

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 54 - 67

BERGMANN, J., & Co., History of the Company

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The Bergmann success story, at the end of the 19th century, is in every way equal to the professional and social advancement of the Steiner family in the first half of the century. Exactly like the rise of the Steiner family - from protected Jew to Lord of the Castle within one generation - that of Josef and Anton Bergmann could be summed up as the rise from travelling journeyman to worldwide operating factory owner – also in one generation. This is the reason why the history of each family follows the summary of the history of the firm, as with the Adler families.



Kapellenstrasse 25 and 26: In left half of the house, today the hairdresser's Salon Scheffold, the Bergmann success story began in 1873. The extension on the far left is the bakery which was transformed into a dye-works. (Photo: K. Neidlinger)

Josef Bergmann, the founder of the business, was born in humble circumstances in 1850, in a village called Rowny with a population of 300, in south-eastern Bohemia. His father Emanuel had been a pedlar and, in addition, had traded in human hair. After leaving school, his eldest son Josef was apprenticed to a dyer. Having finished his training, he set off on his travels as a journeyman, as was customary in those days. He spent quite a long period in Vienna, where he learnt how to dye and bleach human hair.

About 1870 he stopped over in Krumbach, Swabia, where there was a large Jewish community and where he also met the landlord and landlady of the Jewish inn, "The Sun". They had relatives, the baker Daniel M. Einstein, nicknamed "Beckadenile", and his wife Fanny, née Haas, who lived on the Judenberg in Laupheim. Of all their eight children, only the second-youngest daughter, Friedericke, called "Rickele", had reached adulthood. Both bakers, over sixty years of age, died in 1872/1873 within a short time. Their only daughter inherited very little besides the house, Judenberg 2, as the parents had been very poor.

Five months after the death of Rickele's father, after the community had temporarily supported the bereaved daughter, Josef Bergmann married Friedericke Einstein in 1874 and took over the house at Judenberg 2 (later changed to Kapellenstrasse 26). The relationship had presumably been brought about by the mediation of the relatives in Krumbach. For many years Josef Bergmann maintained friendly relations with Jewish and Christian families in Krumbach.

Indeed Josef Bergmann had come to Laupheim before that, in 1872 or 1873. In August 1873 he had officially registered his business in the town: he purchased untreated hair, bleached, dyed and refined it, in order then to sell it further to wig-makers and for hair-pieces. Untreated, cut human hair was at that time only to be obtained in Poland and Russia. Therefore Josef always had to undertake extensive journeys during the summer; in the cold season the refining and the resale of the ware took place. The little bakery on the Judenberg was transformed into a dye-works, obviously quite successfully. Probably in 1877, Josef Bergmann incorporated his younger brother Anton into his business as a shareholder. The latter had, up to then, worked as a waiter in Vienna. In March of the same year, Josef Bergmann also placed the printed advertisement in the "Laupheim Verkündiger", which offered the first two vacant posts – for two grown-up girls – which the Bergmann company had created.

**In J. Bergmann's Haarhandlung
Laupheim finden 2 schon ältere Mädchen (jedoch
nur im Haus) dauernde Beschäftigung.**

After his arrival in Laupheim, dated 1876/1877, Anton Bergmann lived in his brother's house at Judenberg 2. In this house, later changed to Kapellenstrasse 25 and 26, there were four different apartments. The neighboring house was occupied by the "Judenberg Adlers", as Jakob Elias Adler's family was called, to distinguish them from the "Kapellenstrasse Adlers", who were not related to them. Jakob, nicknamed "Kobbel", was married for the second time to Rosalia, called "Lala". He earned his living as a weaver, and was even poorer than his neighbors. Between the neighbor's new tenant and their daughter Helene Adler, born into his second marriage in 1861, there soon developed a relationship, the result of which Anton at first hoped to escape by emigration to America. However, his brother talked him out of this and helped him to accept the responsibility of a young father by paying for Anton Bergmann's and Helene Adler's wedding himself. This took place on the 29th July 1878 and it proved high time: their first son Marco saw the light of day on the 10th August 1878



(„Laupheimer Verkündiger“ of 27th July, 1878)

The incorporation of a partner enabled the young business to expand its range of activities. Josef travelled to Bohemia, Galicia and other provinces belonging to the Danube monarchy. Anton's destinations were Switzerland and Bavaria. Both families still lived in the house at Judenberg 2, and both were enriched almost every year by a new member. By 1890 Josef and Rickele had seven children, Anton and Lina five – almost all were born between September and January! The reason for this was that after Pessach at the latest, mostly earlier, the fathers started on their journeys and didn't return until autumn. Only then were the mothers often able to pay their debts which had built up over the summer at the baker's, the butcher's or at the grocer's, and it is at that time also that usually a child was born.



