



LEGACIES

A Portrait and its People
1927 — 1997

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LEGACIES

INTRODUCTION

A while ago I began exploring three “art pieces,” legacies that have come down to Rob and to me, legacies that we will be passing on someday soon. One I have yet to take up: the events associated with our ownership of a watercolor by John LaFarge. It portrays the Bodhisattva Kannon, a particularly sacred being in my personal pantheon. She figured in a journey John LaFarge made to Japan in the company of Rob’s ancestor Henry Adams. Our ownership comes about thanks to Faith Knapp’s understanding that Kannon, an embodiment of mercy, is connected to my work. She gave it to us several years before she died.

The first “art-piece” I took up is a Madonna and Child from the Renaissance school of Benedetto da Maiano. To tell its story required combining intense and intimate family upheavals occurring over 100 years ago with formal research into the origins of the piece itself. The combination added substance to a piece that, when came to us, had only the thinnest of back stories. So beautiful in itself that it has no real need for a back story and yet, now that we can see it in its enriched context, its own and our family’s, I realize I am ready to pass it on. If one of our children said they would like to have it on their wall, I would happily take it down from our wall in New York and drive it or ship it to them.

Delving into the legacies embodied in the portrait of my Grandfather August Weber, by the German impressionist Max Liebermann, has proven considerably more tangled and more complicated. Its immediate provenance is clear: Painted in 1927, owned since 1967 by my mother and her siblings, in the late 1990s it came down to me as a gift, although it only moved into our house after my mother was gone. In one sense it has already “passed on.” Alex and Rob having recently become part owners of the house at Lake End where the painting hangs means it now belongs one third to Alex and one third to Rob.

Its earliest provenance is also clear. My mother and my uncle Jan Webber told us about and wrote stories about the painting, so in that sense its place in family history needed nothing added. Even quite recently I was assuming I would simply summarize their two existing versions.

Then the project derailed. I got snared when I tried to connect the fact that the painting was made in momentous times to the fact that we too seem to be living in momentous times. Was there a path through those past times which would offer clues as to how to react to these times? In the end I concluded that there was not. Regardless this is the right time to set down this family’s and this painting’s story. The people involved are our ancestors. They contributed a lot to the lineage out of which our lives emanate.

The people connected to the painting conducted themselves 90 years ago with exemplary courage, patience and practical intelligence. Each of those are attributes that are useful regardless of when one happens to be alive.

* * *

Developing a format able to accommodate the varied legacies associated with this portrait has evolved after all the struggles into a document more like a film treatment than a short story. There are plots and subplots, events that foreshadow one another, adults and children encountering differences in culture, education and class. Those who saw Tom Stoppard’s play *Leopoldstadt* have seen events that have a good deal in common with the lives of people associated with Max Liebermann and the portrait of my Grandfather. If you track news coverage of the struggles of “owners” trying to retrieve art works held in museums, you will see another version of that story here. If you ever went on an extended, outdoor leadership course sponsored by Outward Bound, you will even find some of that.

Tom Stoppard, Museums and Outward Bound. Onto the Opening Credits.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

August Weber – the subject. My Grandfather (Opa). In the painting in 1927 he is about 60 years old

Max Liebermann – the artist. Well-known German impressionist painter, at the time nearly 80 years old
He died in 1935. His wife lived on in Berlin, committing suicide in 1943 so as to avoid being transported to the camps

Marie Weber, (née Meyer-Cohn) – my Grandmother, (Granny) about 20 years younger than her husband
Paula (Quirk), Jan (Webber), Mia (Steinberg) and Gusti (Snapp) – their four children
(married names), in 1927 respectively 12, 10 and 8 – the last two are twins

Paula Meyer-Cohn – my Great-Grandmother, (Omi) widow and, by 1933, a longterm resident in Geneva
Grete Ring – After 1926, co-owner of the Cassirer art dealership. Also Max Liebermann's niece
and among my Grandmother's closest friends

Gretchen and Herman Oncken – August's sister and brother-in-law. He was Granny's PhD supervisor

Frank Foley – British consular officer in Berlin and later in Norway

Kurt Hahn – pedagogue and educator, founder of the Salem schools in Germany, where the four children were educated. Later the founder of Gordonstoun School in the UK and Outward Bound

George Mosse – The twins schoolmate and my mother's life-long friend, an innovative historian specializing in Nazi ideology. US based as an adult

THE PAINTING



Laying out a year by year description of the circuitous route this portrait took from its completion in 1927 to its safe return to the family in London in 1997 is truly impossible. We know it left Berlin in the care of Grete Ring, of the Cassirer Art Gallery. Maybe she was allowed to take it out of Germany because Cassirer's had a branch in the Netherlands. What year? Jan says in 1933 sometime after my Grandfather's first run-in and arrest by the Nazis. The family was always sure it was taken to the Rijksmuseum for safekeeping. Wherever it actually spent the war years, in 1946 my Grandfather, assuming it was at the Rijksmuseum, seems to have asked them to return it. They denied ever having had it. 50 years later, and after further abortive searches, a scholar located it in the Hague, at the Mesdag branch of the Van Gogh museum. Without argument but with amazing bureaucracy, the Mesdag agreed to return it. In the cover photo it is hanging on the stairs at Lake End.

Act 1 centers on August Weber, his powerful political presence and the courage with which he confronted the Nazi world and exile as well. **Act 2** centers on Berlin's elite cultural milieu in which his wife Marie Meyer-Cohn circulated. **Act 3** takes up the adults' escape from Germany during the 1930s. **Act 4** centers on their four children, school age when the Nazis came to power, each an example of different kinds of challenge one might face in exile. It was left to that generation to find and to recover the painting.

The subplots feature Frank Foley, Grete Ring and Kurt Hahn, Hahn most dramatically. The first time he appears he was taking a public stand against Hitler. The second puts him among Berlin's Jewish cultural elite, the co-founder of a school designed to shape a new generation of cosmopolitan leaders free from Germany's conformity and militarism. The third time he plays a small part in Paula's and Jan's lives exile.

Finale The picture, which was invisible through the war years and for decades thereafter, was rediscovered almost by chance. Our Grandfather's children made yet another claim for it and this time the claim succeeded. In truth this fitting climax owes more to successfully grappling with bureaucracy than to conventional definitions of heroism. More patience and strategic thinking than derring do.

Act I — Politics, Democracy and Public Lives

Setting the Scene My Grandfather, August Weber, (Opa) was the embodiment of what one calls a Public Man. Well known in finance, he was visible too in public office, both appointive and elective.

