Identifying People in Old Photos

It is really thrilling when people in nearly a century-old photos can be identified. In one case a photo was sent as a postcard to Babette Fleischmann in Oberlangenstadt dated Nuremberg, 21 Nov 1915. The writer signed with „Deine alte ...“ (“Your old ...”); the German word alt (old) in its female form tells the gender of the writer. The signature could have been Emma, although it seems to be a little too long for that. Altogether the woman’s handwriting is not easy to decipher. Although the two ladies addressed each other with Du, not with the formal Sie, the style of the text gives the impression that they were not very close, such as good friends or sisters. They seemed to be more the sister-in-law kind of relatives. Date and mailing place are given both by the writer and the postmark. The writer, and this was not usually the case, wrote the address: Regensburger St.—probably 3/II meaning number 3, 2nd floor.

There weren’t any city directories of Nuremberg on the internet in 2011. So I called a friend, Gunther Friedrich, who is an archivist at the Nuremberg State Archive. “Yes, we have all the city directories of Nuremberg at the archive”, he told me, and “sure, I can look it up”. I sent him a scan of the postcard. Gunther read the address as Regensburger St. 37, 2nd floor and he agreed that, the signature could be “Emma”. Eureka! In the directory of the year 1916 he found the entry of an Emma: Emma Fleischmann, cattle trader’s widow at that very address, on the 2nd floor.

I searched through my compiled data and research results and found an Emma Fleischmann in the revised Grundsteuerkataster (property tax cadaster) of Oberlangenstadt produced by the Royal Bavarian Kataster-Bureau, stored in the State Archive in Bamberg. It documents a transfer of ownership for the properties no. 35 and no. 73 in Oberlangenstadt from the married couple Samuel and Johanna Fleischmann, butchers, to the married couple Moritz Fleischmann and Emma née Wertheimer, butcher and cattle trader married, on 22nd June 1893 for 9000 Mark plus 1000 Mark for a right of abode. Obviously this was a case of the parents passing on the properties to the next generation and securing their life estate. The family lived in house no. 35. Then in the 3rd quarter of the year 1908 the owners were:

“Fleischmann Emma, butcher and cattle trader’s widow, together with her children, in continued community of property.”

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1 German 2nd floor is equivalent to 3rd floor in the USA
This continuation followed the decease of husband Moritz Fleischmann on 21st February 1908 according to a certificate of the Royal Regional Court in Kronach. The widow and the children sold the estate according to a notarial deed dated 2nd June 1908 for 13,600 Mark to Leonhard Sammler, carpenter in Meder near Coburg. Very likely it was at that time that Emma Fleischmann and her children moved to Nuremberg. But who were these children?

Here again a file from the State Archive in Bamberg helped: the estate record from the Regional Court of Kronach concerning the inheritance of “Moritz Fleischmann, married cattle trader from Oberlangenstadt”\(^3\). The handwriting of the clerk at court is really difficult to read. I’d liked to have a word with him or even to kill him—posthumously. But it was worthwhile transcribing the file. One document listed the children of Moritz Fleischmann.

2 Staatsarchiv Bamberg, K221 656 III, Renovirtes Grundsteuerkataster der Steuergemeinde Oberlangenstadt pages 63 et seq for no. 35 and 127 et seq for no. 73

3 Staatsarchiv Bamberg, Amtsgericht Kronach, K121 URII 2751 Nachlass Moritz Fleischmann

Since 1831 the Jews of Oberlangenstadt buried their dead in the Jewish cemetery of Burgkunstadt. Moritz Fleischmann was buried there as well. A small stone plaque leans on his grave stone. The words on it are weather-beaten and hardly legible. Fortunately the cemetery was surveyed in the 1990s and the inscriptions on the stones were published by Josef Motschmann and Siegfried Rudolph in 1999.\(^4\) The words on the plaque would be in English:

Max Fleischmann, killed in action 14 Aug 1916 in Maurepas/Somme.

In 1932 the Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten (Empire’s Association of Jewish Frontline Soldiers) had published the names of the Jewish soldiers and jackies, who were killed in World War I. In here

Inscription on the grave stone of Moritz Fleischmann from Oberlangenstadt, born 17 Dec 1855, died 21 Feb 1908, Jewish Cemetery Burgkunstadt, Upper Franconia

2 Staatsarchiv Bamberg, K221 656 III, Renovirtes Grundsteuerkataster der Steuergemeinde Oberlangenstadt pages 63 et seq for no. 35 and 127 et seq for no. 73

3 Staatsarchiv Bamberg, Amtsgericht Kronach, K121 URII 2751 Nachlass Moritz Fleischmann

two Max Fleischmanns, both born in Oberlangenstadt, are listed under the placename of Nuremberg. One of them was indeed killed in action on 14 Aug 1916. His birth date was 18 Mar 1894. His unit is given as: 9/bayr.R.I.R.12, 308 Bay. which was the 9th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment No. 12, 308 Bavaria.

Transcribing handwritten documents is sometimes very difficult. The more data are known, the better. After compiling all the information I tried to decipher the words of the photo postcard again. Missing or reconstructed words are put into square brackets.

