

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 100 - 109

BERGMANN, Julie, née. Steiner, 2 Bronnerstrasse

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Julie „Julia“ Bergmann, née Steiner, born August 18, 1896 in Laupheim, deceased April 7, 1972 in New York, buried in Laupheim.

OO **Willy Bergmann**, born January 27, 1890 in Laupheim, died October 21, 1925 in Munich.

- **Ernst Leopold Bergmann, "Ernest L. Bergman"**, born July 12, 1922, in Munich,

- **Willy Josef Bergmann**, born May 25, 1925 in Laupheim, deceased December 15, 2012, in Silver Spring MD.

Emigration of the family during 1936 – 1938 to St.Gallen (Switzerland), and in 1946 to the USA.

Willy, the youngest son of Josef Bergmann, after leaving secondary school, successfully completed an apprenticeship with the wholesale grain merchant Nathan in Ulm. He, therefore, did not enter the hair processing business, because, according to the agreement, only two sons of the founders could join as successors, and Willy was the third son of Josef Bergmann. After his training the Nathan company sent him to London where he represented the firm at the grain stock exchange. Due to the outbreak of World War I he was forced to return prematurely, which he was not at all happy about. With the last possible ferryboat he returned to Germany and already on August 3, 1914 he had to go to the front as a reservist. During the whole war he was in action, on the western front and in Macedonia. He got wounded and was awarded several decorations for his distinguished military service

After the war Willy started a second training at a college for textiles in Reutlingen. In 1921 he married Julie Steiner from the highly respected Steiner family in Laupheim. Thanks to this event we have the wedding photo on page 102 which shows the Bergmann family clan, nearly complete, in front of the "Ochsen". The young couple moved to Munich where Willy opened an independent trading company for the products of his father's hair processing firm.

Julie Steiner was the first child of the tanner Simon Leopold Steiner and his wife Melanie, née Herz. Her childhood and youth were happy and harmonious, and a stark contrast to her later life which was characterized by tragic strokes of fate and awful events.

As a student she was one of the first ones who was able to profit from the progress of the beginning equal-rights movement. From 1905 the Laupheim girls, too, for the first time, acquired access to secondary education, and were able to attend high school. Julie Steiner belonged to the class of 1906, which was the second year with girls included. Judging from her performance she was at the top of her age group. She learned to play the piano and at a Purim concert at the "Kronprinz" hall she, together with her father, played the overture to "The Wedding of Figaro" for 4 hands. After the first part of her graduation she moved to a boarding school run by Englische Fräulein (a religious order founded by Mary Ward in the 17th century) in Wallerstein near Nördlingen. She stayed there probably until her graduation, unless the outbreak of the First World War made that impossible. Because of the war she could not begin any higher education.



1903: First day of school for Julie Steiner (white dress). On her left: Julius Regensteiner, on the right: Selma Bernheimer and Fritz Kaufmann.

After the wedding in April 1921 the young couple moved to Munich where, in 1922, their first son Ernst Leopold and in May 1925 the second son Franz Josef were born. In October 1925 Willy Bergmann died tragically in a car accident: a drunken driver who missed a gateway squeezed the young father who was walking on the sidewalk against a house wall. He died shortly afterwards in the hospital due to thrombosis. He was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Laupheim. In memory of the victim of the fatal accident the name of the younger boy was changed to Willy.



1922 Bronner Street 22 with Castle of Gross-Laupheim, entrance to the stables and barn, and the house of H. Rupf and the butcher's "Wyse".

Together with her two small children the widow Julie Bergmann returned now to Laupheim where they were accommodated at the home of her parents in the Bronner Strasse. The Bergmann family clan did not somehow feel obliged to support the three – a slight and offence still felt today by the older son Ernest Bergman. He himself who, in those following years, found a home with, and was formed by, the tanner-Steiner family, and felt himself therefore a Steiner rather than a Bergmann, thinks it is more than an historic irony if during his visits in Laupheim he is welcomed as a representative and descendant of the great Bergmann family.



**Wedding of Willy Bergmann and Julie Steiner in the "Ochsen"
restaurant in Laupheim, 1921.**

*Upper row: Gretel Gideon, Karl Bergmann, Lotte Stern, Benno Nördlinger,
Hilde Bergmann, „Henny“ and Max Bergmann.*

*Second row: Friedel and Max Bergmann, Helmut Steiner, Flora and Uhl
Stern, the bride and groom, Hugo and Clara Hofheimer, nurse with
Martha Hofheimer, Theodor Bergmann.*

*Third row: Uncle Rosengart, Emma Gideon, Lina Bergmann, Simon and
Melanie Steiner, Friederike and Josef Bergmann, Thekla Bergmann.*

*Children (from the left): Helene Hofheimer, Hans Bergmann, Ilse
Bergmann, Liesel Hofheimer, Fritz Hofheimer, Trudel Bergmann.*

The memories of Ernest L. Bergman

Some years ago Ernest L. Bergman wrote down his childhood memories. The most important passages of them deserve to be copied here in full text.