He was born into an egalitarian ethos, and as an adult was committed to Germany's post-1919 identity as a "Republic." Repeatedly my mother would remind us that Opa's Grandmother, Sophie Westerholtz, bowed down to no-one. When the local Landgraf came to call, the two sat together over tea at her kitchen table. Opa's birthplace, Oldenburg, well beyond the reach of Prussia's hierarchy and constraints, is said to have fostered that kind of thinking. In addition to the Liebermann, Rob and I own a commemorative print made so as to mark the first meeting of the Reichstag under the Weimar republic in 1919. Opa treasured it, writing a fond note on the back when he gave it to my mother. Active involvement in public life is another of this Grandfather's legacies to have come down the generations, at least into my life.

Opa was a self-made man, both a banker and a business man, though not personally looking to capitalism as a means to becoming richer and richer himself. He was prosperous enough to rent a large country estate and a Berlin apartment, rentals being the norm in Germany back then and seemingly still today. He was also prosperous enough to invest in the farm attached to the country house without ever making any money from it. My mother's Germany stories re-emerge in the pictures in family photo albums: the bull and the brick works, the worker at their country house in Loepten. Also in the country each child had responsibility for their own horse and for a dog. My Grandfather's dog was said to be able to sense well before he arrived that Opa was nearly home. Their happiness in rural Loepton I assume is a family legacy inherited from life at the Westerholz farm.

Scene 1 This Public Man was elected to the Reichstag twice, serving for the first time for five years in the lead up to World War I. In 1914-1918, his contribution to Germany's war effort saw him assigned to the Economics Ministry. His second stint in the Reichstag, a single term, began in 1930, concurrent with Hitler's rise as a truly potent force in German politics. In this second term he was a member of a very small party, but that small group was made up of prominent men and his presence in the Staatspartei and in the Reichstag did not pass by quietly.

He stood out in the Reichstag for his two utterly explicit anti-Nazi speeches. The first, no more than a brief comment in December 1931, made a complaint that the sitting government was not nearly active enough in curtailing Nazi mob violence. The details of his more famous speech, dating to February 1932, have so far eluded my internet detective work. I know it happened. I know made him a target for Hitler's wrath and it is very clear that once the convoluted electoral process which ended with Hitler as Chancellor was finalized in January 1933, my Grandfather's safety could no longer be guaranteed.



Scene 2 Indeed, his safety was soon clearly at risk. His first of what would be seven arrests under Nazi warrants happened within months of Hitler's elevation. It is important to be clear that while in 1933 Hitler already had dictatorial powers, they were nothing like as thorough-going as they were to become under wartime conditions. Also, the German State continued to describe itself as operating according to rules and laws. So, since my Grandfather was arrested for "corruption" and, since he was a meticulous record keeper and an honest man, it took no more than a few months before he had to be released to return home. My mother treasured the telegram that let her know he was safe for the rest of her life.

The Nazi government forced him out of his jobs in banking and industry, reducing him to practicing as a corporate auditor for the duration of his professional life in Germany. He was also required to surrender the lease on their country house; the estate having once been a Kaiser hunting lodge, it was rented only with government consent.

In the public realm under Hitler, my Grandfather carried a reputation as persona non grata and he remained under suspicion for duration of Hitler's Reich. The Reichstag Remembrance Book, a Wiener Library interview of my Grandfather and, no doubt official Nazi records, list six other arrests — the names and dates of each place he was imprisoned and interrogated. The last time seems to have been a failed attempt at entrapment. None of these episodes resulted in findings that he was guilty of the offenses used to justify the arrest.

When I tell people these days that my Grandfather was arrested seven times they are impressed. When I add that his Jewish wife stayed on, living in Berlin with him until almost the last moment, only leaving after Kristallnacht in late 1938, the astonishment grows. If I then say that she routinely took herself to the places he was incarcerated to deliver food and clean clothes, all the while admonishing his guards to treat him with respect, jaws tend to drop open.

Momentous, troubled times require courage, patience and practical actions.

Scene 3 By the time my Grandfather reached London in February 1939, war was clearly looming though more than six months passed before the explosions actually began.

How did his political life unfold in Britain? The short answer is sadly. He is described as having been a journalist and he certainly did write. Among other things he was working on a book about how Germany must change. He joined the futile efforts by the refugee community to persuade the British government and military forces that they should intervene militarily to bring an end to the slaughter of Europe's Jews.

Furthermore, both he and his wife were interviewed by the British government with an eye to whether or not they were enemy aliens to be confined, as all internees were, either on the Isle of Man or in Australia. Perhaps because he was an old man and a known anti-Nazi he was ruled exempt. It is good to know that at least that particular ignominy did not materialize.

Sometime in 1940, Hitler's underlings, under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler produced a list of people to be arrested at once after any invasion. This list, The Black Book was discovered in Berlin after the war. My Grandfather's is one name among the hundreds on the list, a few of them British, along with the presumption that he would likely be found in London.

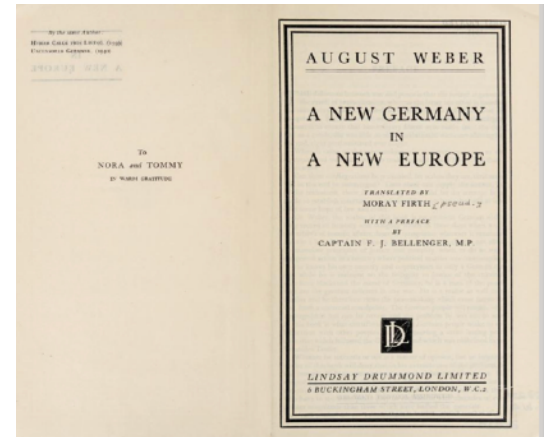
A year later, in 1941 he and all the exiled members of his family were stripped of their German citizenship.

Scene 4 How does Kurt Hahn feature in the politics associated with this picture? He too took a very public stand against the violence on which Hitler's rise rested. For Hahn the breaking point was the 1932 murder of a young communist in Potempa, by Nazi SA mobs. By then already several years into his role as Headmaster of the Salem Schools, Hahn wrote a letter to the Salem community, to the parents, alumni and faculty announcing that anyone who supported the murder would no longer be considered a Salemer. Hitler's confirmation as Chancellor some months later quickly led to Hahn's arrest, itself carried out very publicly on the school grounds in front of my mother's fellow students. Fast action by his German and international supporters got him released in days, with the proviso he left Germany at once, which he did.

Scene 5 My Grandfather remained resident in the UK until the end of his life in 1957. Was his German citizenship restored? I doubt it and assume he was given British Nationality. Either way, for months most years, beginning in 1947, he was back in Germany, living in the Frankfurt area. He set to work, to contribute what he could using long standing business connections, to contribute to a successful resettlement and integration of all the Germans displaced by the realignment of frontiers in eastern European countries. They were also concerned about all those whose homes and lives had been shattered by allied bombing in the Ruhr and Hamburg, in Berlin and Dresden. Opa also went for his own health and wellbeing, becoming a regular presence in one of the major spas in Bad Homburg.