The first remaining photo of the Bergmann business in 1889 On either side of the staff are the proprietors: seated on the left, Josef, far right Anton Bergmann

As the trade with processed hair was doing well, the chemical factory on the Judenberg with its intensive smells was moved far out of town. On the road to Risstissen in the "New World" a new chemical workshop was constructed, in which bleaching and dyeing was then carried out. Later on, this workshop was placed on the roof of the entrance building of the new factory in the König-Wilhelm-Strasse, in remembrance of the primitive beginnings. Josef Bergmann's family temporarily left the cramped living conditions of the Judenberg and moved into the castle of Grosslaupheim, living as tenants of the Steiner family, but first without selling their former house. Three years later, a large plot of land was able to be purchased at the corner of the Radgasse and the Schwanengässle (today the site of the supermarket Feneberg), on which the construction of a new factory was immediately begun. As in 1897 Kilian von Steiner returned to Laupheim, he needed the apartment in the castle for himself, and so on the spot the decision was taken to erect a new imposing house for two families near the factory: the house Radstrasse 21 was built, which still exists today. However, until it was inhabitable, Josef and Rickele and their seven children had to move back again to Judenberg 2. After both Bergmann families moved to the Radstrasse, the apartments on the Judenberg were sold to the hairdresser Anton Hermann.

August Schenzinger's description of the town of Laupheim, published in 1897, mentions the Bergmann factory. The following extract reveals which

further fields of activity had been added in the meantime and how many people had been enabled by the two employers to make a living:

The latest comparatively large factory is the business owned by the Bergmann brothers which employs four sales representatives and manufactures hair products and hairdressing items. This new attractive property is situated in a garden in Radstrasse, next to which an appropriate residential building will be erected. Here, all the items which are somehow relevant to the hair-trade are produced, and not only will the male population with a shortage of hair find wigs of every variety, but also the ladies are provided with plaits according to their wishes and desires. There are plaits in both simple and intricate designs, and whatever is connected with hair or beards can be found in stock. Washing, splitting and dyeing of hair – all is carried out on a large scale here. Likewise this renowned business deals with just about all toiletries, particularly those which are used in the hairdressing businesses. As such manufacturers are rare, the products are in demand all over the world. Thirty to forty girls work specifically in the hair processing branch under the supervision of several foremen and hairdressing artists.



The Bergmann factory as seen from the König-Wilhelm-Strasse

There were two reasons why the enormous investment came at exactly the right time and paid off quickly. First of all, among women the fashion of wearing a hairnet caught on and the Bergmann business, with its new premises, was able to cope with the rapidly increasing demand for hairnets. The brand-name article from Laupheim, "The Net with a Spider", dominated the market until after the First World War. The second, more important reason, was that Bergmann & Co was able to profit from a com-

pletely unexpected advantage arising out of the imperial world politics at the turn of the century. China was being forced to yield to the struggle for supremacy of the European powers, and the German empire was also known to be attempting to gain a foothold there. European influence was increasing, and a decisive consequence for Bergmann was that more and more Chinese were having their plaits cut off, because they wanted to adapt to European trends of fashion. The result was virtually ideal for Bergman & Co: untreated human hair of best quality, the raw-material basis of the firm, thanks to the Europeanisation of "the Middle Kingdom" (China), and thanks to Chinese plaits cut off in great numbers and at increasingly cheaper prices!

The two employers took a further step on their road to success. The Chinese hair refined in Laupheim, which was particularly suitable for the manufacture of hairnets, would soon no longer be meshed for nets in Laupheim, but for that purpose would be sent back to China, duty-free. For the Chinese women managed to mesh more nets than the German workers in the same amount of time, and they even did so for a fraction of the German wages. Globalisation arrived in Laupheim as early as 1900 and at the beginning of the century, Josef and Anton Bergmann found themselves as early "global players".

There seemed to be almost nothing missing in the Bergmann range of products which, in the broadest sense, had to do with hair. Although wars can't really be won with hair-pieces, Bergmann & Co even profited a little from the arms race preceding the First World War. For in Laupheim, the plumes for helmets were produced, which were an essential part of the dress uniform in many units of the Prussian-German army up to 1914. In the face of several enlargements of the army, the demand for colourful horse-hair plumes also increased enormously.

Apart from the extension of the factory grounds in the Radstrasse during the pre-war period, two branches were set up, one in Chotebor/Bohemia, quite near the birthplace of the founder of the business, and another in Braunau, on the River Inn. The latter didn't thrive and was soon abandoned. In contrast, the works in Chotebor became an important prop for the business in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, as the Bohemian part of the Bergmann family was also active in the hair-trade there.

