

Salomon's archive

The return of a collection of papers seized from the Rothschild family in Vienna in 1938 gives a glimpse of what was almost certainly the first attempt to create a Rothschild Archive a century and a half ago. Melanie Aspey explains

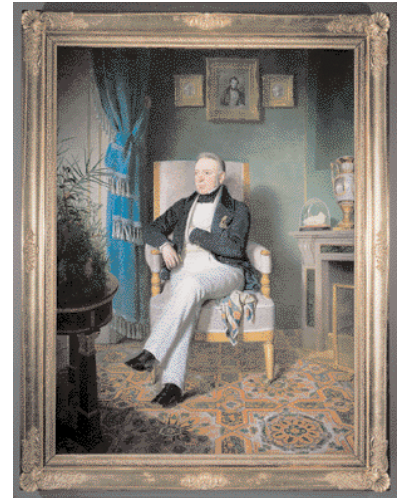
"The records in this register, together with the register itself, are, for all time, to be held in the safekeeping of my dear son, Baron Anselm Salomon von Rothschild, and thereafter in the archives of the entailed estate of his successors, in perpetual remembrance by these descendants of their ancestors. This is the firm and certain intent of the undersigned Baron Salomon Mayer von Rothschild, 20 October 1844."

This inscription, in the Baron's own hand, sits within the covers of a brown leather-bound index volume. On its cover, tooled in gold, the title 'Familien Archiv Register' defines the aspiration which led to this first attempt to bring together key documents in the history of the Rothschild family. The volume was recently received in The Rothschild Archive as part of the consignment of documents seized from Nazi stores at the end of the War and recently released by the Russian Government.¹

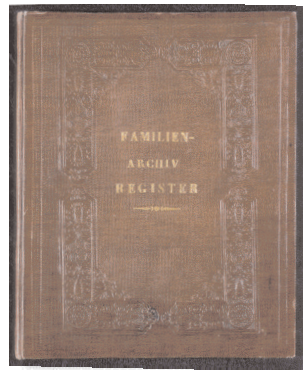
It is perhaps not surprising that it should have been Salomon who took an interest in recording his family's achievements in this way. Among the family, his was the most sharply honed sense of history. In his letters to his brothers he often recalls the days when the five boys slept in one attic room in the Jewish ghetto in Frankfurt, and muses on the changes in the manner in which they are treated now that they have become rich and titled. Reputedly it was Salomon who first commissioned Moritz Oppenheim to paint scenes from their lives, in particular the twin paintings showing the Elector of Hesse entrusting his valuables to the Rothschilds and receiving them back at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. His role in the advancement of the family is in no doubt: their most significant title, Baron, was conferred upon them by the Austrian Emperor in 1822, one year after Salomon, having worked closely with Prince Metternich after the fall of Napoleon, established a business in Vienna. His pride in their achievements is equally clear.

The immediate impetus for the creation of the Archive is probably to be found in two events in Salomon's life: the grant to Salomon in 1843 of honorary Austrian citizenship, the first such privilege ever granted to a Jew, and his 70th birthday in 1844. The mixture of a sense of achievement and of mortality surely spurred this new effort at self-memorialising.

Altogether 67 documents were gathered together by Salomon and classified alphabetically in the Register. A note on an early page indicates that eight items, marked with asterisks, were in the special keeping of Salomon. In fact there are ten items thus marked – seven relating to property – some with the additional remark that the item had been retained because still being used. Only three were returned to the Archive. Of the 67 items in the Register, 49 have so far been identified as having survived their enforced journey to Berlin, Silesia and Moscow. The oldest



Salomon von Rothschild, painted by Wilhelm Schlesinger in an interior decorated with heirlooms and family mementoes, 1838



The cover of Salomon's Family Archive Register

item in Salomon's Archive was already 75 years old when he gathered together his collection; others date from the very year of the Archive's creation. The Register gives no real sense of Salomon's selection criteria. Indeed, it is not clear where he found the materials for his Archive: did he search through business and domestic premises in Frankfurt² and Vienna looking for 'old' things, or was the family already accustomed to preserving documents and artefacts? How much did he select, and how much had survived anyway?