I've driven down the street where he stayed while in Bad Homburg and had a brief tour of the Kaiser Wilhelm Bad, one of the spas that give the city its name. It is not hard to see the attraction to an elderly man who was never comfortable in the English language nor wholeheartedly admiring of the British war effort. Unlike his children, who immersed themselves in the societies and cultures of their new homelands, and unlike his considerably more nomadic wife, my Grandfather never lost his feeling for Germany and German life.

He also never lost his desire to make his Germany, his homeland, a better place to live, and a better model for other societies to emulate. His book *A New Germany in a New Europe*. was published in London in 1946.



Act 2 Pre-Hitler Berlin — culture, ethos and family

Setting the scene As I've already said, my Grandfather was a self-made man, with origins in NW Germany, in the city of Oldenburg. He studied Law in what after the war became East Germany and in his first job worked for the Dresdener Bank. By 1913 he had moved to Berlin where, after WWI, he took on leadership of the financial side of the Jute and Hemp industry and a directorship in the Commerz Bank. Close-in business and banking connections were and remain the norm in Germany. Entire industrial sectors collaborate to form shared banking relationships with particular banks.

Berlin as a city, before and also after World War I was a thriving and growing metropolis. Visit it today and one can see that part of the prosperity which survived the bombers in World War II, street after street of four to six story apartment buildings, some magnificent, all of them solid and spacious. The “suburbs” consist of large villas in large gardens along winding and gracious tree-lined streets.

Scene 1 A significant segment of the prosperous in this city were Jewish. These were not the Klezmer musicians, nor the Yiddish speakers of American lore and American musical theater. These Berliners saw themselves as a vital part of an urban elite. They too were often bankers. My Grandmother's father, Heinrich Meyer-Cohn, acted as private banker to the Krupp family among others. His headquarters were on Unter Den Linden, at the very center of the city's material wealth. Heinrich Meyer-Cohn traveled to the Netherlands, to marry Paula Rindskopf. Paula's three other sisters were also married into Germany's Jewish banking elite, two in Frankfurt and one in Hamburg.

Scene 2 Their daughter, my Grandmother, Marie Johanne Helene Sophie Meyer-Cohn was a beautiful young woman. There's a portrait of her as well, now very much in the public domain, though my family sold it in 1938 to a Swedish family which continues to own it to this day. A few months ago my cousin ordered a photocopy on canvas made for us. Although it feels quite odd that a private portrait, privately held should be this accessible, nonetheless it is lovely to have .



Scene 3 In addition to being beautiful Granny was an intellectual and a scholar. She had grown up very close friends with another scholarly inclined girl, Grete Ring, later the Cassirer Gallery owner who carried Liebermann's portrait of Opa to safety. In the early 1900s both women were among a handful of women in Germany who would earn a PhD: Grete Ring in Munich doing Art History; Granny in Heidelberg, doing History. I even have in the files a printed copy of Granny's thesis — a study of George Buchanan who, in German parlance, is described as “publicist” for Mary Queen of Scots. Her uncle, Alexander Meyer-Cohn was also a scholar, a widely renowned collector of original documents for their signatures. Academic inclinations continue down as legacies in our generation as well.

Granny in Heidelberg was studying under Professor Herman Oncken. Oncken's wife Margarete (Gretchen) was a beloved sister of my Grandfather's. It was Gretchen who brought the couple together. And, despite their evident age differences and distinct cultural differences, all the signs are that she was spot on in her assessment.

Granny's mother, Paula Meyer-Cohn did not approve of the marriage. He was much too much the self-made man, presenting little of the urbane and cultured style valued in her Berlin community. By the time the marriage was mooted, Paula was a widow and the sense I get from my mother's stories is that the disapproval remained a constant theme although it did not prevent the wedding. My Grandmother “converted” to Lutheranism before the wedding but such a conversion seems to have been nothing but a paper event. I never saw in either grandparent the slightest sign of religious devotion. In later years that conversion would have had no effect on her status as a Jew under Nazi regulations, Jewishness being defined according to blood rather than belief.

Scene 4 Max Liebermann, the painter was a prominent member of that same elite Jewish circle in Berlin. According to my uncle Jan, Liebermann and my Grandfather spent their sittings chatting about his other portraits and their subjects. Liebermann's granddaughter went to school with my mother during the months every year that the Weber family was resident in Berlin.



The Artist's Granddaughter at the Table

Max Liebermann was nearing the end of his life when he made our painting. He had long been a prominent figure in the Berlin art scene and, although he had been accepted into the Association of Berlin Artists, he is best known as a leader in the Secession. Secession was an activist movement of cutting edge artists in Vienna and in Munich and in Berlin. These painters and sculptors abandoned the strict realism admired in the established art scene during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Hitler, the Secessionists were “degenerate,” artists whose work he proudly destroyed. Why was this such an important issue? Because Hitler was himself a painter in the realist school and his skills had not received public recognition. Grete Ring the painter's niece, my Grandmother's friend, never married. Shortly after she completed her PhD she joined the Cassirer Art Gallery and dealership. They represented those same Secessionist painters, mostly German ones but also the more famous French impressionists.

Scene 5 Elite Berlin Jewish culture also produced Kurt Hahn, educator extraordinary. Early in his career he served as secretary to Prince Max of Baden, the Kaiser's last “Imperial” Chancellor. Those were the years the Prince was trying to negotiate the 1918 Peace. The two men came out of the experience with a shared commitment to restructuring schooling for future German leaders, offering a new curriculum based in moral courage, internationalism and constructive civic activism. They formulated detailed lesson plans and schedules for middle and high school boys and girls, establishing schools in the Prince's castle, Schloss Salem, and in two nearby unused monasteries.

My mother, reminiscing about the siblings' education, talked about governesses who had favorites (not her) and about school at Salem. There she fell in love with field hockey, proud that by the end she had become Captain of the girls' team. She loved math and chemistry and, nervous about her bad marks in Latin and Greek, she pushed to persuade her parents to allow her to specialize in science rather than in classics through to the Abitur (Germany's

end of school exams). Kurt Hahn and Salem remained a powerful presence for the rest of her life. She and my father even decided that all three of their children (all of us pretty fluent in German) would spend a semester between 8 and 10 years old, with no immediate family nearby, in the primary schools that were the feeders for Salem. We all went, each of us spending 3 months alone in a German boarding school. To this day, it remains an unforgettable experience.

Act 3, Part I. From Berlin Into Exile — when and where they went and what they took with them.

