

HOFHEIMER, Clara,

Clothing Store, 6 + 7 Mittelsrasse

Translated by: Ursula Volwiler

KARL NEIDLINGER

Clara Hofheimer, neé Bergmann, born September 18, 1882 in Laupheim, died March 20, 1967 in New York, OO Hugo Hofheimer, born February 14, 1882, died June 4, 1928 in Laupheim.

– **David Friedrich "Fritz" Hofheimer**, born June 10, 1908, died May 13, 1999 in Pennsylvania,

– **Helene Hofheimer**, born September 20, 1910, died January 26, 1989 in Florida,

– **Elisabeth Ruth "Liesl" Hofheimer**, born December 21, 1917, died April 2, 1993,

– **Martha "Martl" Hofheimer**, born January 28, 1920, died June 5, 1972 in Kibbuz Hasorea, Israel.

Emigration of the entire family to the United States or Israel between 1933 and 1940.

When R. Hofheimer's "Clothing and Linen Store" advertised its going-out-of-business sale in November 1934, a 125-year-old business tradition came to a close. Following the premature death of her husband Hugo in 1928, Clara Hofheimer managed the business, which had been in the family for four generations, with her brother-in-law Rudolf Hofheimer. The business was one of the oldest in Laupheim at the time and one of the first Jewish establishments to cave in to Nazi pressure.



Business History

The „R“ in the company name refers Raphael Hofheimer (1816 to 1880) whose father David (1780 to 1832) founded the business in 1809. David Hofheimer's gravestone, which can still be found at the Jewish Cemetery, bears his title of "former court merchant to His Royal Highness Duke Heinrich of Württemberg." For this reason, the first roots of the Hofheimer textile store were most likely put down in Wiblingen. The cloister in Wiblingen had become Duke Heinrich's residence after its closure in 1806. It was at his court that David Hofheimer was made "court merchant" in 1809, which in German at the time was called "hoffactor". Since that year he carried the name "Hofheimer" after having previously been called Hirsch. He lived in Laupheim and is also buried here.



*The Hofheimer
Textile Store, ca.
1900*

His son Raphael Hofheimer built the commercial building on Mittelstraße (shown here) in 1856. Since all of Raphael's children died prematurely, the house passed into the hands of David, his brother Samuel's son, in 1880. David finished the attic and added a cross gable toward the street still visible today. David was followed in 1906 by his eldest son Hugo, born 1882, who married Clara Bergmann. They had four children. Fritz, the eldest son, also completed a business apprenticeship. He helped manage the business after the premature death of his father, and would, no doubt, have continued it into the fifth generation. As early as 1933 he realized, however, that Jews would have no future in Nazi Germany. After closing the business on January 1, 1935, the widowed Clara Hofheimer rented out the business space and later the residential part as well, and in March of 1939 sold both to businessman Karl Doss, who was renting the property at the time.

R. HOFHEIMER & Co.
 MANUFAKTUR- UND MODEWAREN
 FERNRUF Nr. 31 / POSTSCHECKKONTO 5640 STUTTGART / FERNRUF Nr. 31

Fol. LAUPHEIM den 27. August 1928.

RECHNUNG

für *4. d. Frau Hedwig Heimer*, hier.

	G. <i>Arch. Bernhards Heimer</i>	- 90		5 40
	G. " " <i>Joh</i>	1 10		8 10
		<i>de</i>		<u>13 50</u>
	Betrag empfangen			
	Fonds am 30. Aug. 1928			
	<i>R. Hofheimer & Co</i>			
	<i>Ich gebe für Ihren Diener!</i>			

Today, direct descendants of the Hofheimer family can only be found in Israel, but no contact has been established. There are, however, reliable sources which provide a vivid image of the living conditions in the 1920s and 1930s thanks to, above all, the written records maintained by Clara Hofheimer's nephews, John H. Bergmann and Ernest Bergman.

The Family in the 1920s

Judging by the age of the children, we might conclude that the Hofheimer family picture was taken in 1921 or 1922. Clara and Hugo Hofheimer are standing in the center of the picture, the youngest daughter Martha is sitting on the table in front of them, Elisabeth and Fritz are standing to her right, and Helene is sitting all the way on the right. All the way on the left is Rudolf Hofheimer, Hugo's bachelor brother, who was also employed in the business. The older gentleman on the right is most likely Wilhelm Bergmann, the youngest brother of the business managers.



