The German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) was one of the most important figures in the history of the liberation of LGBTI people. He was co-founder in 1897 of the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee (WhK) [Scientific Humanitarian Committee], the first organization to advocate for homosexual and transgender rights. Hirschfeld was a prolific researcher, writer, and lecturer. In 1919 he founded the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft [Institute for Sexual Science] in Berlin, which became world-famous for providing medical consultations and educational services concerning sexuality; the Institute also contained Hirschfeld’s large library and a museum of sex.¹

By the time Hirschfeld embarked on a world lecture tour in 1930–32, he was at the peak of his career and was hailed in America and elsewhere as the “Einstein of sex”. Whether he also knew that this tour marked the beginning of the end of his career is unknown. Hirschfeld likely knew that he was facing several problems. For example, in a letter to Harry Benjamin he joked that he might not survive the tour.² Although he was only sixty-two, Hirschfeld’s health was poor. He was plagued by heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. His health worsened after he contracted malaria on the tour. And, there must have been some thought as to what he would do after the tour. The situation in Germany was particularly unsettling. As early as 1920, because of his work Hirschfeld had been attacked in the street by thugs and left with a fractured skull.³ Increasingly, his public lectures were disrupted. The rise and strength of the National Socialist (Nazi) party in Germany by 1932 made it too dangerous for him to return to Germany; he remained in exile, mostly in France, for the rest of his life. Hirschfeld’s fate was sealed on May 6, 1933, only fourteen weeks after Adolf Hitler became

Serendipity and the Papers of Magnus Hirschfeld: The Case of Ernst Maass

Donald W. McLeod

Introduction

The German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) was one of the most important figures in the history of the liberation of LGBTI people. He was co-founder in 1897 of the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee (WhK) [Scientific Humanitarian Committee], the first organization to advocate for homosexual and transgender rights. Hirschfeld was a prolific researcher, writer, and lecturer. In 1919 he founded the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft [Institute for Sexual Science] in Berlin, which became world-famous for providing medical consultations and educational services concerning sexuality; the Institute also contained Hirschfeld’s large library and a museum of sex.¹

By the time Hirschfeld embarked on a world lecture tour in 1930–32, he was at the peak of his career and was hailed in America and elsewhere as the “Einstein of sex”. Whether he also knew that this tour marked the beginning of the end of his career is unknown. Hirschfeld likely knew that he was facing several problems. For example, in a letter to Harry Benjamin he joked that he might not survive the tour.² Although he was only sixty-two, Hirschfeld’s health was poor. He was plagued by heart disease, obesity, and diabetes. His health worsened after he contracted malaria on the tour. And, there must have been some thought as to what he would do after the tour. The situation in Germany was particularly unsettling. As early as 1920, because of his work Hirschfeld had been attacked in the street by thugs and left with a fractured skull.³ Increasingly, his public lectures were disrupted. The rise and strength of the National Socialist (Nazi) party in Germany by 1932 made it too dangerous for him to return to Germany; he remained in exile, mostly in France, for the rest of his life. Hirschfeld’s fate was sealed on May 6, 1933, only fourteen weeks after Adolf Hitler became
chancellor of Germany, when the Nazis arranged for the destruction of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft and the subsequent burning of its library.

In November 1934, Hirschfeld finally settled in Nice, on the sunny Mediterranean coast, which at that time was a centre for German intellectuals in exile. In February 1935 he moved into an apartment at the luxurious Gloria Mansions I, 63, promenade des Anglais. Built in 1924, the six-storey building contained apartments of about 130 square metres, with three large windows on the front and a balcony. We do not know for sure which apartment was Hirschfeld’s other than that it was on the fifth floor and that it had a southern exposure, overlooking a large garden with exotic plants and palm trees, and the sea. Hirschfeld settled in, with the remainder of his library and collection, and continued to research, write, and receive visitors. For exercise, Hirschfeld liked to walk along the promenade des Anglais, often in the company of friends or guests.⁴