Setting the Scene So much has been written about Jews, exile, Zionism, refugees and Hitler's brutal revenge on those who opposed him that it is easy to submerge personal stories in the enormity of their social context. Though constituting no more than a handful or two among the uncounted numbers of Jewish exiles and others at risk, in this particular Cast of Characters, virtually all were forced to leave Germany and all of them survived. Each journey had its own twists and turns.

Scene 1 The picture clearly left early. Jan says 1933. I have always thought 1932. Regardless it left Berlin right away. Liebermann may have been famous but would a portrait of a contentious man have fetched any money if sold? I doubt it. Regardless, Grete Ring took it to Amsterdam for safekeeping. She then returned to Berlin.

Scene 2 Kurt Hahn also left very early, within days of his release after the arrest in March 1933. He left with the promise that he could found a new school right away. He had supporters in Britain for his kind of pedagogy, the well-connected Arnold Forster family among others, so he made his way to Scotland, where in yet another castle, though not as big as Salem, he founded another school — Gordonstoun. Unlike Salem, the British school was for boys only. Hahn's most famous pupil, enrolling in 1935, was none other than Queen Elizabeth's future husband, Prince Phillip of Greece. Some years after the war, Hahn returned to Germany and to Salem. He died there in 1974.

Scene 3 My Great Grandmother (Omi), Paula Meyer-Cohn also left early, though exactly when it's not clear. We have a stack of wartime letters, typed and in English no less, from her in Geneva to her London-based daughter and granddaughter. According to my mother, Omi left Germany not because of Hitler's rise but because she never forgave the Kaiser and the country for stealing the lives of her sons in World War I. The younger one, Jan, spent most of the war years in Kobe Japan, but died in China. The older one Paul died on the Russian front. Opa took care of her finances from Berlin and then from London for the rest of her life. She died in Geneva in 1942.

On Omi's return to Geneva from a short trip to Berlin, she is said to have sewn family jewelry into her underwear to avoid it being confiscated by the Nazis as she crossed the frontier. My grandparents sold bits of this jewelry throughout the war for an income, though a few pieces still remained after my Granny died. In the Knapp family, Roses has an opal and pearl bracelet, Monica has my Grandmother's engagement ring and Emily has a pearl and diamond pendant.

Scene 4 The four children also left early. Germany's academic year begins in April, so my mother, Abitur in hand in March 1933, had enrolled at Freiburg University to study Chemistry. One of Hitler's first decrees limiting the rights of Jews was promulgated that April — in future there would be no place for Jews in Germany's public schools and universities. My mother was not legally considered Jewish but it quickly became clear that after her first semester, Freiburg would have no place for her in any Chemistry labs. Meanwhile, still at Salem, Jan was getting into trouble for stamping on a Swastika. Their father had already been arrested once, so my mother wrote urgently to him that he must stop taking stupid risks. By the end of the summer, plans to send all four children out of the country for good had been settled.

The one time in my mother's stories that she described their situation as frightening was on the train that was taking them to exile in Switzerland. My Grandfather traveled with them for the first few stops, just to make sure

they were OK but his presence at the frontier would have endangered them. So Granny and her four children the rest of the way alone. The parents had skillfully hidden money in the train's heating vent, which turned out to be hard to extract. Luckily my mother had her knitting needles. What they were bringing would have been immediately incriminating, approximately \$50,000 in today's money. No wonder they were worried about being searched. What did they need the money for? To pay for schooling and lodging for the children. Oddly to my eyes, this was not the children's last departure from Germany. For the next few years they came back for holidays and to see the dentist.



Scene 5 Grete Ring was the next to leave Berlin permanently. She moved to Amsterdam in 1935, the same year that Liebermann died, and then to London in 1938. She lived and worked in London during the war, setting up another Cassirer dealership that survived until the building was bombed out in the Blitz. She was close friends with the artist Kate Wilczinski, winner of the 1930 Prix de Rome, who is also the one who made our childhood pencil portraits, one of my two sisters and one of me. When the bombing in London became too intense, Grete and Katie retreated together to a cottage outside Peterborough belonging to the Kauffmans, also members of my Grandmother's social circle. The Kauffman family was at the



center of the antiques trade in Germany but they too had to leave before the war, managing to find refuge in the UK. For a few years in the early 1950s their son Michael and his family lived in the top floor flat in my family's home in London.

Scene 6 Granny and Opa were the last of our immediate family to leave.

I have already said that Granny helped repeatedly to support Opa while he was in prison. It was the 1938 Kristalnacht, the night of a nationwide pogrom against Jews, that changed her trajectory. She left for London very quickly, though not before she had filled a moving van with furniture so as to set up house for the two of them in London.

I was astonished to learn that this was possible for exiles. Stories of the Nazis stripping everyone of their possessions were so vivid in my head. My mother suggested two factors at work. One was that Hitler did not close the frontiers to Jews until late in 1938. Before that he was actively encouraging them to get out, to South Africa, to Israel, to wherever. The bigger barrier that faced Jews trying to leave was getting a visa which would allow them to settle somewhere else. My mother also suggested that an ordinary moving van clerk would have no reason to associate a name as commonplace as Weber either with Jews or with my politician grandfather.

Whatever made it possible, the furniture did reach London. With adult hindsight, I can recognize some of old Berlin in my grandparents' flat in Wimbledon — they were downstairs from Frau Bliechroeder a Berlin banker's widow—dark furniture, dark pictures and heavy curtains. No servants however, and very little extra space.

Though they had not sold Opa's portrait, in 1938 they did sell Granny's portrait. The painter Anders Zorn, still famous today, was from Sweden. The buyer, Swedish as well, paid the equivalent in today's money of about \$50,000. I assume the payment made its way via Sweden to England, thereby helping to cover my grandparents' expenses, at least for a while.

In February 1939 my grandfather August Carl Weber faced the fact that he would never survive if he did not leave. Warned specifically of the risk by a secret visit from a Gestapo officer, he turned to Frank Foley in the British Consul's office in Berlin. Foley granted him a visitor visa for the UK, the stated purpose to visit his wife and two of his children. On arrival in the UK his kind of visa seems to have been convertible to a resident's visa. Many years after World War II my mother joined a group determined to see Frank Foley recognized in Yad Vashem for his consular work on behalf of Jews and others endangered by the Nazis. Foley will pop up once more in my mother's exile story, this time in the British Consulate in Oslo.

My grandfather took nothing with him on the journey except the equivalent of about \$27 in cash, hoping to make “temporary visit” as the reason for his transit through the German frontier convincing. He arrived in London within days, reuniting with Granny, with my mother Paula and her brother Jan. To begin with Granny and Opa lived near the two children in Chelsea but they soon moved permanently to Wimbledon.

Act 3, Part II. Germans who stayed in Germany and lived to tell the tale.