*The landau belonging to tanner Steiner in the "Bastelwald" forest,
September 1927.*

The coexistence of Christians and Jews in the 1920s:

"At that time Laupheim was a district town of about 5,000 inhabitants and two castles. Christians and Jews lived together, in close vicinity, and everyone knew where the others lived. They worked, celebrated and mourned together, and each one participated, at the appropriate time, in the religious services of his faith. At the most important festivals of each religion, the higher authorities paid visits to the different houses of worship, e.g. at Christmas or at the Jewish New Year. On Corpus Christi everyone loved to see the wonderful arrangements of flowers, and on days when a recently ordained Catholic priest celebrated his first mass (Primiz), my grandfather's horses and the coach were present. On Sunday morning he used to climb to the top of the tower of the Synagogue to wind up the clock, since all the church clocks in the town went by the exact time of the half-hourly stroke of the synagogue clock."



The 70th birthday of Grandpa (Simon Steiner) on June 18, 1934. All the cattle were shown on the photo.



Hay harvest near the bark barn 1929. On the horse Ernst Bergmann. On the right: Simon Steiner, Willy Bergmann, 2 helpers

It was not a provisional solution or even by chance that after his emigration to Switzerland the young Ernst Bergmann started an agricultural apprenticeship. His grandfather Simon Steiner was not the only Jew in Laupheim who kept a considerable-sized farm besides his manufacturing business, in this case the tannery. This state of affairs significantly shaped his youth and personality, so that his teacher Mr Zepf in the secondary school made fun of him as the "little Jewish farmer from the fields in the Grund":

"My grandfather always had two horses for use at the tannery. Then we had also six cows and about 25 acres of land. By that time I already took great interest in agriculture, and ran around the courtyard with the young cattle. Later on I even was called "the young Jewish farmer from the Grund (area near the Schlosspark)". I often helped with all the work in the fields. Once they let me drive two hay wagons , but - alas! - at the great Jahn oak tree at the end of the Kapellenstrasse the two oxen, which we had at that time, wanted to turn into the Ulmer Strasse because there we used to get the grass for the cows in the mornings. A nice man helped me then to redirect my team of oxen, and I arrived safely, with some delay, in the Vorholz meadows. But this was the end of my driving. The nicest thing with the hay and wheat harvest were the picnics during the breaks, and I loved to go to the several butchers in town to buy the necessary products.

In summer we used to ride to the "Bastel" forest to check the state of the bark needed for the tannery. This I really enjoyed, in particular the "visits" to the pubs. I also admired the blossoming of the wonderful wild lupins. Frequently we cycled to go swimming at some of the nearby mills or even at Stetten or Mönchhöfe. But there I was afraid of the water rats."

Grandfather Simon Leopold Steiner, called "the little tanner", became a sort of substitute father for the fatherless Ernst Leopold. Therefore he received a very religious education. This was quite an exception in the Bergmann family clan, because the other families were becoming very secular and no longer observed the Jewish laws and holidays. And naturally the Steiner family cared as well for the religious needs of their Christian employees: so at the tanner Steiners' house there was no meat for lunch on Fridays.



Simon Steiner at his desk, 1935.

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Like all Laupheim Jews the tanner Steiners felt themselves to be good Germans and therefore were especially shocked, after Hitler's seizure of power, by their gradual expulsion from the German nation. Ernest Bergman recalls a scene in the synagogue which was repeated every year on the Pessach holiday, when he went to the service with his grandfather:

"We were more and more like Germans. For instance at Easter, the Jewish Passah holiday, there is a prayer which says: 'Next year in Jerusalem!' – but my grandfather whispered every year: 'We don't say that, we are Germans!' This, in spite of his presiding over the Jewish congregation and all the family life observing Jewish customs. But this changed quickly in 1933 when Hitler grasped power and the political climate in Germany turned entirely. On April 1, 1933 people of the SA appeared in front of the Jewish shops with signs requesting the population to boycott them. There was one as well in front of the tannery."

