

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 116 - 124

BERGMANN, Edwin, 9 Sebastianstreet

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KARL NEIDLINGER

Edwin Bergmann, born June 8, 1881, died June 6, 1947, OO
Paula Bergmann, née Stern, born October 10, 1886, died April 20,
1979

– **Rudolf Julius**, born November 14, 1911, died June 13, 1971

– **Margarethe Minnie**, born April 12, 1914

– **Walter Anton**, born August 17, 1926, died December 25, 2000
1937-1939 - Escape to England or the United States

Gretel Lambert, née Bergmann, probably the best-known member of the Bergmann family, grew up near the city train station, in Sebastian Street, a small street with only five houses. Gretel Bergmann was a talented high jumper and a shoo-in medal contender for the 1936 Olympic Games, though she was not allowed to start. Her father, one of four co-owners of the family company, had purchased the family house on Sebastian Street shortly before the First World War. As Gretel wrote many years later, they loved living in this house, as much as they had loved and enjoyed life in the small town of Laupheim. This house was their home.



Ex libris from Friedrich Adler.

As Gretel Bergmann's memoirs are printed and easily accessible, the chapter about her family will provide only the most essential information.¹⁾

The Bergmann Family

Edwin Bergmann is remembered fondly by his daughter. She describes him as a man who despite his wealth remained modest and stayed true to himself. She recalls him as a reserved man with much dignity, yet a mischievous sense of humor. He had many hobbies that he cultivated in his free time, such as his love of photography. Not only did he derive great pleasure from taking pictures, but in his new home he also had a completely equipped darkroom where he could develop them. In the back garden he had his workbench. On one side of this bench he repaired everything that broke down in the house; and on the other side among other things, the puppet theater and figures of his eldest son, Rudolf, came into being. Last but not least, stretching out from where Edwin grew roses there was a huge fruit and vegetable garden that provided almost everything needed to nourish a family of five. „All kinds of berries and espalier fruit made this garden a haven for hungry children.“

In 1910 Edwin Bergmann married Paula Stern from Frankfurt, a friend of his brother's wife, Else Oppenheim. Paula is not as fondly remembered by her daughter as her husband was. Gretel's father was a constant, stabilizing element in her life, whereas for a long time the relationship between Gretel Bergmann and her mother was rather strained. She explains that her mother was the youngest of five children in an upper-class family where she was very spoiled, which throughout her mother's life resulted in an exaggerated disposition to sickness. Paula Bergmann only reluctantly made the move from the big city of Frankfurt to the provincial town of Laupheim, which to her equated a loss of status in Frankfurt's upper-class society. To the best of his ability her husband pampered her to compensate for her loss and thanks to the many domestic servants he employed in the home, Paula Bergmann did not

Mädchen - Gesuch.

Wegen Verheiratung meines bisherigen
suche ich zuverlässiges, fleißiges Mädchen
das kochen kann, per 15. Sept. evtl. später.
Zeitgemäße Entlohnung u. gute Verpflegung.