Furthermore the question of a successor in the management of the firm was dealt with early enough. It was agreed that from each family only two sons or sons-in-law were to enter the firm as authorised partners - from Anton's family, Marco and Edwin, and from Josef's family, Theodor and Max. However, all of them only entered the management of the firm after

marriage between 1907 and 1910. This was certainly none too soon, as Anton Bergmann died at the early age of 58 in 1912.

The outbreak of the First World War brought an abrupt end to the long upward trend of the past decades. The boom up to 1914 was followed by a long phase of recession, and it was never to be the same as before the war, which applied generally everywhere.



World War I: Soldiers from the Bergmann family, 1915/1916. From left: Marco Bergmann, then serving as a driver, and his wife Elsa née Oppenheim. Leopold Wallersteiner (Ulm), trainer of recruits, and his wife Elsa née Bergmann. Paula and Edwin Bergmann, of the anti-balloon defence.

Already on the third of August 1914 Willy Bergmann, Josef's youngest son, reported for duty as a reservist, and Karl Bergmann, still too young for compulsory military service, reported voluntarily for military service. Both served the whole war period in the front line, they were wounded several times and were decorated. Karl later followed a career as an officer and became a lieutenant. In 1915 Marco, Max and Edwin were called up for service, so that only Theodor and his grandfather were still active in the company management.



Willy Bergmann, non-commissioned officer, 1918 in Macedonia



Karl Bergmann, voluntary and reserve officer.

Almost all the world-wide connections of the company collapsed; the company was not considered to be important for the wartime economy and could hardly be transformed for war purposes. So business continued on a

reduced scale. The planners of the first total warfare in history came up with the idea of a substitute product which the company was able to manufacture and by which the use of leather, necessary for war, could be reduced. Transmission belts were manufactured out of hair to substitute those made of leather.

Certainly more significant was the voluntary commitment of the company and its partners for the national cause in order to contribute to a successful end to the war. Already in August 1914 a "Frauenausschuss für Liebesgaben" (Women's Committee for charitable gifts) was set up in Laupheim, by which presents were collected and sent to the soldiers at the front. Warm underwear, tobacco, food, luxury foods and drink, simply everything that was thought necessary for the soldiers on the battlefield was collected by this committee. The collection point was the Bergmann factory in the König-Wilhelm-Strasse, as is stated in the announcement from the "Laupheim Verkündiger" on the 25th August, 1914.

Liebesgaben

für die Soldaten im Felde und deren hilfsbedürftige Familien in der Heimat

werden jeden Montag, Mittwoch, Freitag je von 10—12 Uhr und Nachmittags 2—4 Uhr von Frauen des Ausschusses in den Arbeitsräumen der **Bergmann'schen Fabrik** entgegengenommen.

Laupheim, den 15. August 1914.

Die Frauen des Ausschusses für Liebesgaben.

On the initiative of Mayor Schick and the town councillor Max Bergmann, lists of all the soldiers from Laupheim were published regularly in the newspaper from November 1914, so that later sometime a chronicle of the places of engagement of all war participants could be compiled. If a name was missing, or a reader noticed a different mistake, the corrections of the list were not handed in at the town hall, but at the doorman's office in the Bergmann factory.

The senior director, Josef Bergmann, invested a large amount of liquid assets in war loans and made many donations and set up foundations to contribute to a successful end of the war. Also, the Austrian-Hungarian army was borne in mind. For this he was awarded the Red Cross Silver Medal in 1916 by the Emperor Franz Josef, and in the same year, the Charlotte Cross by the King of Württemberg.

Fortunately, after the end of the war, all of the soldiers of both Bergmann families returned home. Economically, things were progressing very slowly, for it was a long time before supplies from Chinese sources became accessible again, and also a new trend in fashion caused a decrease in the sale of hairnets: ladies who wanted to be in fashion had their hair bobbed and no longer needed that old-fashioned item. Of course, all the women in the Bergmann family rejected this trend, except for the young generation.

Todes-Anzeige.

Unsere liebe, gute Mutter, Grossmutter, Schwiegermutter

Frau
Friedericke Bergmann
geb. Einstein

wurde uns gestern abend im 74. Lebensjahre durch einen sanften Tod entrissen.

Die trauernd Hinterbliebenen:

Laupheim, 28. Mai 1924.

