



Traces of the Jewish-Christian banker family Seligmann-Eichthal at Munich's old southern cemetery

History of the old southern cemetery (Thalkirchner Strasse 17)



former entrance to the old southern cemetery

The southern cemetery at Thalkirchner Strasse reflects the urban history of Munich and - surprisingly - also Jewish family history.

The cemetery had been established in 1563 outside the city walls for the numerous victims of the plague, after the existing cemeteries within the town were no longer sufficient or could not be extended. Due to its location outside the walls, precisely speaking the Sendlinger gate, it was called the "fertere", an expression etymologically related to the English word "farther", meaning in this context "the cemetery outside."

Since 1788 the southern cemetery was the central burial place of Munich, after electoral orders had strictly forbidden funerals within the city walls. But soon it became too small. To extend its capacity the cemetery was redesigned according to the plans of the architect Gustav Vorherr at the beginning of the 19th century, giving the whole area the shape of a sarcophagus by adding a semi-circle arcade. Again, in 1844 at the southern edge of the area close to Kapuzinerstrasse, another enlargement by the famous architect Friedrich von Gaertner took place. A square new section with a connecting open vestibule was added.

Since 1868 the southern cemetery was supplemented by a new, the northern cemetery at Arcisstrasse. On January 1, 1944 the old southern cemetery was closed for funerals, also in the cemetery's pertinent church of Saint Stephen's (Stephanskirche). At this time the old part of the cemetery housed 13,066 graves and 95 tombs, the new part 5,022 graves and 175 tombs.

After being heavily damaged during Second World War the southern cemetery was rebuilt and transformed to a public park in the years 1954 - 1955 by the architect Hans Doellgast.

The family Seligmann-Eichthal



the Eichthals' palace at Residenzstrasse 26

The Seligmann family originated from Leimen near Heidelberg. Already their progenitor Aron Seligmann belonged to the Jewish upper class as a merchant and money lender around 1700. His sons were promoted to be "Hoffaktoren," an office which had developed at German courts since the 14th century for their supply and financing and after the Thirty Years' War helped many Jews in its variation as "Hofbankier" (banker to the court) to either reach the upper spheres of the feudal society - or the steps of the gallows like the famous Sues Oppenheimer in Wuerttemberg.

Besides Leimen, which remained the Seligmann family's headquarters for a long time, soon various business relations connected the members with Munich.

The family had attained their wealth particularly by leasing the salt monopoly in Wuerttemberg. In the early 19th century the Seligmanns were among the most important bankers to the court in Baden and Bavaria, where they played a paramount role.

Aron Elias Seligmann in Munich

Aron's son Aron Elias Seligmann influenced crucially the development of the Bavarian state in the years 1801 to 1815. Born on April 26, 1747 in Leimen, he came to Munich in 1799 after he had received an appointment to the electoral court. Founding his wealth upon the trade with tobacco and salt, he could grant Bavaria loans worth several millions of Florins and thus helped to reorganize the desolate finances of the electorate. For his services he received a privilege, which granted him and his children full civil rights. Thus the Seligmans became pioneers long before the general emancipation of the Bavarian Jews.

On September 22, 1814, the then banker to the royal Bavarian court was ennobled as the very first Bavarian Jew after his estate "Eichthal" to "Baron von Eichthal". At the same time his ten children were also raised into nobility. The same year he took over the accountancies of the Bavarian department of foreign affairs.

In 1819 Aron Elias Seligman converted to the Christian faith, as his three sons Simon, Bernhard, and Arnold had already done before him. On October 21 he was baptized in the Munich parish Au and chose the additional first name Leonhard. His wife Henriette Levi kept her Jewish faith. While she is buried at the Jewish cemetery of Wiesloch near Mannheim, Aron Elias Baron von Eichthal's grave is in the southern cemetery in Munich. The translated inscription of his dark gray marble memorial besides the family's tomb reads as follows:

HERE RESTS IN PEACE
THE BANKER TO THE ROYAL BAVARIAN COURT
L.A.E. BARON VON EICHTHAL
HE WAS, WHEN HE LIVED AND WORKED,
HONORED BY HIS KING,
ADMIRING BY HIS FELLOW CITIZENS,
LOVED VERY TENDERLY BY HIS CHILDREN
AND WHEN HE PASSED AWAY
BY ALL OF HIS FRIENDS
MOURNED SINCERELY.
BORN APRIL 26, 1747
DIED JANUARY 11, 1824

In his will he donated 2,000 Florins to Munich's institute for the poor. After his death his heirs increased this sum, thus another 18 individuals benefited from this generous gift.

Simon Aron Eichthal, a Jewish-Christian personality



the grave of Simon Baron von Eichthal

Simon Aron, Leonhard's youngest son, increased the prominent role which the Eichthals played in Munich's banking by successfully continuing his father's activities. The inscription on his memorial says: "What the father created, he preserved and consolidated."

As an executive member of the Munich board of trade he coined its work. Additionally he as his father was banker to the royal court and one of the founders of "Bayerische Hypotheken- und Wechselbank" (Bavarian bank for mortgages and bills), which had been approved by King Ludwig I. on June 18, 1835. He contributed with other backers to the bank's capital in shares and thereby initiated a new development of private banking. In acknowledgment of his services he received honors like the appointment as a knight of the civil service medal of the Bavarian crown.

Just like his father he was a benefactor to his fellow men. For the time after his death he created a family trust. He decided that the capital should be divided equally between the municipal orphanage and the hospital. However, the inflation following the First World War destroyed the trust's property.

Together with his wife Julie Mayer he was baptized in August 1816 in St. Michael's church in the Munich quarter of Berg am Laim, and also accepted the first name Leonhard. On August 28, 1854 he died in Munich and was buried next to his father.

The third generation of Eichthals in Munich



the tomb of the Eichthals and adjacent graves

Simon Baron von Eichthal's children married members of the aristocracy and initiated a new epoch of the family's history, during which the Eichthals gave up banking. His son Karl, born in Munich in 1813, likewise became a royal Bavarian banker. The banking house existed until 1858. Countess Isabella Khuen von Belasi became his wife.

Karl's brother Julius married in 1847 Marie countess von Armannsparg, the daughter of the royal minister of state and royal counselor. He took over the commercial operations of his father.

Simon's third son Ludwig owned an estate in Ebersberg and also was a citizen of Munich.

Son Bernhard became a citizen of Munich in the year 1861. He was an officer, in the end first lieutenant à la suite and married Clothilde countess Bossi Fedrigotti. Both are buried in the family's tomb at the southern cemetery, where their quite weathered memorial plate testifies for their earthly existence.

Finally, Simon's daughter Anna Sophia married the count Berchem at the age of 22.

The traces of this fascinating family can be found at the southern cemetery in a 'good neighborhood,' framed by the graves of the painter to the court Johann Christian von Mannlich and academy professor Rudolph von Seitz.

Susanne Rieger

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All photographs were taken by the author.