



**Wedding Portrait
Emmerich, Germany 1911**

Felix Nathan **1886 - 1977**

Felix Nathan, the patriarch of the Nathan family, was born in Emmerich, Germany. In Felix's time, Emmerich was a town of 15,000 with about 30 Jewish families. Felix fought in World War I and was a French prisoner of war. Felix, possibly the best known of the town's Jewish citizens in various capacities, was a cattle and horse trader by vocation, trading with the Dutch as well as the Germans. He was a member of the Citizens Rifle Club where he was an officer and, for twenty-five years, he was a member of the Volunteer Fire Department and president of the Emmerich Mardi Gras Association. When there was a fire, he rode his bicycle through the city carrying the fire horn, which he blew to alert the firemen to go to the fire station or to the fire.

Felix married Regina Freibaum in 1911 and the couple had three children: Herta (Helen), Heinz (Henry), and Margareta Sybilla (Greta). Although relations between Felix's non-Jewish neighbors and the Jewish residents had been good, with Hitler's added power, Felix believed that the situation for German Jews would continue to decline. He, thus, sent Henry and Henry's older sister, Helen, to this country (and to Alabama) in 1936. Felix and his wife arrived in early 1937. (Daughter Greta, who was married by then, came later that year with her husband Rudy.)

The synagogue where Felix worshipped in Emmerich had fallen on hard times, as there was not enough money to run it or residents to attend. To pay off its debts, the synagogue's leaders sold some of the ritual objects; Felix purchased the yads (a pointer shaped like a hand used to read the Torah) and brought them with him when he left Germany; he gave the yads to Temple Beth El where they are still in use by the congregation. Also, Georg Nathan – a second cousin -- had purchased the Sabbath candlesticks from the Emmerich synagogue. On a trip to Germany in the early 1950s, Felix brought back the two brass Sabbath candlesticks. When the Nathan's home was looted on Kristallnacht, a neighbor had saved them. Felix retrieved the candlesticks on his visit and those brass candlesticks were donated to the congregation in 1961 in honor of Felix and Ina's 50th anniversary by Thea Nathan, Sophie and Henry Nathan, and Emmi and Hans Loewenstern.

Since Felix was married to Lee Freibaum's sister, upon arriving in Anniston Felix worked at Classe Ribbon where Lee was the president. Then Felix started making and selling sandwiches to the employees at Utica Mill, eventually opening Nathan's Lunch (known by family members as "The Stand"). The restaurant, which Felix later combined with a store, was on Walnut Street between the 21st and 22nd Streets in west Anniston. It was also close to Classe Ribbon. When

Helen Nathan, his daughter, took over the business, it became known as Helen's. Felix bought and also built several houses on Walnut Street in West Anniston. Brother Karl and Henriette lived in one of these houses. As relatives arrived from Germany, they worked in the store and lived in the houses surrounding the store.

Although Felix returned to Germany to visit, Ina never did. Felix died in Anniston and is buried in the Temple Beth El congregation portion of Hillside Cemetery.

Correspondence with George Nathan, in writer's file, December 2, 2009.

Correspondence with Don Kemp, in writer's files, December 4, 2009.

Herman Schuurman, *The Life and Destiny of the Jewish Families in Emmerich, West Germany*, January 21, 1987.

Sophie Nathan, interview code 15654, Interview by the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education.

Photographs courtesy of Don Kemp and George Nathan.



Felix (r) and Unidentified Companion in Military Uniform - During WWI



Felix and Ina, Nathan's Lunch, Anniston, Alabama