

German and German-Jewish Immigrants: Michael German, Lewis Baar, David Bendheim, Max Pretzfelder, J. H Gerhard, and Henry and Isaac Schwarz.

Beginning in the 1850's, the 500 Block saw its heterogeneity furthered by the arrival of foreign-born residents and shop-keepers. Immigrants from Germany - both Christian and Jewish - made their way to Alexandria in relatively high numbers. Many of them entered the mercantile business and became relatively prosperous. As the main commercial artery of Alexandria, King Street received many of these new immigrants, and the 500 Block was no exception.

The story of German and German-Jewish immigrants on the block revolves mainly around two properties, located at 518-520 and 522-524 King Street (Fig.1 and 15). The former was built by [Adam Lynn, Jr](#) in 1811, and the latter by his sister Catherine Lynn Coryton a year later. They were both Federal brick buildings, a style characteristic of Alexandria at the time (Cox 1968). Both houses remained on the block until 1967, when they were demolished as part of the City's [urban renewal project](#).



Fig. 1: 518-520 King Street (left) and 522-524 King Street (right) in 1967 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

One of the first German-born residents of the block was **Michael German**, a baker and confectioner who set up shop on the ground floor of 522-524 King Street and lived with his family in the upper floors. He moved in as a renter in 1849 and stayed until 1852. At that time, he bought the house next door at 526 King Street and was still there when the 1888 Census was taken. German was originally from Bavaria and was a member of the Immanuel Lutheran Church. According to historian Phillip Terrie's examination of tax records, German went from belonging to a fairly low wealth decile in 1850, to being one of the richest men in Alexandria by 1870 (Terrie 1979 - Read more about Michael German on p.45 of the [Social History](#)).

In 1860, another German immigrant moved into the same house. **Lewis Baar** and his family of seven settled into the upper floors and began operating a dry goods store on the ground floor (Shepard 1989; researchers). At this time the property was probably already in the hands of Catherine Coryton's daughter Ann Eliza Childs (Sinberg Baker, Alexandria Archaeology Files). It is unsure how long she rented it out to the Baars, but by 1862 a new occupant had moved in (AAF- [Read more about Lewis Baar](#))

The new renter was **David Bendheim**, a German-Jewish immigrant from Baaden. He too opened a dry goods store and settled in with his family and one black domestic servant named Emma Carty. Bendheim's son Charles became a member of the City Council and a Virginia Assemblyman and married Edith Schwarz, daughter of a prominent German-Jewish merchant of the 500 Block (see section below on Isaac Schwarz). Their son was Leroy Bendheim, who became Mayor of Alexandria in the 1950's and member of the Virginia State Senate (Terrie 1979).

In 1882, David's daughter Rachel married another German immigrant from Bavaria named **Max Pretzfelder**. Pretzfelder operated a dry goods store and rented the house at 528-530 King Street from Michael German from 1882 to 1896 (Van Landingham 1994; Terrie 1979). Sadly, in her article on the Home of Peace Cemetery, Ruth Sinberg Baker writes that between 1884 and 1895 the *Alexandria Gazette* announced the death of three of Rachel and Max's children (Sinberg Baker 1992: 26).

In 1880, **J.H. Gerhard** moved in with his wife and teenage daughter. Gerhard was a confectioner who rented his store and home from Catherine Coryton's grand-daughter Mary Virginia Anderson (Sinberg Baker, AAF). It is unsure how long he stayed, but when the census was taken in 1888, he and his family were no longer there (Terrie 1979).

Almost a hundred years later, archaeologists carefully investigated the grounds on which this house once stood. They found the remains of a well, which had been used as a privy from the 1820's to the 1890's (Feature 6). This same well yielded artifacts associated with [Lewis McKenzie](#), an earlier occupant of the house and first Mayor of Alexandria.



Fig. 2: Inside the well/privy, AX 1 Ft.6 Level 8 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).