Figure 1: Gloria Mansions 1, Nice, France, ca 1930. Credit: Collection of Hans Soetaert.
Figure 2: Hirschfeld walks along the promenade des Anglais with friends, ca 1935. His student and companion, Li Shiu Tong, is at right. Credit: Magnus Hirschfeld, Exil-Gästebuch 1933–35, in the collection of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

May 14, 1935

Magnus Hirschfeld began the morning of his sixty-seventh birthday at the Gloria Mansions I, in the company of Robert Kirchberger, a secretary, and Ernst Maass. Maass, the grandson of Hirschfeld’s maternal uncle Dr Julius Mann (1853–1931), lived in Milano and had come down to visit and to help celebrate Hirschfeld’s birthday. Maass’ own twenty-first birthday was later in the month. The trio spent time opening the birthday mail, and then went for a brief walk. They returned to Gloria Mansions I, where Hirschfeld suddenly collapsed and died before noon.
The shock of Hirschfeld’s sudden death must have been considerable, especially to Ernst Maass, who was suddenly thrust into the spotlight. As the only relative present in Nice at the time, it fell to him to arrange Hirschfeld’s funeral. A service was held at the Cimetière Israélite du Château on May 21, 1935; Hirschfeld was later cremated, and his remains were placed in the Cimetière de Caucade. His simple, elegant tombstone, completed in 1936, was designed by the sculptor Arnold Zadikow (1884–1943).
After his death, Hirschfeld’s possessions, including books and papers, were removed from his apartment at Gloria Mansions I. We know from article five of Hirschfeld’s final testament that Li Shiu Tong (1907–1993), Hirschfeld’s student and companion, was to receive all books, papers, artwork, etc., located in Hirschfeld’s apartment in Nice. Karl Giese (1898–1938), Hirschfeld’s assistant, was at that time living in exile in Brno, Czechoslovakia. He arrived in Nice to attend Hirschfeld’s funeral and deliver a eulogy; Giese likely also took some material back to Brno, including the Exile Guestbook. And what about Ernst Maass? Do we know if he received any of Hirschfeld’s papers or possessions?
Who Was Ernst Maass, and What Became of Him?

Hans Soetaert, a Belgian archivist and researcher, and I were able to visit Nice in October 2009 and pick up the trail of Hirschfeld. We were particularly interested to see where he had lived and the details of his life in Nice, where Hirschfeld was buried, the details of his funeral, and so on. We published our findings in *Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft*, the publication of the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft (M-H-G) in Berlin. As we were preparing the article, we were in e-mail contact with Ralf Dose, the director of the M-H-G, trying to tie up loose ends. One question that kept recurring concerned the fate of Ernst Maass. He was very young when Hirschfeld died. What happened to
Figure 6: Ernst Maass, ca 1935. Maass/Mann Papers, Brooklyn, N.Y. Credit: Don McLeod.
him, subsequently? Did he survive the war? Ralf said that there were few clues, including the fact that Maass had been born in 1914 and that it was known that he had emigrated to America in 1938. This was not much to work with, but I decided to try to solve the mystery of Ernst Maass.  

**Technology Comes to the Fore**

I began the search in earnest on December 1, 2009. The first place I looked was Ancestry.com, the world’s largest online family history resource. I’m keen on genealogy, have searched my own family history extensively there, and have a personal subscription to this resource. It is international in scope and includes databases with access to millions of records relating to immigration and emigration, births, deaths, marriages, census and military files, border crossings, and passenger lists.

I went to the “Search All Records” tab and filled in the search terms Ernst [first name] Maass [last name] 1914 [estimated birth year]. The first hit in the list was an entry for an Ernst Maass, born about 1915 in Germany, part of the “New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957” database. This was a digital copy of the microfilm of the “List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States” kept by the United States Department of Labor. The manifest was a detailed list of “all aliens arriving at a port of continental United States from a foreign port or a port of the insular possessions of the United States, and all aliens arriving at a port of said insular possessions from a foreign port.” I examined the manifest carefully. It was for passengers sailing on the Ile de France from Le Havre, France, on March 9, 1938, arriving at the port of New York on March 16, 1938. The entry for Ernst Maass stated that he was a twenty-three-year-old single male working as a clerk in a travel agency, that he could read and write, that he was familiar with German, English, French, Italian, and Hebrew, that he was a German national of the Hebrew race, that he had been born in Stettin, Germany, that his visa had been issued in Jerusalem on December 18, 1937, and that his last
permanent residence had been in Jerusalem, Palestine. And, he was travelling with his widowed mother, Lotte Maass, aged forty-nine; her entry was directly below his in the manifest. Surely this was a good candidate for our Ernst Maass, but additional evidence was needed to remove all doubt.