In 1923 or 1924, the first Nazi propaganda event with its awful inflammatory speeches produced quite a stir. Hugo Hofheimer organized a town hall meeting at the hotel Raben (Raven), with special invitations sent to all the town dignitaries. John Bergman describes Hugo Hofheimer as a "fearless warrior type and eloquent speaker", one who "always displayed the black, red, and gold flag" (translator's note: the colors of the German flag). For fifteen years he had been a religious leader in the Jewish community and for some time also the director of the Commerce Bank in Laupheim. Hugo Hofheimer organized the event to calm down the upset townspeople and to counteract emerging signs of antisemitism. Thanks to Friedrich Trefz, the Protestant pastor, the family would never forget this event. He left the event making the disapproving comment: "How could I ever get involved in something like this!" In the 1920s, so Bergmann recalls, the young Nazi party recruited its members mainly

from the town's small Protestant community, and, according to Bergmann, even its pastor seemed to not entirely reject the Nazi party's ideas.



Cousin Hans (John H.) Bergmann's reminiscences convey a beautiful atmospheric image of a carefree childhood in the Laupheim of the 1920s. Shown here is the rear of the Hofheimer property facing Rabenstraße, today's location of the Doss business (now WM-City-Mode). It was the adventure playground of the extended Bergmann family. Only a small part of the barn described in the text below remains in the photo from the 1950s: the building on the right with a makeshift shed roof.

"As most Jews engaged in some sort of trade that involved travel, barn and stable were needed for horses, coaches, for storing hay, wood, and coals. The Hofheimer family was no exception. They sold textiles from their store to the farmers and had to deliver the merchandise out in the country. Their barn must have been designed by an architect over many sleepless nights. For us children it was a castle. Stairs led up and down to false floors, nooks, and mysterious rooms where we could hide and nobody would find us. In the courtyard of the Hofheimer property we founded a sports club called "Frischauf" (translator's note: a name used by many sports clubs meaning "Let's go") and staged competitions. Whatever we needed to run our sports club was created out of materials found in the Hofheimer barn, as we had no money at our disposal."

The Four Hofheimer Children

Toward the end of the 1920s, son Fritz, like his father, was known to support the ideals of the Weimar Republic and to reject those of rising right-wing radicalism. He was a member of the "Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold" (the Black, Red, Gold Banner of the Reich), an organization of democracy-minded groups associated with the Social Democratic Party, which was determined to defend the republic and attempted to confront right-wing organizations, such as Stahlhelm (Steel Helmet) and SA. He emigrated to the United States in 1937, and in 1939 married Rosl Dreifuss, who hailed from Buchau. He first trained as a waiter and later successfully ran his own business dealing in abrasive products. He died in Media/Pennsylvania in 1999 at a highly advanced age.



Martl, Liesl, Helene and Fritz Hofheimer, 1932.

In the 1920s, all four Hofheimer children attended secondary and grammar schools in Laupheim. Helene Hofheimer, the eldest daughter, completed secondary school in 1926, which was the occasion for the class picture showing her seated on the left in the front, her arm slipped through that of her classmate, Lotte Beck. According to oral reports, three of the four Hofheimer children performed at the top of their individual classes. Martha, called "Martl", was always presented by her Latin teacher as a shining role model for her less Latin-inclined cousin Ernst Bergmann,

and she often tutored her cousin in Latin. Very few boys at the grammar and secondary school managed to live up to teacher Zepf's rigorous standards of Latin. Student Fritz Hofheimer was that kind of rare exception!



After finishing secondary school, Helene went on to complete her baccalaureate in Ulm. She dreamed of becoming an archeologist, but the events in Germany at the time no longer allowed for the realization of this goal. The first of the four Hofheimer children, she emigrated to Amsterdam as early as November of 1933, and in July of 1934 to the United States. There she worked in the fashion store of her uncle Rudolf

Hofheimer in St. Joseph, Missouri. He had emigrated to the United States in 1907. Later, she had various office jobs, including one with Carl Laemmle Universal Motion Pictures in New York. Even in the United States she was not able to realize her childhood dream of becoming an archeologist.