The men and women in my Grandfather’s family of origin stayed in Germany, living out the war years as best they could. They were not Jews. Nor, for the most part, were they prominent people.

When Hitler took power, Herman Oncken, my Grandfather’s brother-in-law, and the holder of the Berlin History Professorship was among the most distinguished in his field. He did suffer, in 1935 forced into retirement, his loyalty to Hitler deemed inadequate. When Opa finally fled Berlin in 1939, he encouraged his sister Gretchen Oncken to take anything they could from the Berlin apartment for Gretchen’s own use. After the war the Onckens sent some of the smaller pieces they had rescued over to England for Granny and Opa to have once more.

The Onckens had two sons and a daughter. Alste the daughter followed in her scholar father’s footsteps and quite often found her way over to England and thus into our lives. Onno, my mother’s favorite cousin abandoned Germany for Chile soon after the war. He never returned to live in Europe. Decades later, on trips to New York, he made a charming addition to my graduate student life in Philadelphia. Dirk joined the German foreign service, rising high enough to become an ambassador towards the end of his career.

None of Opa’s many other relatives seem to have played much of a part in our family’s journey into exile though my mother reestablished contact with cousins in other parts of the family in the postwar years.

Recently I learned that one of their Jewish Rindskopf cousins, Gertrude Wenzel, also lived out the war in Germany. Her Jewish ancestry as it appeared in government record books had been somewhat disguised, but she writes that she escaped persecution largely because her husband was an early military casualty in Poland in World War II. The widow of a “Hero of the Reich” and a productive farmer, she managed to keep going with her children on the farm all through the war. Subsequent exile was voluntary, beginning in 1945, when she emigrated with the children to live in Australia. Once in a while she would appear in our London house, quiet and rather dull. Back then I never heard a thing about her wartime history. In her last years Gertrude found herself missing Europe’s cultural milieu, so she returned and, like her brother Oswald Burchard, she lived in Switzerland. Her autobiography, Broken Star—the Warburgs of Altona, gave me my first ever intimate introduction to what it was actually like to experience the war on the German side.

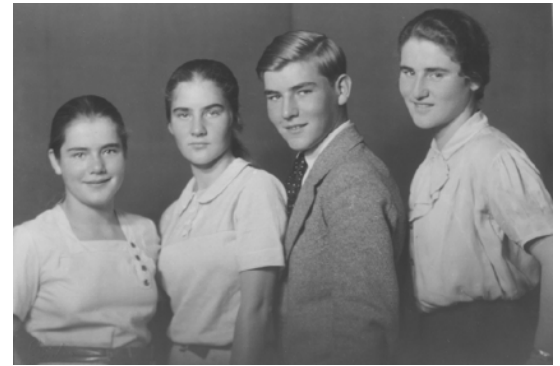
Act 4. Siblings in Exile after 1935 — Four variations on starting a future.

Setting the Scene There is a significant distance between me and the exile experiences of my grandparents. They uprooted their fully developed adult lives, watched as their children started off into four different futures and ended up dying in a foreign country. I can only describe the generalities, since what I took in of them in person was that they were two benign and rather quiet elderly people.

We do have their letters written before, during and after the war. Sadly too many of Opa’s are in what is, even to native speakers, illegible German. I am still actively searching for a transcriber for those letters. Opa and Granny write of themselves as engrossed in family life. Interestingly, they almost never refer to the dramas and tensions of war. Granny wrote about people and illnesses, and also about her delight in taking care of my sister, their first grandchild. Opa sent lots of cards to that grandchild, and those are in English. Most letters are practical, for example about sharing ration cards and food. Little evokes the courage their new lives must have demanded of them, not even after the grandparents’ flat in Wimbledon was damaged by a bomb.

How did exile transform the lives of the four children? That is much clearer to me.

Assume they left Germany a year or so younger than the photo. They left tightly bonded, all on the same train, the one where they hid the money in the heating system. Exile began with them together in Switzerland, three still in school and my mother in secretarial college. In less than two years, their interconnected lives began to break apart. First to leave were my mother and her brother. By the summer of 1935 they were in the UK, in Scotland to be precise. Next was Gusti, who set sail for the USA at the very end of 1938. Mia couldn't and didn't leave Switzerland until 1947. That summer she arrived in the USA, invaluable visa in hand, to take on a PhD in Mathematics.



This is the moment also to introduce George Mosse. The same age as the twins, his family were prominent in Jewish elite circles in Berlin, as well as owners of a vast country estate near Loepten. George described his childhood self as naive about the threats. In school at the junior Salem, Hermansberg, he was in such danger he had to be rushed to the Swiss frontier in 1933 the moment the school term ended. His personal exile story shines an interesting light on the experiences confronting my mother and her siblings. Also in the Finale he plays a small part assisting with the return of Liebermann's portrait.

Scene 1 Jan and Paula left Switzerland together, headed for Scotland where Jan was to go to school at the newly founded Gordonstoun, once again under Kurt Hahn. Paula worked for a few weeks as Hahn's secretary and, while Jan finished out his schooling, she worked nearby tutoring and as a secretary. Paula preserved her letters of recommendation and even some personal notes from her employers and colleagues, as well documents that show her more than once signed up to study for a degree. I now think that, although when I lived with her she seemed engrossed in being our mother and had an active social life, it was her professional work that really mattered in a meaningful existence. During the war, although quite soon she had a child, she stayed on the job, except for a few weeks right after their wedding when my father fell deathly ill as a result of a biking accident.

Pre-war and wartime letters of recommendation describing Paula are effusive: Effective, her secretarial skills like shorthand included being equally fluent in three languages, discrete, skilled at sorting and filing, the kind of employee anyone might want. They and the university applications also reflect the interests that came to dominate the rest of her professional life. She may have started at Freiburg University as a chemist. In exile and thereafter her professional and educational focus was economics. She told stories about her wartime work in the French section of the BBC, but the employment paperwork says economics.

The longest professional relationship my mother maintained during those years was with her boss and colleagues at the International Nitrogen Cartel. That was also the job which almost put her life into serious jeopardy. As war broke out in Sept. 1939, the Cartel opted for a base in what was then neutral territory, moving its entire operation to Oslo. They were only briefly safe. By then my parents were already close and it is clear my father was devastated. The love of his life had gone and might be gone for ever. His dismay forced her to choose. She decided to go back to London, though not until the Cartel had found and she had trained her replacement.

Then, of course she had to get a visa. Who stepped in? Frank Foley. Quite literally. Coming out of a back office in Oslo he began by telling an astonished Paula that he actually knew the name of the last person who had stayed in their Momsenstrasse apartment in Berlin.

Paula made it back to England. My parents did get married and the rest, as they say is history. When I commented to my mother that their wedding photo has only a handful of guests she responded: Well it was not easy to get a lot of food so the wedding breakfast



guest list had to be small.