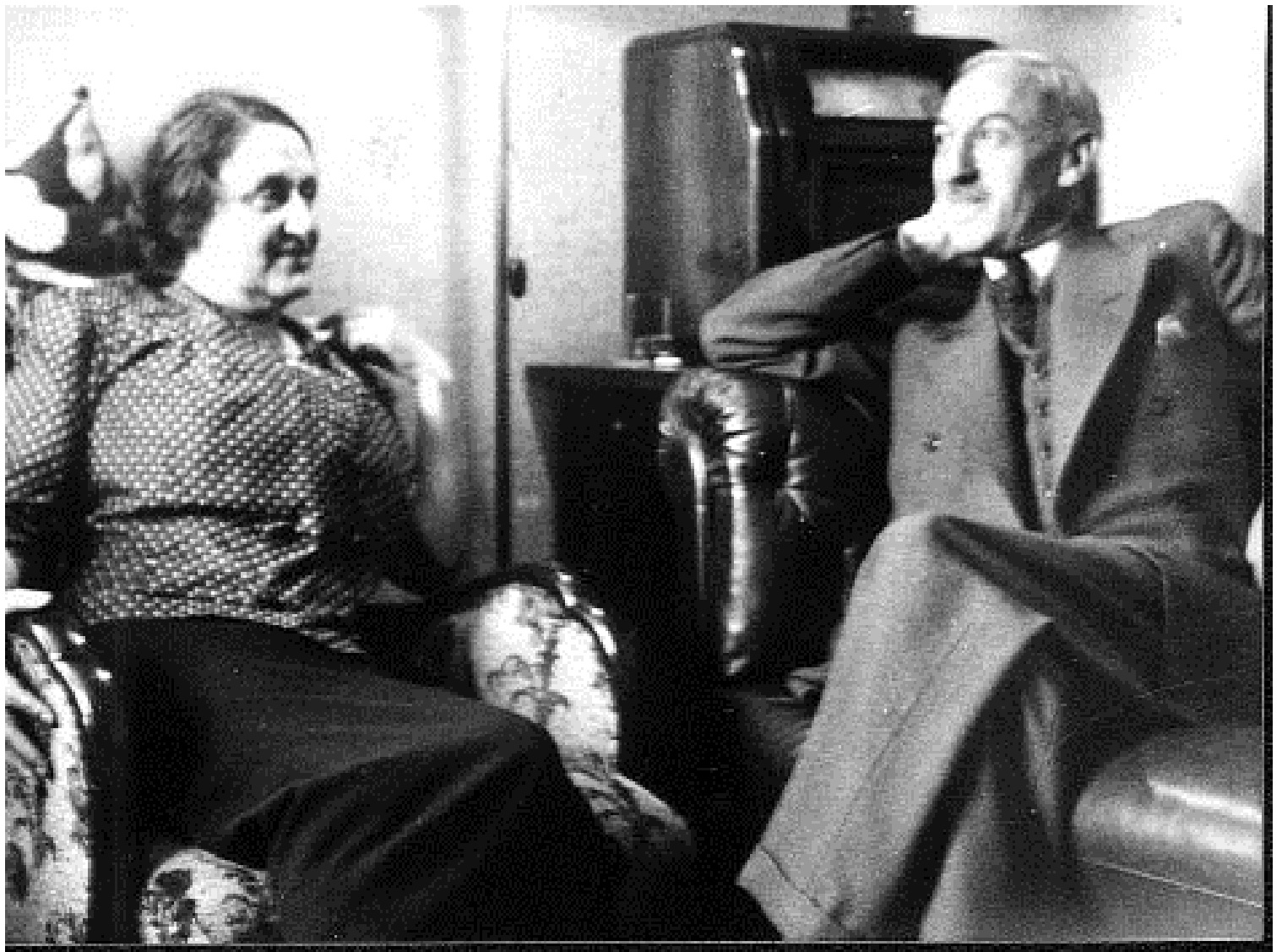
Frau Edwin Bergmann,
Laupheim.

have much to do, apart from her daily grocery shopping. Yet, she still hired a governess to raise her two rebellious children, which ultimately did not go very well.

As Gretel recalls in her memoirs, the numerous antics of the two eldest children, who got along famously with each other, speaks

volumes to just how poorly this went. For instance, there were conflicts quite frequently between the children and their mother due to very different views on fashion. When Paula went to Frankfurt to visit her mother, the children's grandmother, she always brought back clothes for her children. Unfortunately for the children these visits took place several times a year, and the clothes „though they may have been highly contemporary in the world of fashion, in Laupheim they were completely unknown“. This is why a stylish hat for Gretel, a gift from Frankfurt never to be worn, ended up being thrown out the window onto the dusty street. Rudolph's new knickerbockers met this same fortune after he successfully refused to wear them to school, despite coercion. As is true for most children, the Bergmann children did not wish to set themselves apart from other kids by being fashionable, but preferred to dress like their peers.

When Paula Bergmann was 39 years old she gave birth to her last child, Walter. Toward the end of the pregnancy, Paula proceeded to Frankfurt for delivery, as she did not trust the doctors in Laupheim. Conflicts between Paula and Gretel were fewer after the birth of the little latecomer, Walter, who exhausted all of Paula's attention.



Paula and Edwin Bergmann.

Edwin Bergmann served in the First World War as a soldier on the Western Front. After he returned home unharmed in 1918 the first thing he did was have central heating installed in his house. He never wanted to be as painfully cold as during his service in the trench warfare. In his family-life, as well as in the family business, he took on an unassuming and non-dominant role by virtue of his relaxed and easy nature.

1) Gretel Bergmann: "I was the great Jewish hope." Memoir of an Extraordinary Athlete. (Erinnerungen einer außergewöhnlichen Sportlerin). Published by: House of History, Baden-Württemberg. G. Braun, Karlsruhe 2003. (Haus der Geschichte Baden-Württemberg). All quotes have been taken from this source.