The other results in the search for “Ernst Maass” under “Search All Records” proved to be disappointing. From my previous experience with family records I knew that personal names on records are sometimes misspelled, or that people sometimes slightly change the spelling of their names over time. I decided to use “Search All Records” again, but for the anglicized name “Ernest Maass”. Incredibly, the first five entries in the results list related to an Ernest Maass, born May 29, 1914. The first two entries, from the *U.S. Public Records Index, Volume 2*, listed Maass’s date of birth, and an address: 15076 Village Road, Jamaica, NY, 11432-1013. The third entry was from the *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850–2009*, which listed for Ernest Maass a birth date (May 29, 1914), a death date (January 24, 1975), a social insurance number (055121215), an enlistment date (June 10, 1943), and a release date (October 30, 1944). The results from the *Social Security Death Index* confirmed that Ernest Maass, S.I.N. 055121215, was born on May 29, 1914, died in January 1975, and that his last residence had been in Jamaica, Queens, New York. The *U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938–1946* provided more information about Maass’s service record: that he was born in 1914 in Germany, had enlisted on June 10, 1943, as a private, that he was single, with dependents, and that at that time he had completed four years of college education and that his civil occupation was as a library assistant and attendant. Finally, the search for Ernst Maass took a fascinating turn with the search results for “Ernest Maass” from the *Biography and Genealogy Master Index (BGMI)*, which listed citations to biographical entries for an Ernest Maass, born in 1914, in *Who’s Who in Library Service: A Biographical Directory of Professional Librarians in the United States and Canada* (1966), and in *A Biographical Directory of Librarians in the United States and Canada* (1970). I found these books at the University of Toronto’s iSchool Inforum library collection,
and they revealed that Ernest Maass became a distinguished professional librarian, eventually working at the Dag Hammarskjöld Library at the United Nations in New York City.\textsuperscript{12}

It was December 2, 2009, one day after the search began, and I felt positive now that this was the Ernest Maass we were looking for, the young man who had visited Hirschfeld on his birthday and who had been present at his death.\textsuperscript{13} But, where to go from here? The \textit{U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850–2009} had listed a death date of January 24, 1975. Through my account at the University of Toronto Library I was able to enter the online \textit{ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851–2008)}, and in particular the \textit{New York Times (1923-Current file)}. I limited the search to the Obituary section, for the period January–February 1975 only, under the name “Maass”. There was one result, for January 25, 1975:

\textbf{MAASS — Ernest, beloved husband of Ann, devoted father of David and Bobby. Sunday, 9:45 A.M., Schwartz Brothers. Service “Forest Park Chapel,” Queens Blvd. and 76th Rd., Forest Hills.}\textsuperscript{14}

This led me to search the current telephone White Pages online (\url{www.whitepages.com}) for the name Maass in New York City. One of the people listed in the results was a Robert D. Maass, 158 E. 7th Street, Apt E4, New York, NY 10009-6282, who was said to be 50–54 years old. A button for “Additional Information” redirected me to PeopleFinders (\url{www.peoplefinders.com}), which listed a Robert D. Maass, age 53, who had lived in New York, NY, Brooklyn, NY, and Jamaica, NY. There was no doubt that this Robert Maass was the son of Ernst Maass.

I did a Google search (\url{www.google.com}) for “Robert Maass” “New York” and the first entry to come up was the website for Robert Maass (\url{www.robertmaass.com}). Robert Maass is a distinguished photojournalist who worked on contract for \textit{Newsweek} magazine for ten years and is now a freelancer. He is also a film maker (his feature-length documentary \textit{Gotham Fish Tales} was released in 2003), and has
authored and illustrated more than ten books for children. His website lists a contact link for sending messages to Maass.