Scene 2 Looking carefully at that wedding picture family members can spot that Jan is not in the picture. As he was finishing school at Gordonstoun he tried for a place at Cambridge to study History and to his lifelong regret he was turned down. Had he been accepted he would perhaps have encountered George Mosse who, a couple of years later, did get in. Instead Jan was “articled” as a clerk to a cousin’s husband, Bertie Oppenheimer, to be trained as a solicitor . . . the non-litigating kind of lawyer in England. He was surviving this pretty disagreeable experience in 1939 when, as war was becoming certain, British authorities began investigating Germans, particularly those who still had relatives in Germany, to determine whether they might be enemy aliens. As I said, they did investigate Opa and Granny, as well as Paula and Jan. All but Jan were determined to be no risk. Jan was interned.

I can still find it a shocking thought: a half-Jewish refugee, forced to flee Germany as a child the moment Hitler came to power, designated an “enemy alien.” Sadly similar examples abound, most obviously in US internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry a few years later.

Jan’s family were horrified and scared. Letters flew back and forth between London and Geneva, worrying for his safety and yearning for his release. Jan himself had a nasty, brutalizing sea journey to Australia. Yes, that is where he and hundreds of others were sent. His letters from the camp however, are anything but depressing. Assuming that most of their companions were there for no good reason, the “inmates” made themselves into a genuine community. The weather was agreeable. They were safe from Hitler’s bombers and there were good cooks among them.

They were of course not free to leave, but within two years Jan at least was taken off the list of dangerous men and shipped back to England. Once there he served in the “home guard” for a while, though his war ended in Italy where, as allied forces swept northwards, his task was to interrogate German POWs. Ironic . . . the enemy alien becomes the gauge by which to measure the dangerousness of the enemy. He liked Italy, traveling all over by motor cycle. A handsome man in the prime of his life.



Scene 3 The twins, who still had several more years of required schooling, stayed on in Switzerland until they graduated. Mia, more scholastically inclined took to that task with ease. Family myth implies that she also ensured that Gusti pulled through, the latter success opening the door to a further scattering of the family.

In the early 1920s my Grandfather had helped a Polish/Jewish sculptor Simon Moselsio make a name for himself in the Berlin art scene. In gratitude, in the late 1930s, Moselsio offered to sponsor one of the twins in the USA, to enroll her at Bennington College where he was on the faculty. Gusti was the one chosen, crossing the Atlantic by herself in 1938, a 19 year old who spent the entire war separated from a family in peril. She was not exactly alone. There were cousins in the USA already, descendants of another of the Rindskopf sisters, but it must have been a daunting prospect. She only just got in. 1939, the year after Gusti arrived the German “quota” for visas filled for the first time ever. Applications for a spot in the quota for Jews, identified as “Hebrew” in US immigration law, were already far outstripping the allotted number.

I am guessing that Gusti had a rather lonely and anxious exile. Her Bennington “entry photo” conveys a tentative spirit under her lovely exterior. She wrote a letter after letter to the others, to Jan in Australia, her twin and grandmother in Switzerland and her parents and sister in London. She was thrilled by Paula’s marriage and concerned for Jan of course. Being in America, she was also in a position to send over items that were hard to come by in Europe. There was even some kind of radio program to which she contributed and the Geneva crew rented a radio especially to try to hear her broadcasts,



though it seems they never did so. Gusti worked for pay while in university. On graduating in 1942 she went to New York and like her older sister was immediately recognized as an invaluable employee.

When she came to London for the first time well after the end of the war, to me Gusti seemed so full of liveliness and she also wore pretty clothes, which remains a memory to this day. This led to a dramatic sense of déjà vu watching the last scene of Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*. In that play a character arrives on stage whose war years have been spent in the USA. She gave such a similar impression, one I now think of as a posture then available only to those whose lives were not clouded by the day to day traumas of war.

Scene 4 Mia's journey into exile was different again. She graduated from school in Lausanne and then spent the next few years in Geneva living with her Dutch grandmother. Omi saw herself defiantly as Dutch and distinctly NOT German. Mia was enrolled at the university to study Physics, ending up with a degree in Mathematics as well. Omi wrote letters to Paula and to my Grandmother every few days, with Mia occasionally adding a note or two. Hers talk of skiing and vacations, hiking and classes. It all sounds very "normal." Omi meanwhile worried constantly about the safety of her beloved ones in London. Those Geneva letters are where I learned about renting the radio to hear Gusti's broadcasts.

In May 1942, Mia's life changed seemingly overnight. Omi's letters continue almost up to the day officially recorded in the Swiss archives as the day she died. Settling her estate became Mia's responsibility. Who knows how hard that was? Then she was alone, finishing her degrees, planning the next steps.

For the rest of her life Mia talked fondly about her last years in Switzerland, a teacher in the "Geheeb" School. Officially L'Ecole d' Humanité, it continues to this day. Many of her students were also refugees. She was the math teacher and she delighted in a school that devoted half of every day to the outdoor life.

With her degrees in hand, yearning to move closer to her parents, Mia kept getting visa applications rejected by the UK. Gusti was keen for Mia to try the US instead. That worked. She got a visa, probably because the US had thousands and thousands of returning soldiers and had plans for a national effort to open higher education to everyone. In 1947 Mia, legally "Stateless," landed in New York to begin a PhD program at Cornell. Within a few years she had moved to California, married another mathematician, Robert Steinberg, and never again yearned for a European life.



Scene 5 George Mosse, a classmate of Gusti and Mia's at the boarding school, was also forced into exile early. The Nazis targeted his family with particular intensity and unlike those in my family, his passport was stamped with a very visible J signifying Jewish. March 31, 1933, George got into Switzerland at what he believed was the 11th hour, but on arriving was surprised to encounter the very same Berlin social scene he knew at home ensconced in his parents' hotel. "The lounge was packed with Jewish and Christian refugees though this term needs elaboration for today we think of refugees as inevitably poor and ragged. While these refugees may have lost many of their possessions, they were hardly poor or ragged. This was an overwhelmingly middle class emigration, educated and articulate."

Within a year, George was in school in the UK, a boarder at Bootham, a Quaker school. Here, with excellent and very British teaching, he was set on his way to success in applying to Cambridge where he spent two happy years. Summer 1939 he joined his father, by then living in the USA. War broke out, and given the very real risk that he would be interned, George opted to stay on the far side of the Atlantic. Quakers to the rescue again, Haverford College allowed him to transfer to finish his degree.



From there he went to Harvard and then on into a life he truly loved as an academic at the universities of Iowa and then Wisconsin. The Germanic underlay of the American Midwest reminded him of home. Annual research trips took him to London where our house became his summer home. After my father died in 1964, George's connections with our family, connections which dated back to childhood matured, becoming a rich, lively and strong adult friendship.

