

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 68 - 70

BERGMANN, Theodor,

47 Kapellenstrasse

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Theodor Bergmann, born on 17th December 1875 in Laupheim, died on 16th August 1941 in NY, OO Thekla Bergmann, née Steiner, born on 22th August 1881 in Laupheim, died on 27th February 1974 in Seattle/USA.

– Hildegard „Hilde“, born on 24th January 1908, died on 24th April 1997 in Seattle/USA,

– Ilse, born on 24th January 1911, died on 15th July 1953.

The whole family emigrated to the USA between 1933 und 1939.

With regard to Josef Bergmann's eldest son and his family we have the least information or photos. There are two reasons for this lack of information about him: firstly, even back then in Laupheim he appeared to be the member that least participated in the life of his extended family, and secondly, all contacts between the family and all their relatives were cut off entirely after their emigration to the US. That is why "John" Hans Bergmann's family chronicle provides the least information about uncle Theodor, as the author seemed to have hardly any material about him.



John Bergmann's family chronicle is the most important basis for the company history on the preceding pages and also for the following six family histories.

Theodor, who always read a great deal, was "perhaps the most intelligent and intellectual" among the later four company owners. After primary school he attended the Laupheimer Lateinschule (Laupheim grammar school) and graduated with the so-called „Einjaehrige“, as the respective secondary education certificate was called at that time. After graduation he began his professional life, meaning for the sons, as it once did for their father Josef Bergmann, to take to the road. Theodor worked for several years in

Italy, also learning the language. In 1903 he spent some months in England. It was not only good connections, business experience and the Italian tongue he brought back to Laupheim, but also his passion for the Italian Opera. The "Bergmann whistle", which he introduced, mastered to perfection by every family member except Grandfather, was a well-known tune from one of the operas. Whenever the whistle was heard, everybody knew: there was a Bergmann coming!

In 1907 he married Thekla Steiner (born 1881) of the well-respected Steiner family. It was her parents' house in the Kapellenstrasse 47 that she brought into the marriage as dowry. After restructuring and renovation it became their family residence. In 1908 their first daughter Hildegard, also called Hilde, was born, followed by their second daughter Ilse in 1911. From 1904 Theodor and his cousin, Marco Bergmann, were managing directors and in 1907 he became joint partner with plenary authority.

On the outbreak of the First World War Theodor was already 40 years old, which saved him as the only one of the four partners from report for duty. During the war he ran the company together with his father.

The family lived a rather private and secluded life and had but few contacts either with their relatives or with others. John Bergmann attributes this fact mainly to Theodor's wife Thekla, who tended to be seen in a negative light, and to her domineering influence on her husband. She could never get along with anybody except herself and had only her own benefit in mind. This became apparent after Josef Bergmann's death in 1922, when Theodor was to share out his private inheritance. This was followed by severe arguments in the family, which did not help to improve the image of the "Theodor side"



*Thekla Bergmann, née Steiner,
with her daughter Hilde*

The elder daughter, Hilde, married Hermann Schmidt in Stuttgart in the late 20's and from there she emigrated to the US with him later on. Ilse, the younger daughter, began her medical studies in Tuebingen in 1930, which she had to abandon in 1933. She took up her studies in Vienna, but it is unclear for how long. In 1937 she married Kurt Lebrecht from Ulm with whom she emigrated to the US early in 1937. From 1933 the three brothers, and especially Theodor, as senior director, were uncertain how to assess and cope with the increasing Nazi pressure and terror. Over a long period of time they appeared undecided and divided, which became obvious with Theodor's poorly planned and ill-conceived first emigration to Liechtenstein in 1937. Being better off than the others with the inheritance from his parents-in-law he moved to the small principality of Liechtenstein without all the necessary documents and without Liechtenstein's explicit permit. He came back one year later voluntarily,

though, after the Nazis had promised him financial benefits with regular emigration to the US later. Of course they did not keep their promise but deported Theodor and the others to Dachau in the Reichspogromnacht (Night of Broken Glass), but he managed to return after four weeks even though he was seriously ill.

He went to the hospital in Laupheim for treatment where he was accepted and taken in but it was only the women's section which could provide a bed for him. So he had to make use of the women's toilets where he unfortunately met a leader of the BdM (Nazi association of German Girls). The woman felt offended by the presence of a Jew and reported Theodor to the party executive committee: still very sick he was forced to leave the hospital.

After the night of the pogroms in 1938 almost all German Jews tried to flee their homeland as fast as they could. But the immigration countries, also the US, were still very reluctant to hand out entrance visas, raising anxiety and emotional pressure among would-be emigrants. Those tensions destroyed the relationship between Theodor's family and the other Bergmanns. Due to the collapse of trust there were hardly any contacts between them. For more details see the Edwin family.

Theodor died young in New York as early as 1941 but his wife Thekla, with whom all the others had to come to an understanding during the restitution negotiations after the war, reached the ripe old age of 92 years. She died in Seattle, Washington, in 1973, where also their daughter Hilde had settled with her husband Hermann Schmidt. Theodor's second daughter Ilse was married twice, first to Kurt Lebrecht and, after her divorce, to Siegfried Einstein from Buchau. In her second marriage Ilse gave birth to Theodor Einstein, later physics professor at the University of Maryland.

None of the children became involved with the Bergmann company so the shares were passed over to Marco Bergmann's descendants in the 50s.

All the children and grandchildren settled the differences long ago, as Ernest Bergman pointed out in an interview. And thus cordial and amicable relations have been established between the emeritus professor of biology Ernest Bergman and the physics professor Ted Einstein. Having grown up, Hilde married Hermann Schmidt in Stuttgart in the late 20's and from there she emigrated to the US with him later on.

Source:

John Bergmann: The Bergmanns from Laupheim, 1983.

Fotos: Staatsarchiv Sigmaringen, Wü 65/18 T4, Nr. 13-17, Archiv Ernst Schäll.