Theodor Bergmann und Frau Thekla, geb. Steiner
Emma Gideon, geb. Bergmann
Flora Stern mit Gatten Sam. Stern
Max Bergmann mit Frau Henny, geb. Stern
Klara Hofheimer mit Gatten Hugo Hofheimer
Frieda Biedermann mit Gatten Max Biedermann
Willy Bergmann mit Frau Julie geb. Steiner,

Beileidsbesuche dankend verboten.

Die Beerdigung findet am Donnerstag nachmittag $\frac{1}{4}$ 5 Uhr vom Trauerhaus aus statt.

In November 1922, the founder of the firm, Josef Bergmann, died at the age of 73, and two years later his wife Friedericke followed him. Partly due to the tremendous inflation, there was a strong dispute about the inheritance among the children, in which the new senior director, Theodor, and his wife, Thekla, did not play a very pleasant part. On the death of the senior director, the surviving dependants set up a charitable foundation in his memory. This was devalued in an extremely short time due to the galloping inflation. Further strokes of fate followed: the daughter Flora, wedded name Stern, died in 1924 at the age of 46, the youngest son Willy was killed in a car accident in 1925, and Hugo Hofheimer, their daughter Klara's husband, passed away in 1928.

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122 Wood Street London E.C.

J. Bergmann & Co.
Haarhandlung u. Haarnetzfabrik

Laupheim, den 8. Oktober 1908.
(Württemberg)

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The middle of the 1920s was accompanied by a slight upward trend, and the ground between the Schwanengasse and the König-Wilhelm-Strasse was purchased, the first truck was bought and the horse stable changed into a garage. Bergmann, in the meantime transformed into a KG (limited company), still maintained its leading position in the hair products trade. The Württemberg Secretary of Economics, Reinhold Maier, certified the business as one of the most important export-oriented in the federal state. The greatest employer in Laupheim was at that time the Bergmann company.

 Schutzmarke „Mit der Spinne“	<h1>J. BERGMANN & Co.</h1> <h2>LAUPHEIM</h2> <h3>WÜRTEMBERG</h3>	Gegründet 1873 Telefon 560 Tel.-Adresse: Bergmann Laupheim Postfach 61-62	
Großfabrikation von Haararbeiten wie: Perücken für Theater, Film, Puppen, Schaufensterfiguren etc. - Haarzöpfe, Nackenteile. - Großbleicherei und Färberei von Menschenhaaren. Spezialität: Weißgebleichte Haare. - Haarnetze „Mit der Spinne“. - Friseurbedarf. - Spezialartikel.			
Abs.: J. Bergmann & Co, Laupheim-Würtbg.		Zur Leipziger Messe: Messhaus Union, gegenüber dem Hauptbahnhof Zimmer Nr. 407 III. Stock Codes: Bentley, A. B. C. 5 th Rudolf Mosse, Lieber und Privat	
Ihre Zeichen:	Ihre Nachricht vom:	Unsere Zeichen:	Datum:

However, the beginning economic crisis of 1929 caused a decrease in sales for the company: in 1932 only half of the turnover of 1927, which had been the last good year, was reached. And still it was the only firm in Laupheim which suffered no dismissals during the Repression.

To counterbalance the decreasing turnover in the factory's business, experiments were increasingly carried out on hair cosmetics and colorings for hair. For this purpose, a chemical laboratory was established and a chemist was taken on.

One of the main reasons why Hitler came to power in 1933 was the desolate economic situation in Germany and his promise to alter this rapidly. That is why large companies, like Bergmann, which provided numerous jobs, could continue to work without problems during the first few years. For the unemployment would have become even more acute if measures had been taken against them. In 1933, Bergmann, with its roughly 150 employees, was the greatest employer in the administrative area of Laupeheim as well as in the town itself, and paid the most taxes. There were no SA guards standing in front of the factory gates on the 1st of April 1933. The boycott was directed more towards the retail trade. The international network of the company was its protection at first against the great pressure of the ruling junta. This all led, at the beginning, to the four managers' underestimation of the imminent danger of the Nazis. However, they weren't the only ones in this respect. They were not the only ones to think the nightmare would soon come to an end. "Give Hitler enough lead, then he'll hang himself", is one of Theodor Bergmann's legendary misjudgements. Furthermore, the four were in disagreement and their cooperation was seriously affected.

The pressure became even more intense when the fanatical Nazi and anti-Semite, Marxer, became Mayor in 1935. Nazi sympathizers among the Bergmann staff spied on behalf of the Party and accused the proprietors of a made-up breach of exchange-control regulations, among other things. They sabotaged the business, for example, by passing on the names of business partners to the "Stürmer" (Nazi-controlled newspaper), which then denounced them as being friends with Jews. Year after year, the turnover decreased and in 1937, Marco and Theodor fled abroad – an uncoordinated step. Marco escaped to the USA with a visitor's permit, Theodor left the country with incomplete documents for the Duchy of Liechtenstein. This made the observation of the two remaining partners all the more rigorous and worsened their situation.

