

'And there was Goose!': The Wedding Reception as a Micro-Encounter, 1945-1950

Presenter: Robin Judd.

On November 30, 1947, Lala (Ursula) Weintraub and Morris Fishman married in Passau, Germany, after a courtship of several months. Lala, a Polish-born Jewish woman, had spent the war years passing as a non-Jew and had made her way to the American zone in 1946. Morris, an American Jewish chaplain who served as the director of the Hasenhecke DP camp, had arrived in Germany just a few months before his future wife. While their marriage was not unusual – thousands of European Jewish women married American, British, and Canadian soldiers after World War II – the archival records detailing their courtship and wedding are uncommonly rich. They include letters, military records, oral testimonies, photographs, and even a menu from the reception. Moreover, despite the fact that many of the Hasenhecke DPs in attendance at the wedding knew of other civilian-military marriages, few had been guests at them. When Morris and Lala married, the reception was of a significant size and the guest list included large numbers of DPs, military personnel, and UNRRA officials. It was a party of a magnitude that many of the guests could not have imagined.

This paper uses the Fishman wedding reception as a micro-encounter to study the history of liberation. It looks to the interactions among the hosts – Morris and Lala -- and the guests –Hasenhecke DPs, military personnel, and UNRRA officials – to investigate how these different individuals may have questioned, imagined, and shaped their understandings of one another and of that particular moment in time. A deep examination of these encounters hints at how assumptions about liberation came into being and complicates scholarly narratives about the points of interaction among soldiers, NGO officials, DPs, and local Jewish civilians.