Now it became clear that the photo was taken because Max had to go to war, so that he might have a picture of his beloved ones while in the field. At the beginning of World War I he was 20 years old. If the photo was taken shortly before it was sent in November 1915, he had already been drafted. “Max writes thank God well” means of course, he had written from France while at war. When he lost his life, the poor young man was just 22 years and 5 months old.

Now it was clear as well why only three of the six children are in the photo. According to the inheritance file of 1908 Gretchen, had already lived in Marktbreit, Amalie had lived in Gera. So the young lady in the photo is very likely Ida. According to the Census of May 1939 she was born on 09 Nov 1889, Siegfried on 07 Jun 1896 and Eugen on 04 Dec 1899. Thus in November 1915 Ida was 26 years old and her brothers at home 19 and 16 years old. The data match the ages of the ones in the photo. When that was taken, Siegfried and Eugen were too young to be drafted. It is very possible that the words concerning Siegfried mean that Emma arranged the deferment of his call-up or at least applied for it.

The just mentioned database of the Census of May 1939 from the Bundesarchiv in Berlin is one of the most important sources concerning Jews in the German countries in the 1930s and early 1940s. There is no entry for Emma Fleischmann, who would have been 76 years old, but there is for her three children from the photo. In May 1939 they still lived in Nuremberg, all at the same address: Praterstrasse 5: Siegfried together with his wife Hertha and their two children Max and Ruth in one household; Eugen and Ida in another.

Nürnberg, 21 Nov 15
Regensburgerstr. 37/II.
Beloved Babette! Yesterday [I] received your card & am sorry that you had to grieve so much. Hoping you have well recovered now, you have all your good beloved ones [with you]. Max writes thank God well & Siegfried I have [...] this afternoon for [...]time as soldier. He has nothing to complain about. – With our picture I hope to delight you. We are having ours own photo taken because of Max, since he had no picture of us. Sending you many heart greetings from all of us.
Your old Emma

While the story of Max was really sad, the one of Siegfried is horrible. He, his wife Hertha and the children Max and Ruth were deported from Nuremberg to Izbica on 24 Mar 1942. All four were lost without a trace.

Their entries in the Memorial Book for the Nuremberg victims of the Shoah are to be found on page 72 to 74—all four with photos. Especially the one of 10 or 11 years old Ruth is very touching in a sad way. The one of Siegfried Fleischmann proves again that he is the one to the very left in the photo of 1915—just 25 years or so younger (see next page).
Herbert Kolb, son of the last chairman of the Jewish Community in Nuremberg until 1944 and Theresienstadt survivor Bernhard Kolb, filled in Pages of Testimony at Yad Vashem\(^6\) for the four victims. He signed as a nephew or cousin of the deportees.\(^7\) By these testimonies it is verified that this Siegfried Fleischmann is indeed the son of Moritz and Emma Fleischmann from Oberlangenstadt, and not a namesake with the same birth place.\(^8\)

And what happened to Eugen Fleischmann? He is listed on a website called Passengerlists.\(^9\) On 14 Jul 1939 he left Bremen harbour on the ship Bremen, owned by the North German Lloyd, heading for New York. There he arrived in July 1939.\(^10\) Therefore he survived the Nazi tyranny.

It is well possible that the eldest two children of Moritz and Emma Fleischmann, Gretchen and Amalie, survived the Shoah as well; at least they are not listed in any memorial publication.\(^11\)

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6 Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority, Jerusalem, Israel  
7 Certainly his mother Reta and Hertha Fleischmann, both born in Ottensoos, were sisters.  
9 A Project of Die Maus, the Association for Familyresearch of Bremen, with the Bremen Chamber of Commerce and the Bremen Staatsarchiv  
11 Later research in the Standesamt Küps resp. in the Birth Register of Oberlangenstadt revealed the dates of the two sisters: Amalie, b. 11 Feb 1888 in Oberlangenstadt House No. 68; – Gretchen, b. 01 Jan 1887 in Oberlangenstadt House No. 68, d. 1937 in Nürnberg

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Siegfried Fleischmann in 1915 and about 1942, his wife Hertha, and their children Max and Ruth before their deportation to Izbica in March 1942 (Stadtarchiv Nürnberg)

One of the four Pages of Testimony at Yad Vashem Herbert Kolb has filled in for the Fleischmanns from Nuremberg.
This family tree shows how distant the kinship relation of the writer of the photo postcard Emma Fleischmann to Babette Fleischmann was. Their husbands were 2nd cousins once removed, or descriptively: Emma was the husband-father-brother-son-wife of Babette.
Detail of a map of Oberlangenstadt dated 1851. The old housenumbers existed until the 1970ies. The street is nowadays called Nageler Strasse. House No. 35 of Moritz and Emma Fleischmann to the left is situated at the mill stream. Left to the center house No. 23, in which Babette Fleischmann née Strauß lived. No. 54 to the right (marked in red) is the Synagogue (Landesamt für Vermessung und Geoinformation, München).

Below: The same map in a smaller scale.