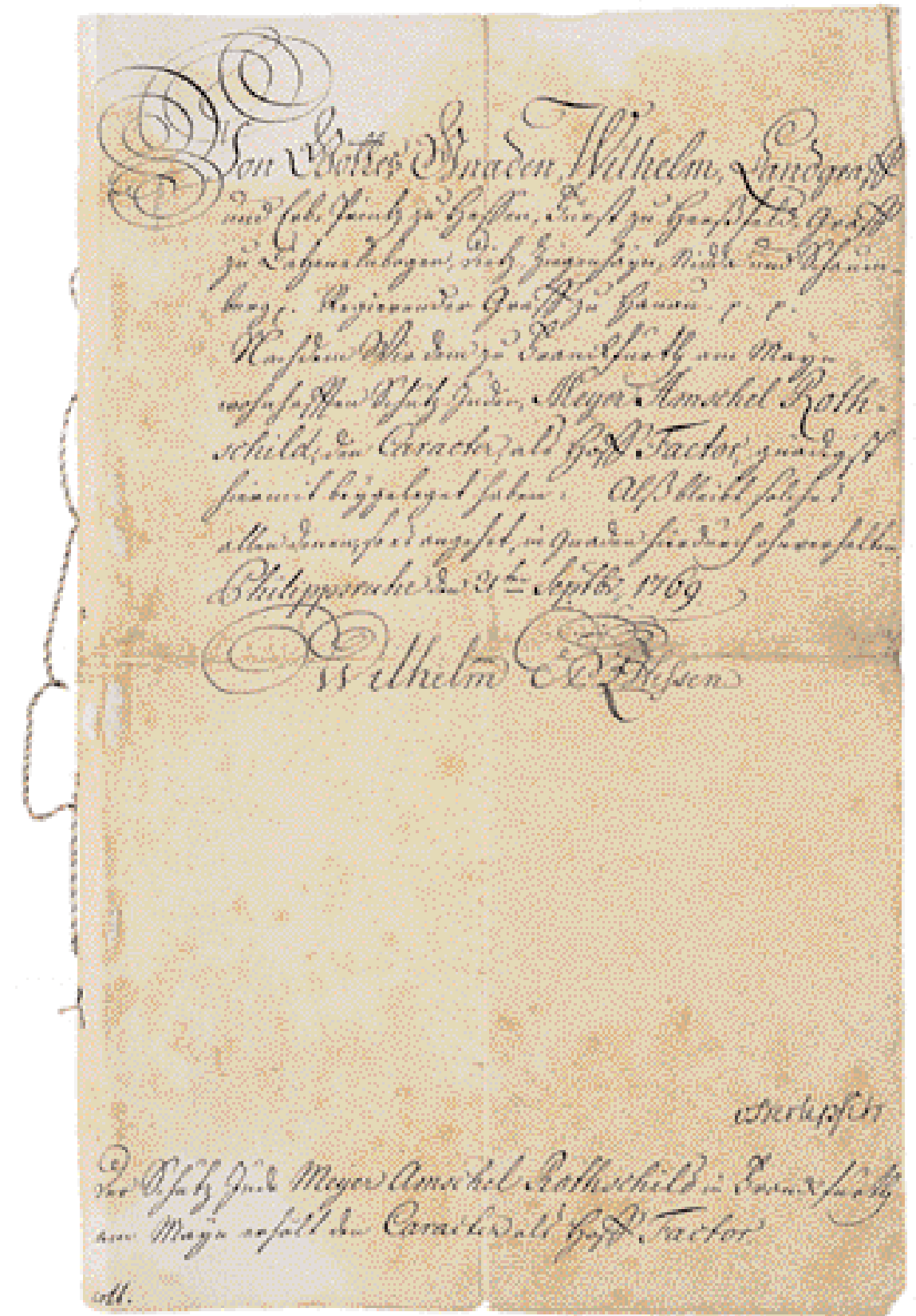
Whether or not his aim was to represent specific aspects of his family's achievement, the documents in the Archive do in fact pick up a number of themes that provide a convenient structure in which to examine them.