Since 1937, there had been deliberations and negotiations about the business being sold to the two executives, Beck and Würstle, although the compulsory Aryanization had not yet been put into force. In July 1937, the accountant, Fritz Beck, was incorporated into the management as a contact to the state authorities. Also interested was Otto Miller, likewise an executive who had worked in the firm for over thirty years. However, the proprietors' trust in him had been ruined since he had become a member of the NSDAP Party and also deputy chief of the local NSDAP branch. They also suspected Miller of being the most significant Nazi "submarine" (mole) in the business, supplying the Party with internal information and therefore, they definitely didn't want his participation.

However, Beck and Würstle didn't obtain the permission of the authorities. When the time came, they were compensated with a share of 18% each, Otto Miller received the same and an old pal of Mayor Marxer, a dairy-owner from Biberach called Fischbach, who had no idea about the hair-

trade, received a share of 46%, the largest share of the Bergmann company. But by the time the sale was finally approved and signed, the price had dropped from originally 249,000 Reichsmarks to 27,500 Reichsmarks. After the "Pogromnacht" (Night of Broken Glass) in 1938, the three proprietors, Theodor, Max and Edwin were imprisoned in Dachau for weeks and returned home, sick and broken men. Shortly before the deportation to Dachau, Theodor had returned to Laupheim of his own free will, as the Nazis had promised him financial benefits if he emigrated later. Of course, nothing of the promise was kept, the return to Germany had brought him three weeks in a concentration camp and, as a result, his health was ruined. After the release of the three proprietors from Dachau – the last was Max on the 14th December, 1938 – a new name was already emblazoned on the factory gate, although the sale of the business had not yet been finalized: it was no longer called Bergmann KG, but "Württembergische Haarfabrik Fischbach & Co". The three still rightful owners were forbidden to enter their premises.

Edwin Bergmann and his family were able to flee to England on the 9th February, 1939, and emigrated later to the USA, followed by Theodor on the 8th March. Max, who signed the sales contract alone on the 20th March, was the last to receive an emigration permit four days later. Robbed of the last penny by the German authorities and their special taxes, the once wealthy businessmen arrived penniless in America – with the exception of Marco, who had fled earlier.

Only two of the four partners lived to see the restitution proceedings carried out after the war. Theodor had died already in 1941 and his brother Edwin in 1947. The talks and negotiations with a view to restitution were only beginning at that time. It was under discussion whether the business should be returned completely to the family or if the new owners should remain involved. Marco and Max were very much weakened by poor health, and the cooperation with Theodor's widow, Thekla, proved difficult. Most of the sons had, in the meantime, taken up other professions or were established in other lines of business. Nevertheless, they were at least able to come to an agreement that cooperation or even partnership with Miller was entirely out of the question. They were more prepared to plan the future of the business with Fischbach as a partner, since the relationship with him was not so disrupted. Yet Fischbach, on his part, was not prepared to separate from Miller as partner. And so a joint solution for the future was eliminated. The restitution department and the courts of justice had to act. Here also, as before the war, the fight carried on, with no holds barred and much conspiracy. The legal action occupied much time, but the former proprietors were able to achieve their goals completely.

On the 31st December, 1948, the restitution authorities in Ravensburg decreed that the company and all rights should be returned to the former owners and the sales contract of 1939 was declared null and void. In a

further verdict of the 7th October, 1949, the objections of Fischbach and Miller were remanded. The court decision was then confirmed by the courts of appeal of Tübingen, in January 1951, and of Rastatt in October 1951.

In December 1952, when the Ravensburg restitution authorities fixed Fischbach and Miller's compensatory payment to Bergmann at 22,000 Deutschmarks, none of the former four partners profited: Marco had been killed in a car crash in June 1952 between Ulm and Laupheim, and Max, suffering from homesickness for Laupheim, died on the 1st August in the same year in the USA.

Already during the court procedures that appeared futile for them, Fischbach and Miller had set up another business in the Ulmer Strasse, which they named "Württembergische Haarveredelung", and for which they went headhunting for staff, know-how etc. from Bergmann. The new Bergmann company passed into the possession of Marco Bergmann's descendants. The other families no longer had a share. In 1954 they entered a partnership with the firm "Freund", and moved later into the new industrial estate near the station. All the new proprietors, however, remained in the USA. In 1955, the old manufacturing plant at the corner of Radstrasse and König-Wilhelm-Strasse was demolished, except for the residential building which still exists today. A supermarket was built in its place.