Fig. 3: Doug Hermon climbing out of the privy (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

The well was about 6.5 ft. wide and a little over 26 ft. deep. The loose brown soil and rubble that filled the top section of the well (see Fig. 2) soon turned into damp and mucky privy fill. When the well became too deep, field workers were lowered into the shaft with hard hats, gloves, and when necessary, a mask to protect them from the odorous and toxic remains of the 19th century privy. As seen in Fig. 3, they still managed to come back up with a smile!

Because of the short periods of occupation, it is difficult to associate specific groups of artifacts with individual occupants. Nonetheless, the artifacts illustrated below were deposited in the privy during the second half of the 19th century, and will thus give the reader a good idea of the kinds of objects that these 500 Block residents may have used. (Nb: Unless otherwise indicated, all the following artifact identifications were made by Barbara H. Magid, Alexandria Archaeology).



The central design of this green and black transfer-printed whiteware plate is widely known as the “Continental Views” pattern (Fig. 4). It was manufactured by Machin and Potts in Staffordshire, England between 1833 and 1837 (Godden 1964) but deposited in the well sometime between 1850 and 1890. This scene in particular depicts the town of Transberg in Germany.

Fig. 4: Green and black whiteware plate, AX 1 Ft.6
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

Dinner ware such as this would have been an appropriate possession for middle class families to use for entertainment purposes. Transfer printed whiteware was certainly not as expensive as the fine porcelain available at the time. It was mass produced after being developed in Staffordshire in the 1820's and made widely available. However, this hard, durable, and aesthetic earthenware was very popular and by no means shunned by the higher strata of society.

This popularity is well illustrated by the variety and number of examples found in the privy:



Fig. 5: Green on white whiteware platter, AX 1 Ft.6
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

This green on white transfer-printed whiteware platter (Fig. 5) was manufactured around 1860 and features an “Ancient Ruins” pattern.



Fig. 6: Blue on white whiteware plate, AX 1 Ft.6
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

This whiteware plate (Fig.6) features a “Domestic” scene depicting a man and woman standing in the front yard of their small farmhouse with a water well to the left and mountains in the background. It was manufactured by James Edwards between 1842-1851 (Godden 1964).



Fig. 7: Blue and black whiteware platter, AX 1 Ft.6
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 8: Blue on white whiteware bowl, AX 1 Ft.6
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

The octagonal platter in Fig.7 has a blue and black transfer print depicting three men on horseback in front of a manor surrounded by water. On the back of the plate the design is identified as “Baronial Halls” and the potter as TJ & J Mayer. It was produced in Staffordshire between 1843 and 1855 (Godden 1964). The serving bowl in Fig.8 is decorated with Chinese designs. No potter’s mark was found, but the interior decoration is so similar to that of the platter’s border that it is possible that these two items were made by the same manufacturer.

Dinner aside, another important feature of daily life was tea-drinking. Tea, which originated in China, was first introduced to America by the Dutch in the mid-17th century. Considered a luxury, entertaining guests with tea drinking became a common ritual. As a result, possessing aesthetically pleasing tea sets was quite important in order to make a good impression.

Below are a few examples of tea-set items found in the privy of 522-524 King Street:



Fig. 9: Whiteware sugar bowl and saucer, AX 1 Ft.6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).



Fig. 10: Bone China tea cup, AX 1 Ft.6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION).

Pictured in Fig.9 are a transfer printed whiteware sugar bowl and saucer, dated 1828-1860. Figure 10 features a bone china tea cup with the handle missing. The cup has applied and molded decoration and is often referred to as “Grandmother Ware” by collectors. Pictured in Fig. 11 is a whiteware saucer with hand painted green spongeware decoration, stylistically dated to around 1860. Finally, Fig.12 shows another whiteware saucer, also dated ca. 1860.



Fig. 11: Green spongeware saucer, AX 1 Ft.6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY MUSEUM)



Fig. 12: Decorated whiteware saucer, AX 1 Ft.6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 13: Stoneware ink bottle, Ax 1 Ft.6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

Other interesting finds included a stoneware ink bottle with a brown salt-glazed exterior, marked “...&V Arnold, London” and dated ca. 1860 (Fig.13).