First among these is the life of Mayer Amschel Rothschild. The Rothschild brothers built on a business founded by their father, Mayer Amschel, who created the Rothschild partnerships that flourished formally for over a century and endure to this day. In their letters the brothers frequently invoke the memory of their father, and remind one another of his business maxims and principles. One of his cautions – "lack of order will make a beggar out of a millionaire" – perhaps underlay Salomon's archival efforts. Mayer Amschel's own balance of account for the year 1797, preserved here, is in meticulous order. The father had made clear to his sons, with whom he entered into business partnership, that he expected them to work together in harmony to create a business that would survive across generations of the *Rothschild* family, i.e. his descendants through the male line. He pointedly excluded his daughters from taking a role in the direction of the business. Records of family marriages and estate papers, together with the associated transfer of assets, were therefore of special significance, not only in terms of the family *per se* but to the family as businessmen and shareholders. Other documents relating to the holdings of individuals in the family business, which Salomon had intended to remain in the Archive, were removed after they were assigned to the Archive because they were still in use.

The acquisition of property had a deeper significance for the Rothschild family than for their non-Jewish contemporaries: as Jews, they had long been debarred from the purchase of real estate, except in designated areas. Two items in the Archive relate to property in Frankfurt: one to the acquisition of land on Fahrgasse in 1809 on which to build a new banking house and the other a contract for the construction of a synagogue in 1843. Salomon also set aside plans and other information relating to property that he had acquired in the Austrian Empire as soon as he was able to do so³, but these documents were removed from the Archive, presumably soon after 1844, again because they were still in regular use.

The earliest title acquired by the Rothschild family – the award of the status of Court Agent (Hoffaktor) of Hesse, granted to Mayer Amschel Rothschild in 1769 – marks the very beginning of the Rothschild family's rise as financial advisors in Europe. Its survival in these papers provides us with the family's earliest known business document.

The significance of honours and titles, of which this was only the first, was not lost on the brothers: Carl von Rothschild's remark, "When a Jew is a baron, all Jews are barons", shows the family's pride in the effect their own achievements had on the rest of their community. The retention of documents conveying titles from Austria, Hesse, Prussia, France, Denmark, Russia, Naples and Belgium is in no way surprising.



Opposite:
The appointment of Mayer Amschel Rothschild as Hoffaktor to William of Hesse, 1769

Salomon's archive: a schedule

The documents listed below formed the original contents of Salomon's family Archive Register and were all listed by the same hand. The items that have not been located in Fonds 637 are shown in italics. Items marked * were recorded in the Register as having been removed from the Archive because they were still in use. The titles as given here are intended as literal rather than elegant translations of those written in the Register.

The categories of document shown here have been adopted simply for ease of reference. The original Register has no sub-divisions and is purely alphabetical in arrangement. The position in the Register of each item is given at the end of its description; the reference indicates the letter of the alphabet under which it was listed (the original Register is of course written in German) and the sequential number within that letter of the alphabet.

Business papers of Mayer Amschel Rothschild

*Balance of the accounts, 1797 **B7**
 *Balance of the accounts, 1807 **B1**
 Extension of credit in Cassel for Mayer Amschel Rothschild, 1790 **C1**
Contract, 1809 V1
 Documents relating to the trial and acquittal of Mayer Amschel Rothschild for trading in Westphalia, 1809 **P1**
Zehend Buch of A.M. Rothschild in Frankfurt, 1771, 1775 Z1

Family documents

Biographical account of Mayer Amschel Rothschild by S. I. Cohen, 1813 **B2**
 Marriage contract etc. of Salomon Mayer Rothschild, 1801 **E2**
 Documents relating to the birth and marriage of Salomon Mayer Rothschild and marriage records of James and Betty, 1829 (sic) **G1**
**Draft will, T1*
Document about the receipt of capital by a Rothschild daughter, U2
Document about the deposit of capital by Anselm as an associate of the Paris House, 1828 U1 [excised: 'still needed']
Document about the possession of Baron James von Rothschild of his quarter share of the House in Frankfurt, 1842 U1