After completing secondary school, Liesl Hofheimer, born 1917, went to Geneva, Switzerland, where she studied to be a neonatal nurse. In 1938 she emigrated to the United States, where she married Ralph Ross, a textile engineer, in 1941. Martha, the youngest sibling, was not able to finish school in Laupheim. She made the most radical decision based on the continuously deteriorating living conditions for Jews in Germany, and turned toward Zionism. Instead of being a model student and cramming Latin vocabulary, she completed a short agricultural training course in Wolfratshausen, near Munich, in order to go to Palestine illegally with Youth Aliyah in 1937, when she was only 16. She lived in the newly founded Kibbuz Hasorea near Haifa, where she later started a family and had two daughters. Her older siblings in the United States never had children.

January 30, 1933: Hitler Seizes Power – Closing of the Business in 1934

On April 1, 1933, two SA guards positioned themselves in front of all Jewish businesses, including the Hofheimer business, in order to stop customers from entering the store. The shorter one of the two Nazis shown, whose name is not known, would have had every reason to be ashamed of this action: He came from a poor family in Laupheim and, just a few years prior during the Great Depression, had been allowed to enjoy free meals at the Hofheimer household for months, as there was nothing to eat at his own home.



Now, there he stood in his SA uniform in front of the store of his former benefactors on Mittelstraße, trying to boycott it. Barely three weeks later, on April 20, 1933, the name Mittelstraße was changed into Adolf-Hitler-Straße. Fritz Hofheimer and his cousin Hans Bergmann had made a special trip to Ulm on March 21, 1933, the Day of Potsdam, to participate in the inauguration of a new government, an event celebrated even there. There was a large military parade at Münsterplatz (translator's note: the large square in front of the cathedral), and a solemn religious service of giving thanks inside the cathedral. However, the two men did not catch

much of the parade, apart from a lot of shouts of "Sieg Heil!", Nazi songs and loud commands, as "thousands of enthusiastic and blissful inhabitants of Ulm completely blocked our view." It was only afterward that they realized that this visit had not been without risk given that they were Jews, and they asked themselves whether it had been just curiosity or even nationalism that had led them to go to Ulm.

When they were back in Laupheim they realized that there was no future in Germany for Jews under this government. Personal safety, safeguarding one's livelihood and preparing to emigrate suddenly became a top priority when making decisions.

The younger generation accepted this insight more willingly than the older ones who were hoping that all this was just a bad dream which would pass. In the case of the Hofheimer family, the decision to give up was definitely made particularly early. Influencing this decision were declining sales figures. Actual evidence of this development, however, exists only about D. M. Einstein, the main Hofheimer competitor. In 1934, the D.M. Einstein enterprise paid only about half of its former business tax to the city. In 1935, it was only one sixth of the tax paid in 1933.

It appears that the decision to give up the business despite its long-standing tradition must have been made early in 1934. The clearance sale began on a Saturday morning, November 3, 1934. The entire family, supported by many friends, served as sales staff in order to meet the expected onslaught of customers. Indeed, it surpassed all expectations: Not long after the store opened it was crowded to such an extent that the doors had to be closed for safety reasons and in order to keep track of customers. The next throng of people, already waiting in front of the store, was permitted to enter an hour later. This scenario repeated itself all day long until the shelves were largely empty.

R. Hofheimer & Co., Laupheim

Modewaren
Aussteuerartikel
Manufakturwaren

Bett- und Tischwäsche
Vorhangstoffe
Damenstrümpfe u. Herrenwäsche

hält

Total-Ausverkauf

Wir haben uns entschlossen, unser seit 125 Jahren bestehendes **Modewaren- u. Aussteuergeschäft** aufzugeben und beginnen daher ab

Samstag, 3. Novbr. 1934 mit dem
Total-Ausverkauf unseres gesamten Warenlagers

Sie finden neben vielen anderen Artikeln in unserem Ausverkauf:

Rein wollene Kleider- und Mantelstoffe
in hervorragenden Qualitäten und größter Auswahl

Hochwertige Qualitäten sämtlicher Aussteuerartikel

1a Halbleinen	1a Bettdamaste	1a Bettbarchente
1a Bettfedern	1a Betttücher	1a Woll- u. Kamelhaardecken

zu billigsten Preisen!

Unser Total-Ausverkauf gibt Ihnen Gelegenheit,
unsere seit Jahrzehnten bewährten, bekannt
guten Qualitäten günstig einzukaufen!

Beginn: Samstag, 3. November 1934.

Verkauf gegen bar.