A beautifully molded stoneware pitcher with a metal handle was also found, marked “D & S Henderson” and dated between 1829-1833 (Fig.14).



Fig. 14: Stoneware pitcher, AX 1 Ft.6 (ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 15: 518-520 King Street, 1967
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY
COLLECTION).

Next door, at 518-520 King Street, was the house of **Henry and Isaac Schwarz** (Fig.15). These two brothers were born in Bavaria in the early 1830's. By 1855, Henry was operating a dry-goods store at 518-520 King Street and by 1860 his brother Isaac had joined him. Henry was an officer of the Hebrew Literary Society and a founder of the Beth El Hebrew Congregation in 1859 (Terrie 1979).

In the tense years leading up to the Civil War, Ruth Sinberg Baker remarks on Henry Schwarz' use of "gallows humor in his *Gazette* advertising. 'GOOD TIMES COMING...Talk about secession, War, Union, Disunion, and all that causes the crisis, nothing will let you in good cheer about this time, as a good look at H. SCHWARZ's tremendous stock of Dry Goods....'" (Sinberg Baker 1992: 28).

Isaac served in the Confederate Infantry, and after the Battle of Appomattox, Henry permanently moved to Philadelphia and left the store to his brother (Sinberg Baker 1992: 29; Terrie 1979).

By 1865 Isaac Schwarz was running his business and living at 518-520 King Street. This house had once belonged to a prominent merchant named [Adam Lynn, Jr.](#) who, prior to losing everything in the years following the 1819 depression, had owned a significant amount of property on the 500 Block.

Isaac Schwarz was soon to become the new Adam Lynn Jr, without the reversal of fortune. In 1883 and 1884, he purchased his house as well as the house next door at 522-524 King Street (discussed above) and in 1887 he bought two adjacent properties around the corner at 102 and 104 S. St. Asaph Street (Sinberg Baker and Rubin, AAF). According to Phil Terrie, by 1888 his taxes placed him in the richest 2% of Alexandrians (Terrie 1979).

When Isaac died in 1898, he divided his property amongst his children. The lot on which he lived (518-520 King Street) went to his son Samuel, and the property on 522-524 King Street was placed in a trust for his three daughters Clara, Fannie, and Edith. Edith eventually married Charles Bendheim, the son of David Bendheim. The house remained in the family until the 1960's, when their son, Leroy Bendheim, sold it to the Alexandria Regional Housing Authority (Sinberg Baker, AAF).

Learn more about Henry and Isaac Schwarz on pages 43 and 53 in the [Social History](#)

Archaeologists discovered two wells on this property). Unfortunately the finds from these wells have not yet been analyzed, but preliminary field observations of the artifacts indicate they may have been deposited during the Schwarz's occupation of the house.



Fig. 16: Top of the well/privy, AX 1 Ft.4
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)



Fig. 17: Inside the privy, ca. 12 feet below the top,
AX1 Ft.4 Lev. 17(ALEXANDRIA
ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

The well illustrated in figures 16 and 17 (designated Feature 4) averaged about 4 ft. in diameter and was excavated to a depth of 24 ft.. Like many others on the block, this well was converted into a privy. It was found in what once was the backyard of the brick house, and seemed to contain artifacts ranging in date from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries.



Fig. 18: Top of the second well, AX 1 Ft.HHH
(ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTION)

Another circular brick lined structure was found on the site (Fig.18). Construction grading had significantly reduced the feature, so that by the time archaeologists discovered it, only a few feet of it remained. Unlike many of the wells found on this block, this one had been in the basement of the house, not an uncommon location for a well (Shepard 1989).

It contained very few artifacts and was filled with large quantities of wood and coal.

(Written by Amanda Iacobelli, 2006)

References

Unless otherwise indicated, all artifact identifications were made by Barbara H. Magid, Alexandria Archaeology. Historical information was extracted from the Alexandria Archaeology Files (AAF), mostly compiled by Ruth Sinberg Baker, Vivienne Mitchell, and Nancy Sennewald.

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