Gretel Bergmann

Gretel Bergmann's athletic talent showed itself at an early age. Already when she was ten she had won her first competitions. At that time, she was by no means committed to high jumping but tried out virtually every type of sport, including gymnastics. However, as she says herself, "My long arms and legs were always in the way".

There are presumably very few photos from the 20s of the family skiing, although all three kids, even Walter, tried their luck at this sport.

Gretel Bergmann's educational career was not quite as successful as her athletic career. At the age of seven, she entered the Jewish elementary school in Laupheim, followed by the Laupheim Latin Junior High School in 1924, and lastly she was compelled to attend the Ulm school for girls in 1930. Not one positive experience is articulated in her memoirs from any of these schools. In fact, her success at sports was the main

source of her self-confidence and as such remained more relevant to her than success in other school subjects. In 1933 she wrote and handed in an essay, necessary for graduation, with satirical emphasis on the uselessness of school-acquired knowledge for real life, which she obviously failed. Yet, Gretel Bergmann's last year of school in Ulm in 1932, ended up being, as she remembers "the most beautiful year of my life": Not only because she graduated from high school and was allowed to move to Ulm rather than commute, but most of all because she met Rudi and fell in love. Rudi was six years older and already working as a graphic artist.

"I had never known such intense feelings and never experienced so much happiness, love and affection...We were so deeply connected that we soon entertained thoughts of marriage for our distant future. The fact that I



was Jewish and he wasn't, was irrelevant. The fact that we were both members of the Ulm Soccer Club strengthened our relationship, and made it even better. The drives home after practice were incredibly romantic..."

At the beginning of 1930 Gretel's uncle who lived in Ulm, Karl Bergmann, had arranged for her membership in the Ulm Soccer Club. This meant she had to forego the Laupheim Gymnastics Club, which was very difficult for her. However, her uncle's promises to get her the best coach and conditions for practice convinced her and she never regretted the transfer. At the end of the track and field season of 1931, Gretel Bergmann took fourth place among the 30 best athletes in Germany; in high jumping she was only 2 centimeters away from first place. In 1932 when she fell to 5th place, it didn't matter so much due to Rudi's love and support and the prospect of finally being finished with school. For the summer semester of 1933 she anticipated beginning her studies at the Berlin Academy for Physical Education.

"How could one year be so wonderful and the next so catastrophic?"

In April 1933, a few days before her 19th birthday, Gretel was dismissed from the Ulm Soccer Club and the Berlin Academy advised her to wait to begin with her studies "until this is all over", clearly misjudging the political reality. Her world fell apart. She continued to see Rudi until it simply became too risky and dangerous for both of them. After one last night together at the summerhouse of a friend, they broke off their relationship:

"We were deeply connected to each other but the insanity of the time separated us...We held each other for what seemed like eternity. We cried. We kissed. We parted. We walked in opposite directions and dared not look back. We never saw each other again. Years later, I heard that Rudi had lost his life as a soldier in Hitler's war."

With no other choice Gretel Bergmann returned to Laupheim in 1933, as did her brother Rudolph who had been in Berlin learning the art of filmmaking at Universal Pictures. This was the worst time in Gretel's life. She was tortured by lovesickness, she saw no prospects for her future, and she was increasingly isolated from the non-Jewish society. In autumn 1933, the decision to emigrate to England, with the goal to resume her athletic career, took shape. Already one year later in England, she was the British champion in high jumping, reaching 1,55 meters (5ft 1 1/32 inches). She had hopes of qualifying for the British Olympic team in 1936, so she could properly give it to the Nazis.

Instead she would be unexpectedly forced to return to Germany. Her father personally delivered the news that the Nazis would punish her

family and the Jewish sports clubs, should she fail to return. Once again Gretel's life was turned completely upside down. Within fifteen months all of her hopes and dreams had been shattered, twice. With fearful apprehension, but without knowing what was coming, she returned to Germany. As it turns out, Hitler was in need of this talented Jewish athlete as a pawn in his political ploy to circumvent a boycott of his Olympic games.

On June 1, 1934, the "Community Newspaper for the Israelite Communities of Württemberg" read:

Die Teilnahme jüdischer Sportler an der Olympiade.