While I was conducting these searches I was in regular e-mail contact with Ralf Dose at the M-H-G in Berlin. I have known Ralf since 2006, and have been able to visit Berlin and the M-H-G once per year since then. It was at this point of the search for Ernst Maass that I became nervous. I felt that it would be inappropriate for me to approach Robert Maass directly to ask him about his father, or to inquire about any Hirschfeld memorabilia that might have survived in his father’s papers. I was worried that such questions, asked by a stranger, might seem like an invasion of privacy, and that the Maass family would not react well. By December 7, 2009, I had sent all of my search information to Ralf Dose, including the e-mail contact information for Robert Maass, and encouraged him, as a representative of the M-H-G, to contact Maass.

Ralf did not hesitate, and sent an e-mail to Maass asking if he was related to Ernst Maass, born in Stettin in 1914. Robert (known as Rob) Maass replied that he was the son of Ernst Maass. Ralf asked if the family had any memorabilia relating to their distant relative Magnus Hirschfeld. Rob replied that they had plenty of family records, going back to the nineteenth-century, and that there was some material relating to Hirschfeld, including photographs, letters, and so on. Ralf, of course, was ecstatic that a new trove of Hirschfeld material had been found. He continued a friendly e-mail correspondence with Maass. Unfortunately, Maass could not provide a list of items, as the large amount of material needed sorting, and Ralf was handicapped in that he could not easily fly from Berlin to New York to view the collection. I consulted with Ralf, and volunteered to go to New York to see the collection on behalf of the M-H-G. Ralf agreed, and on December 16, 2009, I was introduced into a three-way e-mail correspondence with Ralf and Rob.
A Scouting Trip to New York

On February 5, 2010, my fifty-third birthday, I arrived on the doorstep of Rob Maass at his brownstone in Brooklyn, New York. He had taken time out from his busy schedule to allow me to poke through his family papers. Rob was a perfect host, and was somewhat bemused that anyone would be interested in these old papers. He knew a bit about Hirschfeld, and we talked about Hirschfeld and Ernst Maass and Li Shiu Tong and others as we spent the next five hours looking through the material. This was not actually enough time to see everything, as there was one suitcase stuffed with material, several boxes, and also loose items. We concentrated on the photographs and the suitcase, which Rob placed on the dining room table. I made some notes, and also took photographs.
The more we looked through the material, the more excited I became. There was an inscribed copy of Hirschfeld’s doctoral thesis from 1892; family photographs; letters from Hirschfeld and also postcards sent during his world tour; original photographs (and negatives) of Hirschfeld’s funeral taken by Ernst Maass; letters from Hirschfeld’s assistant Karl Giese to Maass; correspondence from Hirschfeld’s executor Franz Herzfelder concerning the disposition of Hirschfeld’s estate (Maass received a bequest); Hirschfeld’s passport from his world tour; and on and on. Rob confessed that the material had only recently come into his possession, as it had been stored in a closet at his mother’s house. His mother was still alive and was clearing up her home in preparation for moving. She had wanted to dispose of the suitcase and

Figure 8: A copy of Hirschfeld’s thesis from 1892, inscribed to his maternal uncle Dr. Julius Mann, found in the Maass/Mann Papers, Brooklyn, N.Y. Credit: Don McLeod.
other materials. Rob insisted that he wanted to look though the material first, and moved the things to his home in Brooklyn.