In his memoir, George claims actively to have been grateful for his exile and refugee life. This child, because he was born into an extraordinarily wealthy family, without exile would never have needed to take his adult professional life seriously. As it was, he achieved renown both as a teacher and as an innovative scholar of the Nazi era with special focus on German Volkultur.

Scene 6 London. Christmas in the early 1950s. That my mother was German led to complicated moments in my childhood . . . who wants to tell a school friend right after World War II that their mother is German? I found it hard. With hindsight however, I now identify almost all our Christmas rituals, which I loved wholeheartedly, as having German ancestry. Christmas Eve not Christmas Day was the center of the holiday. Like others across Europe we put out shoes for St. Nicholas Day, Dec. 6, instead of stockings for Christmas. Shoes were just the right size for a small block of chocolate and an Ant and Bee book, later a fountain pen and finally a watch. All December long we opened windows on our Advent Calendars, beautiful glittery pictures and no-one else we knew even had such a thing.



We spent Christmas Eve all together: Grandparents and Jan's family and all of us. The tree had real candles. There were Kringle as well, stars and bells (chocolate covered fondants) hanging from the branches. We tied apples on the bigger branches to make sure they lay flat, safer for the candles. No presents under the tree. Instead everyone had their own designated chair or stool. After the presents came the food. Goose, not a surprise in Britain, but also red cabbage. That was our tradition and the red cabbage still is. There was a Christmas pudding, and the coins hidden in it were antique silver three-penny pieces from the Portobello Road. The only thing wrong with our version of Christmas as far as I was concerned was having to wait for presents until the end of the interminable Kings College carol service. My father had been at Kings so the event mattered to him. To me it meant a needless delay for the main events.

One would be transported to a similar Christmas Eve in the opening scene of Tom Stoppard's *Leopoldstadt*. A large tree, well fed and well dressed people, a lot of fun

for the children and very little focus on whether activities had a religious significance or not.

That there were refugees in our house all the time had always been obvious. It took decades of my living in the United States before I paid much sustained attention to the Jewish side of our heritage. Coming to value how much our everyday childhood entailed encounters with cultural difference . . . I was an adult before I really understood how much joy had come from that.

Finale The painting 1933 – 2024

Setting the Scene The fate of the portrait immediately after it left Berlin is, to say the least murky. The Nazis, Hitler and Goering in particular proved, among other terrors, to have voracious appetites for fine arts and decorative objects. Their quest for these extended at least as far as the Netherlands and France where, after the conquests in 1940, operatives arrived with lists of items they intended to take. The *Orpheus Clock*, by Simon Goodman offers an intimate and exhaustive record of the impact of that fateful project on his family. Nowadays we know for sure that Opa's portrait was never in Nazi hands

Scene 1 Sometime after the war my Grandfather made the family's first attempt to retrieve the painting. The Rijksmuseum has in their files a document labeled Weber-Mosse dated 1946, which makes it clear someone was looking for the painting. Why the name Mosse is associated with the search is a mystery. We have in our files a 1954 letter written by the "Superintendent" of Brehna, the region where Opa had his first job, who often stayed in my Grandparent's apartment. It is written as an attestation that he had seen the Liebermann portrait hanging among the many pictures in the apartment. Reading the letter is moving. He is at pains to make it clear that August Weber was a literate man in a gentleman's lodgings so particular admiration is directed towards the vast library. The letter's date suggests someone was trying to produce a "proof of ownership" statement. Grete Ring certainly told everyone that she had deposited it at the Rijksmuseum. The Museum's response to Opa's request for a search was nothing more than a "likely story:" That the painting had been confiscated by Mühlmann, the lead in Nazi art theft, which meant it would have been auctioned off by the Dutch after the war as "Nazi Property." My Grandfather died in 1957 and the search died down for a while.

Scene 2 On a work trip to the Netherlands in 1989 my mother visited the Rijksmuseum, asking once again whether they knew where it might be. That visit led to a small flurry of correspondence. More dead ends persuaded my mother that it was time to register the portrait formally as Lost Art. Apparently the art world, nervous about handling stolen goods, checks known lists when paintings of uncertain provenance appear on the market.

Scene 3 The search unexpectedly took on a momentum of its own in the mid 1990s, thanks to a researcher engaged in the creation of a Catalog Raisonné of Max Liebermann's work. I had not heard the term until quite recently but it is vital to keeping a hot art market hot. One needs as comprehensive a list as possible of a given painter's work to avoid certifying and selling faked pieces. Matthias Eberle, a German academic undertook making this kind of catalogue for Liebermann.

Sometime in 1995 he sent a photocopy of an unidentified painting to a longtime friend of my mother's, Marianne Feilchenfeldt. He sent it to her because Marianne, in the 1990s and her son Konrad and his wife Rahel now, are custodians of the Cassirer legacy and records. Cassirers might know the piece because the gallery had acted for Liebermann, selling his paintings. Marianne, with a faint memory that this might be August Weber, sent my mother a rather poor fax, a fax plenty good enough to be decisive. The painting still existed and Marianne's identification was sent back to Mr. Eberle.

Not long after that Mr. Eberle was in Los Angeles in search of more Liebermann data where, in the cataloging room of the Los Angeles County Art Museum he met Mia, my mother's sister. She of course asked about the painting and he, not realizing the family believed it lost, told her where it was, and that it was in the catalog that would be published soon.

Scene 4 Though the catalog copy here is likely too small to read, it describes the painting as in the collection of the Mesdag Museum. No sign of the Rijksmuseum. The Mesdag is not even in Amsterdam. It is in the Hague, and since 1990 has been an affiliate of the Van Gogh Museum. How the painting made its journey to Mesdag remains a mystery though it does seem to have gone via the Van Gogh, only transferred after the merger of the two.

The then director of the Mesdag Museum, John Leighton, had arrived in the Netherlands from the Scottish National gallery. When he and my mother connected, it was clear he would not stand in the way of the painting coming back to us. We were lucky there. Anne Frank may have endowed the Dutch with an enviable "pro-Jewish" reputation for the World War II years, but that positive appearance conceals a fair number of shadows in the history. Postwar, Dutch arts institutions have not always been friendly towards WWII claimants.

In our case, the return process was legalistic and in some ways humorous but not particularly difficult. The four siblings officially agreed that the museum could surrender the painting to my mother. No problem. Then they were required to offer some kind of proof that there were no other siblings, no other possible claimants for the picture. How on earth does one do that for a man who died 40 years ago? George Mosse and my mother's cousin Onno

1927/6

Bildnis Dr. August Weber (1871–1957)

1927

Öl auf Leinwand

107 x 80 cm

Bez. rechts oben: M Liebermann 1927.