Auf dem Olympischen Kongreß, der in den letzten Tagen in Athen abgehalten wurde, brachte der englische Delegierte Lord Aberdair und der amerikanische Delegierte Garland die Frage der Beteiligung jüdischer Sportler auf der Berliner Olympiade im Jahre 1936 zur Sprache. Die Vertreter Deutschlands, Dr. Lewald und Ritter von Halt erklärten, daß jüdische Sportler bei den Berliner Spielen ebenso gern gesehene Gäste sein werden wie alle anderen. Auch ins deutsche olympische Team würden jüdische Athleten, falls sie die erforderlichen Limite erreichen, eingereiht werden.

Participation of Jewish Athletes at the Olympics.

At the Olympic Congress being held in Athens, the English delegate Lord Aberdair and the American delegate Garland raised the question of intended participation of Jewish athletes at the Olympics in Berlin in 1936. The representatives of Germany, Dr. Lewald and Ritter von Halt, stated that Jewish athletes would be well received at the Berlin games just like everyone else. Even for the German Olympic team, Jewish athletes would be lined up to participate if they meet the necessary requirements.

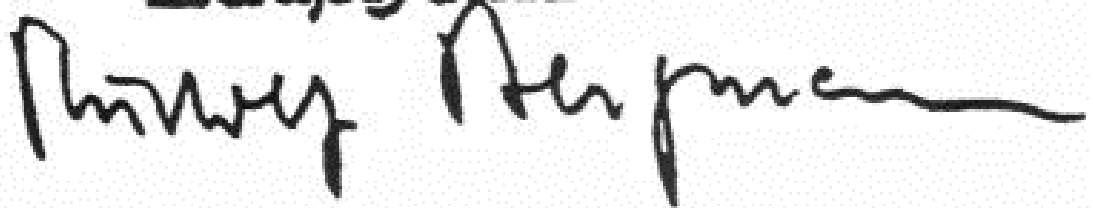
Now that Gretel Bergmann was an official candidate for the Olympics she was invited to various training camps, allowed to take part in competitions and was admitted to a private sports academy in Stuttgart. She was always the only Jewish participant. In 1935 during a visit to the training camp in Ettlingen, she met her future husband, Bruno Lambert. Three months before the Olympics in Berlin in 1936, she exceeded the German high jumping record with 1,60 meters (5ft 2 63/64 inches). Only three women worldwide had achieved this record, so qualification for the Olympics seemed certain – but a day after the US Olympic team started their journey to Germany by ship, and the threat of a boycott was thereby unlikely, she received a disqualification letter dated July 16, 1936. In this letter it was stated that because of her inconsistent and inadequate performance she would not be allowed to compete with the German Olympic team.

Emigration and Escape

Having been so disgracefully cheated out of the chance of a lifetime became the source of profound hatred in the young, ambitious athlete. It was completely clear to Gretel, after spending a recuperative two weeks in absolute solitude, that she would have to get out of Germany as quickly as possible. She urgently pursued her emigration to the USA and on May 10th, 1937 she was able to leave Germany forever. Even so, she did not leave without once more meeting with Bruno Lambert, who wanted to join her in the US after completing his medical studies in Switzerland. On May 9th at the train station in Ulm, where Gretel bid farewell to her family, and where her little brother, Walter, was beside himself, she swore never to return to Germany again.

Laupheim, den 30. Juni 1936.

*Jüdischer Jugendbund
Laupheim*



Gretel's older brother, Rudolph, had been the first to emigrate to the USA in February 1937, three months prior to her own departure. In 1935, preceding his emigration Rudolph had been pressured by Nazi authorities, due to his artistic and creative skills, to become involved in the newly formed "Culture Association of German Jews", in which virtually all of the Jewish people from Laupheim were members. Although he had actually found work in the family business upon his return to Laupheim in 1933, he ended up being active in the "Jewish Youth Association" up until he emigrated. Only associations that had been authorized by the Nazis were allowed. Once authorized, these organizations were required to submit quarterly membership lists with exact accounts of any new sign-ups or withdrawals of membership. These lists made the collection of data and monitoring of the Jewish organizations and their members possible. The signature pictured here from Rudolph Bergmann was taken from such a registration form. On January 1, 1937, shortly before his emigration to the USA, Rudolph formally reported the dissolution of the Jewish Youth Association for lack of members.

Even Edwin and Paula Bergmann got involved in the official, yet shrinking associations of the Jewish community. This is how Edwin became Deputy

Director of the "Reichs Union of Jewish Veterans – Laupheim" from 1935 on, and his wife Paula became Secretary of the Jewish Cultural Association.

