dass ich viel an Euch denke u. sicher werdet Ihr auch an mich nicht vergessen. Ich bete Tag u. Nacht für alle meine Kinder. Bleibt gesund, ich schreibe sobald ich kann. Wartet mit Eurer Antwort bis ich Euch meine neue Adresse mitgeteilt habe.*

*In Liebe*

*Eure Euch nie vergessende Mutter und Oma.*

*Liebe Etta, alles Gute, Dir u. Deinem Mann u. Kindchen. Deine Dora.*

*Lübeck, 27.11.41*

*My dear Children and Grandchild,*

*I have received by way of Frida your letter of 22 October &\* feel lucky to hear that you are happy. Hopefully you are all healthy &\* lv\* Hugo has become successful at work. This I have been wishing for you from the bottom of my heart. I would have really liked to see for myself my sweet grandchild but who knows, whether or not I will have the chance to see her in this life. Yes, my dear children, it looks like this will be my farewell letter to you because I will be moving again on 4 December, though I am not able to tell you my new mailing address. But be assured that I will send it as soon as I can. I trust in our lv\* G'd\* that He will be in control of our fate, whether or not it will be good. Dora Lex\* &\* many others will be going with me.*

*Frida and Evchen will also surely be writing something similar to this. Do not worry too much for we have the hope of having a safe and sound reunion.*

*Dear Etta, I have not received any mail from Jacob the entire summer. Please write to him & Israel a nice letter &\* tell them, that my thoughts are with my lv\* children. I have received a letter from Leo. He is in good health.*

*One of my eyes has been watering the entire summer but outside of that I myself feel, G'd\* be praised, healthy & hope I will survive. On 7 April I broke my arm while putting up the curtains, but it is now good as new. I am looking forward to my 70th birthday, which I wanted to celebrate with Frida and Evchen. But, I will have to spend it while still having thoughts of sorrow. To celebrate it without one's children! Such is life. But I force myself to continue to have courage and not lose hope.*

*I especially want to say hello to &\* kiss my most beloved Susan, who I would have loved to see with my own two eyes and be filled with joy for her. With all my heart I wish you & her all the best. Be certain, that I think about you a lot &\* certainly you will not forget me. I pray day &\* night that all my children might remain in good health. I will write as soon as I can. Wait for my new mailing address before sending me an answer to this letter.*

*With love*

*Your mother and grandmother who will never forget you*

Dear Etta, all the best to you &\* your husband &\* small child.

Sara Opler, Dora Lexandrowitz and some ninety other people from Lübeck were deported to Riga on 6 December 1941. At the last moment the departure day for the deportation was moved to a Sabbath. The assembling location for the "Evacuation to the East" was at St. Anne-Straße 11. Those assembled there and their 50 kg per person luggage were then transported in buses to the main train station. There they boarded regular passenger carriages/cars and were taken to Bad Oldesloe southwest of Lübeck. At Bad Oldesloe the so-called "Hamburg Transport" of 1,000 Jewish people from Lübeck, Kiel, Hamburg and other locations in the state of Schleswig-Holstein was assembled.

The trip ended at the Skirotova train station, south of Riga. The people were forced to walk 3 km through the snow to Camp Jungfernhof. There was very little indication that the necessary preparations had been made at the former estate on the Daugava River (until 1948 called the Dūna River) for the inmates. In the barns and sheds some 4,000 families from different cities found wooden bunk beds, some with several levels, but nothing for heating and no WCs/toilets.

The cold and lack of food in the bitter winter months killed many people. In February 1942 about one thousand children, women and sick people were transported on trucks to the Bikernieki Forest and were shot there. A second such transport-execution occurred on 26 March 1942. This is the latest possible date that 70-year-old Sara Opler was still alive.

In her farewell letter she wrote how she was worried about her sons, Jacob and Israel, since had not heard from them for months, while she had received letters from her youngest son, Leo, and knew that he was well. But Leo was deported from Brussels to Auschwitz and murdered there on 10 May 1942. His wife, Rachel Mickenbrunn, was either pregnant or had just given birth when she died in Brussels in 1943.

Israel Opler on the other hand succeeded fleeing to another country, which saved his life. In the late 40's he emigrated to the USA and died there some ten years later.

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Heidemarie Kugler-Weimann, 2010

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