In April 1933 Ernst Bergmann was able to move to a secondary school which offered Latin as a foreign language. At this time this was still possible with special permission: children of First World War participants were still granted the possibility of attending higher schools. He cannot remember teachers or students with anti-Semitic attitudes. Out of the 13 pupils of his class who came from all the Laupheim elementary schools – the Catholic, the Protestant and the Jewish all together, there were 3 Jews: Ruth Friedland, Heinz Bach, and he himself:

"That was the first time we met together. And we had difficulties in understanding one another. But with regard to my class, they all were very decent. But that somebody in the class should beat someone up – that never happened to me."

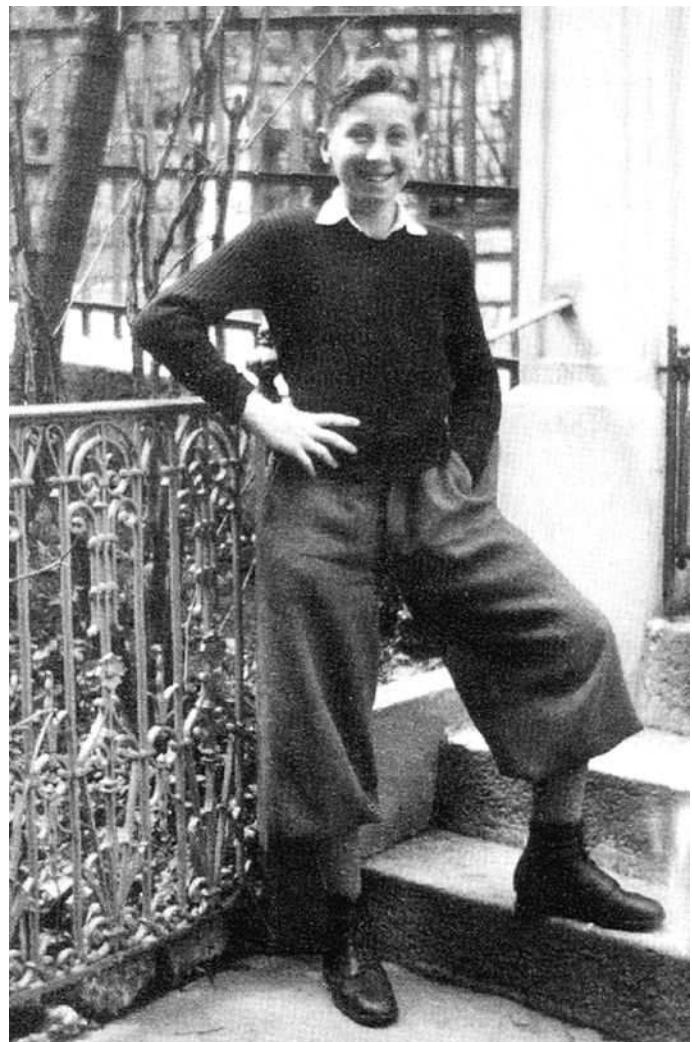
Four generations in one picture (1924). Seated: great-grandmother Fanny Steiner, née Rosengart. After her passing away the family founded the Fanny-Steiner-Trust to support youth during their vocational training. On the left grandmother Melanie Steiner, née Herz. On the right Julie and Ernst Bergmann.



But from the outside the pressure became stronger and stronger, and the situation for the Jews in the town and in school more and more intolerable:

"At the first Reich Sports Festival we were permitted to take part, and I even got a certificate signed by the minister Baldur von Schirach. But the next year Jews were excluded from participating. I also had to resign from the Laupheim Sports Club, and on my way home from gymnastics was the victim of verbal abuse. I joined the sports group of the Reich Association of Jewish Soldiers who did sports and played handball on the public "Luss" green every Sunday morning. Then the Nuremberg laws came into effect and all women employees had to leave, which hurt us very much. The actions against the Jewish shops were supported also actively by Austrian "legionaries" who were in a camp in Burgrieden. They damaged the shops by throwing stones into the windows, and even tried to set fire to the (Jewish) Restaurant "Ochsen". As well during the Feast of Tabernacles in 1935 we were bombarded by stones in the garden of the Jewish community center, but no one got hurt."

*Ernst Bergmann in Zwingli Street
in St.Gallen (Switzerland) 1938.*



Emigration to Switzerland

In May 1936 Ernst Bergmann was the first of his family to emigrate to his uncle Helmut Steiner in St. Gallen (Switzerland). One year later he was followed by his brother Willy, and in 1938 by the mother Julie Bergmann. Melanie Steiner's mother, Lina Herz, had moved from her home town of Ludwigshafen to Laupheim in 1935, since her apartment there was wrecked by gangs of the SS. Both of them were able to flee to Switzerland in 1939, where Lina Herz deceased in 1941 in St.Gallen at an advanced age.