In 1938, during the Kristallnacht Edwin Bergmann was arrested and mercilessly humiliated with other Jewish people. On the next day he was brought to a concentration camp in Dachau. Four weeks later when he was released, he was ill and weighed a mere 40 kilos (88 pounds). Just like the others, he and his family wanted nothing more than to get out of Germany but their "exit and permission to leave" papers were still not complete. Additionally, people working with internationally active companies, such as the Bergmanns', had their passports confiscated to prevent escape. Then in February 1939 Edwin Bergmann's passport was returned to him so that he could renew his expiring British work permit. He used this opportunity to flee Germany.

As they set out on February 9th, and so as not to attract attention, Mr. and Mrs. Bergmann only traveled with a small suitcase. First they drove to Herrlingen, where their youngest son, Walter, had been at boarding school since 1934. Although he was running a fever, they collected him for the journey to Cologne. From the train station in Cologne they immediately proceeded to the airport. All three of them were given seats on the flight to London, irrespective of their incomplete documents – Edwin Bergmann never revealed to his children how he managed to make this possible.

Back in Laupheim when Edwin's sister-in-law, Thekla Bergmann, noticed that the Bergmanns were away, she committed a fatal error. She grabbed the telephone and demanded from the Gestapo to know why the Bergmanns had already been given their "exit and permission to leave" papers although she too had been desperately waiting for hers. She had not grasped that the Bergmanns had fled and not been granted official permission to leave. Luckily for the Bergmanns, they were already safely seated on the airplane, or maybe they had already landed in London, so that the immediately initiated manhunt was unsuccessful. It was much easier to get a visa for the USA once they were in England and in April 1940, the whole family was happily reunited.

In the U.S.A.

With the help of his brother, Marco, Edwin was able to find employment (in Haarveredelung). Unfortunately, Edwin Bergmann died in 1947. Rudolph, his eldest son had a successful career in radio and television. He started out as a playwright for comedy and entertainment programming, and eventually advanced to Program Director of CBS. Pretty soon after his arrival in New York, he met Ruth Valfer from Kippenheim who would later become his wife. They had two children who both inherited their father's writing talent. Rudolph died unexpectedly during a vacation in Italy in 1971.

Gretel Bergmann initially tried her hand at diverse jobs in the US to make ends meet, which indeed proved difficult because she had not yet been trained for any particular vocation and had not studied. At the same time, she was trying to get funds together for the necessary affidavit (the Consulate fee was \$2000.00) for her friend Bruno Lambert and earn money so she could pursue her sports career.

*Gretel Bergmann and
Bruno Lambert in New
York, 1938.*



In autumn 1937, she participated in the American track and field championships although she had not been able to properly train for the event. She soon noticed, however, that the American women's track and field skill-level was below that of the European. As such she was able to clinch a one-two victory with, by her standards, a mediocre performance. She was the US champion of high jumping and shot putting in 1937 and 1938. Gretel began to dream of making the US team for the 1940 Olympics, until the outbreak of the Second World War, at which point these dreams were shattered.

Bruno Lambert arrived in the USA after having graduated from medical school in August 1938. Before being allowed to practice medicine in the US, he had had to re-take the medical exams in English.



Walter Bergmann - US-Soldier.

Gretel and Bruno married in autumn 1938. They had two sons, Glenn and Gary. On December 11, 1941, immediately after Germany declared war on the US, Bruno Lambert registered with the Army to help fight against Nazi Germany. As a medical officer for the US Army, he returned to Germany with the liberators. He even returned to his hometown of Andernach. His parents, who had not been able to emigrate, had disappeared. Only one Jewish person, in a mixed marriage, was left in the city. Bruno resolved, as adamantly as Gretel, to never return to Germany again.

The Bergmann brothers, Walter and Rudolph, also served with Americans in the Second World War. They too returned to Germany as US soldiers in 1945. The picture on page 123 is from 1945 and shows Walter at deployment in his "Army Intelligence Corps" uniform.

In 1999 Gretel broke her resolution and visited Germany and her hometown again after 62 years. Cause for her change of mind were the efforts of the then town councilor, Burkhard Volkholz, and an invitation from the National Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996. Gretel was very glad to have risked returning, as it helped her "heal and gain some inner peace", and then she was able to recognize, "that Germany today no longer deserves my hatred".



This picture shows Gretel Bergmann with her son Gary and Mayor Otmar Schick at a press conference held on the occasion of commemorating this nationally recognized event, at the City hall of Laupheim.

Fotos: Bilderkammer Museum Laupheim