Rückseitige Aufkleber und Notizen: Aufkleber mit der Nummer «1236 inventaris C».

Mesdag Museum, Den Haag, Inv. Nr. S5 BM

Prov.: Dr. August Weber, Domäne Löpten/Kreis Teltow (1929); bei der Emigration der Familie als Depositum an das Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Dort nach dem Kriege angeblich als deutsches Eigentum beschlagnahmt; überstellt an das Mesdag Museum, Den Haag.

Oncken stepped forward. Each one wrote a letter affirming that they had never heard of any other children and that it was inconceivable someone of my grandfather's character would have had a mistress or illegitimate children.



On November 3, 1997 my mother flew to the Netherlands, at the museum's expense, to sign the official transfer papers. One week later the painting was delivered to her London flat, 54c King Henry's Road. Having the portrait in her house gave my mother huge pleasure as this photo makes quite obvious. The four siblings reached a humane and friendly financial agreement enabling Paula to become the sole owner of the painting.

.Continuing legacies that have come down to us from World War II and its aftermath are as complicated as they are in any large family. Here are a few worth pondering.

Virtually all of my Grandmother's close-in relatives evaded the camps, and many of their descendants are still in contact with each other.

The first generation of refugees scattered widely and permanently. Just a handful became settlers in Israel/Palestine.

At the end of their lives several elders "returned" to a German-speaking place: Zurich, Switzerland.

I know of only one in my generation descended from these refugees who lives in Berlin.

My mother cheered when I took US citizenship. One should have more than one passport if possible.

The majority of the great great grandchildren in August and Marie Weber's lineage have taken up Germany's offer to reinstate their German Citizenship. So they at least have two passports

The Oldenburg horticulture gene, expressed strongly in all four of August's children, also came out in 4 of the 5 grandchildren brought up in the UK

Lake End resembles Loepten, a community of friends and relatives, Paula's revisioning of childhood experiences

Love of travel to far off places passed on from Granny through Paula to at least two of us in my generation

The four siblings never lived near each other again. Over a 70 year time span all four were in the same location only twice, once in the 1950s and a second time for my mother's 90th birthday, April 2005.

They did meet regularly in groups of three, with Paula in the USA, Jan passing through LA on his way to visit his wife's family in New Zealand, or Mia and Bobby on sabbatical in London and Paris. Gusti rarely left LA, except to ride or to ski somewhere in the Western USA.

Gusti, Paula and Mia in LA



Onno, Paula and Jan at Lake End



THE WORLD THEY LEFT BEHIND



1920 Jan, Opa and Paula in the library where the picture once hung



1932 A classic family outing to the Spreewald, south east of Berlin



1933. Salem: The graduating class. Paula is 5th from the left at the back

THE WORLD THEY LEFT BEHIND 1925 Oldenburg

Opa's mother's 80th Birthday. Paula on the far left. Jan on the stool. Mia and Gusti on the floor.



THE WORLD THEY CAME TO 1951, London. Opa's 80th birthday.

My parents, Jan and his wife Etta, our Nanny Loli and Onno
Granny with Jenny, Opa, Gretchen with Helena
Jessica and Joanna on the floor

LOST OR FORGOTTEN IN PLAIN SIGHT IN A MUSEUM

The day I was completing final edits on this piece, Feb. 12, 2024, the New York Times published an article about the contested ownership of a Chagall, painting that, for a long time, was a centerpiece of the collection in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Many museums have centerpieces: so vivid so significant that if the ownership is challenged, relationships quickly become complicated and the difficulties can be quite public. Think the British Museum and the Elgin Marbles. Think any museum in the USA that has among its holdings the physical remains of Native Americans.

It is also the case that many, many museums have in storage, perhaps even gathering dust, large quantities of art works and decorative objects no-one pays much attention to. The Metropolitan Museum recently brought a considerable number of these into the light, not exactly on display but visible: shelf after shelf of nearly identical silver mugs, antique chairs, flower paintings and the like.

Unquestionably coincidentally, two of our art pieces, the Benedetto da Maiano Madonna and Child and the Liebermann portrait, each spent decades deep in museum storage with no-one paying them much attention. They had both been taken to their respective museums for safe-keeping though under quite different circumstances. The reasons for this deposit are not the key issue here.

The key issue is that both museums accepted the role of custodian and neither seem to have kept track of what they had nor why they had it. With respect to the Madonna, the family did not keep track of it either.

The Fogg Art Museum is a Harvard museum. On their side of the story, our Madonna and Child lay undisturbed on a shelf in the basement from 1948 to 2003. Attached to it was an envelop containing two broken segments of its rather elaborate frame, and a tag with Rob's Grandmother's name on it: Mrs. Ward Thoron. For the entire time, as far as we know, no-one at the Fogg ever tried to find Rob's Grandmother or to work out why the piece was there. In Boston it would not have been hard to do so. When she died, 101 years old in 1975, Mrs. Ward Thoron's life story got a good deal of coverage in the newspapers. She was so old and her life had been such a classic in the style of Boston's upper crust. The name Thoron could even have been surfaced as associated with three Harvard alumni, one of them Faith's brother.

On the family side of the story, a paper notation sat quietly in the Thoron/Knapp files in the offices of Choate Hall and Stewart, Mrs. Thoron's lawyer who in time also became Rob's mother's lawyer. By the time Faith died in 2003 Rob and I had lost faith in them and nothing that occurred while he was executor of her will would change our opinion. After months of missteps and mistakes Rob was forced to ask explicitly for a letter permitting him to finalize the estate. It came but then was followed within days by another letter admitting that they had forgotten to include one last item. There was a single piece of paper showing that the Fogg was holding something of value.

So Rob called the Fogg, only to hear that they were delighted he had called. About to embark on a major renovation the museum had had NO IDEA what to do about the Madonna. Presumably the paper clues attached to the piece were not worth trying to follow up. What would have happened if he had not called? Who knows?

The family side of the Liebermann story, as you now know, was the opposite of the Madonna: persistent and repeated attempts to recover a painting the family valued and had hoped was in safekeeping in the Netherlands.

It was Dutch museums, likely at least two, which had lost track. Why? How? On my cynical days I tell myself that their inability to locate the painting was more like a refusal than an inability. On my compassionate days I remind myself about the scale of the storage issues in major museums like the Rijksmuseum. On my politically alive days I add that our family would not have wanted any attention drawn to the painting between 1933 and 1945, so that's why there is nothing in the archives. Perhaps, one day, someone will try to "reverse engineer" as it were the painting's travels. Assuming the Mesdag has some accession history, that would be a reasonable place to start. I probably won't bother. The painting is on the wall at Lake End. It survived its exile as did all of its close-in people. Its ownership is uncontested and that for me is enough.