Property documents

Concession by the authorities in Frankfurt for the possession of a purchased plot of land for Amschel, Salomon and Carl Rothschild, 1809 **Z2**
 *Contract for the construction of a synagogue in Frankfurt, 1843 **B3**
 Court decree approving the purchase of Witkowitz, 1842 **W1**
**Contract for Witkowitz, 8 April 1843 W2*
Grant of land in Mäbren and a letter from Bär. Pillersdorf, 1844 G3
**Purchase contract for Gundelhof, 1 Sept. 1843 G4*
**Plans for Römischer Kaiser, 138 and of Witkowitz, 1844 P4*
**Römischer Kaiser, 1844 R1*
**Hultschin, Hoszalkowitz, Ludzschowitz, etc., etc., 1844 H3 [held back for use]*

*Bucblau, etc., etc., contract 1844 B6 Awards and titles

Creation of Mayer Amschel Rothschild as Court Agent of Hesse in Frankfurt, 1769 **E1**
 Naming of Amschel, Salomon, Carl and James as Royal Prussian Commercial Councillors, together with various letters, 1818, 1823 **E3**
 Diploma of Austrian nobility, 1817 **D3**
 Diploma (copies) of the nobility (1817) and of the barony (1822), 1843 **D21**
 Diploma of the Danish Commercial Privy Councillor, 1818, and Order of Daneborg, 1819 **D1**
 Decrees of the Kurfürst of Hesse of Financial Councillor, 1815; Financial Privy Councillor, 1821; Knight of the Order of the Lion, 1824; Commander, 1828 **D2**
 Diploma of the Russian Order of Vladimir, 4th Class, 1822 **D4**
 Diploma of the Neapolitan Order of St Ferdinand, [und Verdienst], 1823 **D5**
 Diploma of the French Order of the Legion of Honour, 1828 **D6**
 Diploma of the Belgian Order of Leopold, 1838 **D7**
 Dispensation for the rights of honorary citizenship, 1843 **D10**
 Dispensation from the City authorities in Vienna, 1843 **D11**
 Grant of honorary citizenship of Vienna to Salomon, 1844 **D23**
 Documents relating to the Freedom of the City, 1843 **S3**
 Grant of honorary citizenship of Brünn to Salomon, together with a letter of thanks for 6,000 [gulden or florins], 1844 **E4**

Gifts and foundations
 Foundation to award dowries to poor girls from Brünn, 1840 **S1**
 Foundation for the support of struggling tradesmen and skilled workers, together with related documents, 1843 **S2**
 Gift to the sick tradesmen's institute, 1843 **S4**
 Gift of the building of a polytechnic institute in Brünn, 1843 **S5**
Drama Bürgerthat for the celebration of the Foundation, 1843 D14

Confirmation of gift from Counts Ugarte and Inzaghi, 1844 **S6**
 Gift for the Catholic and Jewish communities in Rechnitz, together with confirmation, 1844 **S7**
 Conditional pension for Dr Poeltenberg, 1844 **P2**

Addresses and letters of thanks

Letter of thanks from the Jews of Hungary, 1842 **D8**
 Letter of thanks from the town authorities of Pressburg, 1843 **D9**
 Letter of thanks from P. Obdrzalek, together with an address, 1843 **D12**
 Letter of thanks from the Mayor of Ollmütz, 1843 **D13**
 Letter of thanks from the Board of the Nordbahn, 1844 **D16**
 Letter of thanks from the Mayor of Brünn, 1844 **D17**
 Letter of thanks from the town authorities in Ofen, 1844, **D17**
 Letter of thanks from the Jewish orphanage in Pressburg, 1844 **D18**
 Letter of thanks from the committee promoting institutes for the protection of small children in Hungary, 1844 **D19**
 Letter of thanks from the children's home in Pest, together with statutes and annual report, 1844 **D20**
 Congratulatory letter from the German-Jewish and the Turkish-Jewish communities in Vienna, 1843 **G2**
 Confirmation and thanks from Pressburg, 1844 **P3**
 Homage of the Jewish community in Alt Ofen, 1844 **H1**
 Homage of the Jewish community in Pest, 144 **H2**
 Letter of thanks for the goblet and dedicatory address from Pressburg, 1844 **D22**
 Homage from Kübeck, 1843 **A1**
Request from the Jewish community of Lemberg, 1843 A2
 Address by the Jewish community in Leipnik, 1843 **A3**
 Report of the Mayor of Czapka, 1844 **B4**
 Floral wreath from Frölich, 1844 **B5**
Weisskirchen, 8 July, 1844 W3