At least Ernst and Willy could complete their schooling in Switzerland and afterwards start their vocational training. For Ernst this was, according to his inclination, an agricultural apprenticeship; and Willy was, from 1942, able to do a training as chef; both were able to work subsequently as interns in their respective professions. But Ernst Bergmann's profession from 1941 through 1946 should, more correctly, be called a "farmhand" rather than an intern. However he was not discontented, and when, in 1944, he as a stateless person was intended to be interned in a labour camp, his employer protested vehemently. The competent authorities complied and revoked the order with the statement that "Bergmann is in Switzerland more useful in agriculture than in the labour camp for road construction". But the mother Julie Bergmann, as a foreigner, did not get a work permit and was only allowed to do voluntary work involving refugee aid; so the family was always dependent on the support by her brother Helmut Steiner.

During her activity as a voluntary refugee helper Julie Bergmann had a very moving encounter in St. Gallen in February 1945. A Swiss politician and Nazi supporter, the former member of the federal council Jean-Marie Musy, succeeded at the beginning of 1945, in paying for the release of 1,200 Jews from the concentration camp in Theresienstadt (Terezin). Musy knew Himmler personally and it was rather more a private action, not clearly founded or explained, without the collaboration of official Swiss administration. Therefore hardly any preparations were made for the arrival of these 1,200 holocaust survivors. When these starving and apathetic human beings who did not yet grasp their lucky fate, arrived in St.Gallen on Feb.7, 1945, Julie Bergmann, too, was summoned to help. One of the first persons she met there was her former Laupheim classmate Recha Schmal who had worked in Terezin as a nurse for 3 years.

In the USA

In September 1946 Julie Bergmann and her two sons left Europe and emigrated to the United States where they settled in New York City. Willy got a job as a chef in the Waldorf Astoria within three days only after their arrival, thanks to a recommendation of his previous boss in Zermatt. The mother worked in another hotel as chamber maid. One year later they were joined by grandmother Melanie who lived with her daughter in New York till her death in 1956. Julie passed away in 1972, and, in accordance with both of their last wills, their remains were transferred to Germany and buried in the Jewish cemetery in Laupheim.

Am 7. April 1972 ist nach langer, schwerer Krankheit
unsere liebe Mutter, Schwiegermutter, Grossmutter,
Schwester, Schwägerin und Tante

JULIA BERGMANN

geb. STEINER

(früher Laupheim, St. Gallen, New York)

im Alter von 75 Jahren sanft entschlafen.

In tiefer Trauer:

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Gleichzeitig danken wir allen Verwandten und Freunden für ihre innige Anteilnahme.

Julie's elder son, Ernst Leopold, married Alice Adler of St. Gallen in 1948. When the family acquired the American citizenship in 1952, he also Americanized his name to Ernest L (without a full stop) Bergman (with one 'n') – while keeping his Swabian dialect unchanged until the present day. Based on his solid agricultural knowledge he made a remarkable academic career in the USA. After the Bachelor's degree of 1955 in horticulture and fruit growing he acquired his Master's Degree in Science in the same subjects in 1956 and in 1958 a doctorate. Until 1977 he instructed and researched as a professor of plant nutrition at the Pennsylvania State University, and afterwards he was charged with research and lecturing posts in South America and in China. The list of awards and honorary memberships since his retirement is too long to be

recalled at this place. In spite of all that he has kept his friendly and winning character and Swabian mentality – talking, as he puts it himself, "Swabian in all languages", while his mother tongue shines through all foreign languages.

In 1958 Ernest Bergman returned for the first time again to a short visit of Laupheim, following an invitation of his school friend Sixt Brecht. During the first night in his former home town he could not sleep, as the terrible events of the past all came flooding back to him and he was afraid "that somebody enters the room". But after this first visit many more were to come, and today he is able to recognize Laupheim as his original home town. As the nicest visit he remembers till today the one in 1988, when all the still living Laupheim Jews had been invited by the town and "all of us were there again". He was elected to be the speaker of the group, and since then he has done much for the German-Jewish reconciliation in order to come to terms the gloomy past.



September 2004: Ernest L. Bergman on a visit to Laupheim.

The initiators of the "Gedenkbuch" – project, Dr. Antje Köhlerschmidt and Karl Neidlinger, took advantage of this occasion for extensive talks.

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