**Reaction in Berlin, and a Second Site Visit**

Unfortunately, I was only able to visit with Rob Maass for the one day. In our conversations, I stressed how important the Hirschfeld material was for scholarship, and hinted that it should really be repatriated to the M-H-G in Berlin. We said goodbye, and promised to correspond further by e-mail. As soon as I arrived back in Toronto I loaded the photographs

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*Figure 9: A postcard from Hirschfeld to his uncle, Dr Julius Mann, sent during his world tour, 1931. From the Maass/Mann Papers, Brooklyn, N.Y. Credit: Don McLeod.*
Figure 10: Karl Giese to Ernst Maass, January 21, 1938, less than two months before Giese committed suicide. From the Maass/Mann Papers, Brooklyn, N.Y. Credit: Don McLeod.
I’d taken onto my computer and sent them as e-mail attachments to Ralf at the M-H-G. Ralf and others at the M-H-G were very excited to see this material, which had been unknown to them.\textsuperscript{17} We continued our three-way correspondence, and later in 2010 Ralf Dose was able to visit Rob Maass in Brooklyn himself, to have a closer look at the material and to negotiate for its possible donation to the M-H-G. Rob was entirely amenable, agreeing that the material should be preserved and made available for research purposes. He agreed to begin donating the papers and other materials relating to Hirschfeld and his circle to the M-H-G. In May 2011, Rob and his partner Carroll Bogert were able to visit Berlin for a conference, and also took time to visit the M-H-G. They brought a portion of the collection with them, which they donated to the M-H-G.\textsuperscript{18} Some of this has already been displayed at the Schwules Museum in Berlin.\textsuperscript{19} Additional donations will be forthcoming as the material is examined and sorted.\textsuperscript{20}

**Conclusion**

The rediscovery of material relating to Magnus Hirschfeld in the papers of Ernst Maass involved straightforward research and considerable good luck. The story also has a happy ending. In some ways it seems incredible that so few clues could lead to this result, and so quickly. It was also remarkable that virtually all of this information was found through my home computer. I didn’t have to leave home to do this research. Until a few years ago, the level of manual research required to find these papers would have been overwhelming, and perhaps impossible. But with the advent of modern research tools such as Google, Ancestry.com, online phonebooks and directories, and the instant communication afforded by e-mail, with good luck important forgotten research materials may be uncovered with a few clicks of the keyboard. What is more remarkable is that we are only in the infancy of the development of online research tools and databases. In the future, online searching will be much more powerful. There are likely many
more forgotten suitcases and trunks filled with historical documents and materials of interest to LGBTI history, just waiting to be rediscovered. Someday, with research and serendipity, we may find them.

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The author would like to thank Ralf Dose, who made helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper. The images from Hirschfeld’s Exile Guestbook on pages 3–6 have been reproduced with the permission of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.


3 See Wolff, 196–98.

4 Hirschfeld’s life in Nice is examined in detail in Donald W. McLeod and Hans P. Soetaert, “« Il regarde la mer et pense à son idéal »: Die letzten Tage von Magnus Hirschfeld in Nizza, 1934–1935,” *Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft*, no. 45 (July 2010), 14–33.

5 Little is known about Robert Kirchberger. Ralf Dose of the Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft (M-H-G) has suggested that he served briefly as Hirschfeld’s secretary in 1935. Ralf Dose e-mail message to Don McLeod, September 9, 2009.

6 Hirschfeld’s death and funeral are covered extensively in McLeod and Soetaert, , “« Il regarde la mer et pense à son idéal »: Die letzten Tage von Magnus Hirschfeld in Nizza, 1934–1935”.

Giese committed suicide in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in March 1938. The Exile Guestbook, currently in the collection of the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, had been rescued from a dustbin in Brno in 1942. The fact that it was found in Brno strongly suggests that it had once been in the possession of Karl Giese.

See McLeod and Soetaert, “« Il regarde la mer et pense à son idéal »: Die letzten Tage von Magnus Hirschfeld in Nizza, 1934–1935.”

Ralf Dose, e-mail message to Don McLeod, December 1, 2009.


Don McLeod, e-mail message to Ralf Dose, December 2, 2009.


Don McLeod, e-mail message to Ralf Dose, December 7, 2009.

Rob Maass, e-mail message to Don McLeod, February 1, 2010.

Rob Maass later continued to find incredible items relating to Hirschfeld in the papers, including a diary from his exile in Ascona and his graduation diploma from medical school.


The exhibition “Hirschfeldforschung Fundstücke aus neuester Zeit Objekte, Bücher, Dokumente” was held at the Schwules Museum, Berlin, December 7, 2011, to March 31, 2012.