R. Hofheimer & Co.

Laupheim

Adolf-Hitler-Straße 7 Fernruf Nr. 331.



Sale of the House 1939 – Restitution 1951

Karl Doss, a decorator hailing from Zwickau, had been hired by the D. M. Einstein business in 1939, where he met Theresia Allgaier, a seamstress employed there as well. They later married and rented the vacant Hofheimer business space for four years on January 1, 1935 with a salesman from Dietenheim. There, they continued to offer an assortment of textile products similar to the Hofheimer business .



Following the pogrom night of 1938, the pressure exerted on the remaining Jewish homeowners continued to increase such that Clara Hofheimer sold the entire property to her renters in March of 1939 at a price slightly above the assessed value. The last one of her family still remaining in Laupheim, she now moved in with Minnele Einstein on 49 Kapellenstraße. Other members of the Jewish community in Laupheim, who had lost their dwellings, also lived with Minnele Einstein at that time. All were waiting desperately for some kind of visa, some opportunity to get out of Germany. In September of 1939, Clara Hofheimer visited her sisters Emma and Frieda in Winterthur in Switzerland. Upon her return to Laupheim, she found herself yet again in new quarters: the house located on 49 Kapellenstraße was no longer available, and all its inhabitants had been forced to move to the former residence of the rabbi, where 40

mostly elderly people were tightly packed together. In March of 1940, Clara Hofheimer managed at the very last minute to get to the United States via Winterthur and Genoa, shortly before even the Italian ports were closed as a result of Italy taking up arms against France.

After the war, sales transactions concluded under duress were declared invalid and the respective properties were returned to their rightful owners or heirs, a process called restitution. In exchange for paying an appropriate higher price, however, the new owners were generally able to remain in possession of their properties, since none of the former owners returned to Laupheim. Thus, the Hofheimer/Doss business was sold by the Hofheimer family to Karl Doss for a second time in September of 1951. Doss had returned in 1949 after having been a prisoner of war. He soon sold the former business property toward Mittelstraße to Carl Obstbaum, most likely to be able to finance the restitution payment, and in the mid-50s built a new residence and business in the rear part of the property toward Rabenstrasse.

In the United States

According to John Bergmann, his family was “in some respects much better off than other refugee families in the United States. All family members had been able to get out of Laupheim when there was still time, except for Clara Hofheimer, who in 1949 arrived with nothing but the clothes on her back. When the older generation arrived, the children had already grown roots. They were employed and spoke English reasonably well. Nobody was a millionaire or in the process of becoming one, but they were all able to offer their parents a comfortable home as well as support and consolation during the difficult period of acclimatization.”

After emigrating, three of the four Hofheimer children changed their first names. David Friedrich, called Fritz, became Frederic David, and Helene



was Americanized into Helen. Elisabeth was the only one who didn't have to change much. Martha, called by the Swabian abbreviation “Martl”, was a devoted Zionist. She grew roots in Israel and adopted the biblical name Tamar, although her original name was of biblical origin as well. Most likely she wanted to make a point of consciously leaving behind her German identity and starting completely anew in Israel. None of them has ever stepped on German soil again.

Ca. 1980: Helen Hofheimer (left) visiting her sister Tamar Speier (Martl) in Kibbuz Hasorea (Israel).

The child is Tamar's grand-daughter. Helen spent her golden years in Florida. She owes her Americanized first name to her grandmother Helene Hofheimer, née Einstein.

Sources:

Adressbuch (address book) 1925: company logo. Archive Theo Miller: Photograph ca. 1900.

Archive Günter Raff: SA-Boycott, April 1, 1933.

Archive Ernst Schäll: Family Picture 1921 – Helen and Tamar, ca. 1980 – the four Hofheimer children. Museum files: Invoice Hedwig Steiner 1928 – advertisement of going-out-of-business sale.

Traudl Ganser, neé Doss: Clothing Store Doss, ca. 1950 – rear view from Rabenstraße. Josef Braun: Alt-Laupheimer Bilderbogen I, pg. 193 : graduation 1926 of secondary and grammar school students.

Literature:

1. John H. Bergmann: The Bergmanns from Laupheim. A Family Chronicle, 1983.
2. Nathanja Hüttenmeister: Der jüdische Friedhof (The Jewish Cemetery), Laupheim, 1998.

Time period witnesses:

Ernest Bergman, Traudl Ganser.