NOTES

1. The volume was given the reference number 314 by Russian archivists during their listing of the Austrian Rothschild papers, Fonds 637 in the collections of the Special State Archive, now part of the Russian State Military Archive.
2. Salomon, in common with all the family, was a frequent visitor to Frankfurt, where the mother of the five brothers, Gutle, lived until her death in 1849. The visits were partly on account of business but also social in form. Salomon's son and daughter-in-law, Anselm and Charlotte, had two properties in Frankfurt: a town house on Neue Mainzer Strasse and the Grüneburg estate to the west of the city.
3. Salomon's property purchases began as soon as he was granted honorary citizenship in 1843.
4. Verzeichnis des Familienarchivs nach der Aufnahme vom 1. Jänner 1927. Errichtet von weiland Baron Saloman [sic] Mayer, Frankfurt a.M. 20. Oktober 1844 (637–2–40).
5. After the death of Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1744–1812), the eldest of the five brothers, Amschel Mayer (1773–1855) took over the management of the Frankfurt house. As he died childless, two of the sons of his brother Carl, Mayer Carl (1820–1886) and Wilhelm Carl (1828–1901) assumed joint responsibility for the house. Wilhelm Carl directed the business after the death of his brother until his own death in 1901.

Besides a strategy of benefactions intended to secure civil rights for themselves and the Jewish community, the Jewish tenet of *Zedekab* motivated members of the Rothschild family to participate in all aspects of social welfare. The philanthropic activities documented in Salomon's Archive relate to his personal engagements in Austrian communities, specifically around the time that he was granted honorary citizenship.

A collection of addresses and letters of thanks in the Archive all date from 1842–1844 and reflect to the celebrations in 1843 of Salomon's honorary citizenship and of his 70th birthday in 1844. They are the most visually interesting items in the collection, their beauty and the effort that produced them bearing testimony to the regard in which Salomon was held by his contemporaries.

In addition to Salomon's original archive collection of 1844, the Family Archive Register lists a further 21 items, entered later in different hands and over an indeterminate time scale, although one, a trading licence for Baron Louis von Rothschild, is dated 13 October 1926. Salomon indicated in his preface to the Register that he wanted the Archive to pass to the care of his son, Anselm. A second, typewritten list, dated January 1927 and also preserved in Fonds 637, suggests that Anselm respected this wish. The list comprises 132 items, incorporating most of the contents of Salomon's Archive, but adding to them later documents relating to the lives of Anselm and his children. A covering note indicates that it was compiled at the time the Archive was transferred to a new home.⁴ The places of despatch and receipt are not indicated, but the use of the word 'Jänner' for January suggests it was sent to Austria, probably to Vienna. Salomon's original inscription in his Register was dated Frankfurt, 20 October 1844, and the Archive probably remained there, most likely in family hands, until its transfer in 1927. The presence of one particular item of note on this typewritten list, a decorative 70th birthday greeting to Wilhelm Carl of the Frankfurt branch of the family, suggests that the member of the family who maintained the Archive was Wilhelm Carl's wife, Mathilde, who was Anselm's daughter.⁵ She died in 1924, and the transfer of the Archive may have coincided with the winding up of her estate.

It is clear that the English family knew of the existence of the Archive, since a summary of the 'Archive of S M de Rothschild, Vienna' was preserved among family papers in the London bank's vault (RAL 000/573/11, n.d.). There are only 28 elements in the summary, although one element consists of the group of appointments and titles that are identified separately in Salomon's Register. The summary is accompanied by transcripts of some of the documents in the collection, which have been typed onto paper with the watermark 'SMR'. This evidence points to the conclusion that the Viennese bank received the Archive at some stage, but there is no degree of certainty as to the chronology. What is certain is that the Archive was taken from the Viennese bank on 2 April 1938: the survival of a packing list in the files of Fonds 637 proves that the 'family archive collection' was among the items seized from the family after the Anschluss. The arrival of Fonds 637 at The Rothschild Archive presents the opportunity to reconstruct, for the first time since 1844, what remains of Salomon's Archive, tracing its passage across many countries and through the hands of conflicting ideologies. That the Archive should once again be in the trust of the Rothschild family is a fitting conclusion.