

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 401 - 408

OBERNAUER, Hermann,

tabacconist, 56 Kapellenstrasse

Translated by: Audrey Cope, nee Obernauer

KARL NEIDLINGER

Hermann Obernauer, born on 29. Dec. 1895 in Laupheim, OO
Olga Neumann, born on 16. Feb. 1903 in Bamberg,

– **Paul Jürgen Obernauer**, born on 22. Mar. 1930 in
Laupheim,

– **Rolf Arno Obernauer**, born on 22. Jan. 1932 in Laupheim.
Emigration of the entire family to the USA on 22. October 1939

In 1895, Hermann Obernauer was born to Israel Obernauer and his wife Paulina (née Friedberger). Hermann was the youngest of their five children. The four sons, Hugo, Max, Wilhelm and Hermann all served as German soldiers during the First World War. Only three sons returned with numerous military distinctions. The oldest son Hugo was killed in battle in 1915 in Galicia. The newspaper announcement on this page is from the "Laupheimer Verkündiger" and invites the public to the memorial service both for him and his fallen comrade Fritz Kaufmann. The Obernauer family is one of the founding members of the Laupheim Jewish community and can trace its roots back to the middle of the 18th century.

The family's economic basis was the wholesale cigar business, managed by two of the Obernauer brothers, Hermann and Wilhelm. The name of the firm was Obernauer Brothers. It is thought that their father Israel was also active in the branch. Israel, like his sons, had served as a soldier in the Kaiser's German army, as the passport photo taken in 1880 in Strassburg on this page illustrates. He returned in 1901 from a business trip with typhoid fever from which he died later that year. His son Hermann had more luck on his business trips. It was on such an occasion in to Bamberg in the summer of 1928, that he met his future wife Olga Neumann. Hermann and Olga were married in November of that year. The marriage produced two sons, Paul Jürgen in 1930 and Rolf Arno in 1932.

In 1987, Paul Obernauer's daughter Holly Obernauer from New York interviewed her father and transcribed his memories of his Laupheim years word for word. The museum of Laupheim has a copy of this transcription which serves as an excellent source of information about the Obernauer family. The 59 page text describes their situation in the 1930's and many parts of this text are cited here.

Trauer Gottesdienst
für die früh Vollendeten, im Kampfe für's Vater-
land Gefallenen
Hugo Obernauer,
Ersatz-Reservisten
und
Fritz Kaufmann,
Kriegsfreiwilligen,
verbunden mit Kriegsandaht
nächsten Sonntag 18. d. M. Nachm. 6 Uhr
in unserer Synagoge.
Der Gemeinderabbiner :
Dr. Treitel.

The Obernauer Brothers Company

The worldwide economic crisis of the 1930's didn't seem to negatively impact the flourishing cigar wholesale company of Wilhelm and Hermann Obernauer all that much. The Obernauer family seemed to thrive economically at least during these years. Hermann was responsible for field work and therefore travelled most of the week. He even had a car and chauffeur employed in the 1920s for his travelling work. His brother ran the office. In later years, however, Hermann used the train to travel all through Germany on business.

"Things weren't as hectic as today." The cigars, which were first and foremost supplied to the large hotels came from all over the world, yet there was also a house brand, Obernauer Cigars"

In the two-storey house on Kapellen Stasse 56 (today known as Gasthaus Kappelenzipfel) housed Hermann Obernauer and his immediate family lived on the first floor and on the ground floor, Paul's widowed aunt, thus Hermann's sister, Theresa Eppstein (née Obernauer) and her daughters Trude and Ilse. In the attic floor, there was a room for the nanny that the family always had. In the backyard of the house was a large orchard. The business premises were situated on firm operated out of the top floor of the Jewish school during the 1920s, as, at the time there wasn't a need for the entire school to be utilized.



Brief Characteristics of the Obernauer Family.

Employing a nanny and a maid allowed Olga Obernauer the freedom to participate in many cultural activities in the community, at least during the week while Hermann was travelling on business. At first Olga experienced a bit of cultural shock when, due to her marriage, she ended up in a small town like Laupheim after the more cosmopolitan Bamberg. Olga particularly loved the theatre and would have happily become an actress. This love later helped in directing religious plays for the children, which were performed, for example, at Hanuka. Olga and Hermann were avid opera fans and attended performances quite often in Ulm, Stuttgart or Nürnberg. The first gramophone in Laupheim was located in the Hermann Obernauer household. Rabbi Treitel was a frequent guest of the Obernauers, probably because of the many books as well as original Caruso albums. Both parents sang in the Synagogue choir. Hermann could read and translate Hebrew fluently. His Hebrew was almost as good as his German, which at that time was an anomaly. Their son Paul remembers that their house *"was overflowing with Hebrew books"* The active participation in the religious life of the community was very important to the family. Friday evenings before sunset, the family would pick Hermann up at the train station and they would all go together to the synagogue. Saturday, also Shabbat, they also regularly attended.



The Obernauer house on Kapellen Strasse 56 in the 1940s

(Photo: from the Archive of Theo Miller)

As a child, Paul owned his own bicycle which was an exception at that time. He would ride all around the region, far beyond the borders of Laupheim. He remarked in his memoirs " *I visited the countryside. I loved the countryside in Laupheim.*"

A frequent destination point for his bicycle excursions was the Laupheim West Train Station where he could watch and admire the trains going by. His mother was also a big nature lover and took the children on long walks during which she taught and sang to them "all those characteristic German songs about the heathland, the meadows and the forest". An excursion with Paul's uncle Wilhem in 1935 left a particularly strong impression on the young boy: they drove on the newly built and still very empty Autobahn from Ulm to Stuttgart.



The fruit and vegetable garden behind the house according to Paul's recollection (right on the above photo) measured about a hectare (2 1/3 acres) and a large part of their everyday life revolved around discussion of between his mother and his Aunt Theresa about gardening.

"we were self sufficient when it came to fruit. There were ginat apple and pear harvests and currants. In the vegetable garden, there were potatoes, radishes, beans, carrots and even tomatoes."

Developments after 1933

In Paul Obernauer's memory, the Jews of Laupheim lived a pleasant life and there wasn't any particular anti-Semitism. This only developed due to Nazi agitation. He also believed that in contrast to other countries, the anti-Semitism in Germany was part of the government policy. One of the first anti-Semitic laws that directly affected the family was the law in 1935 that forced the Obernauers to part with their nanny Gertrude, who Paul adored. No "Aryan" household help under the age of 50 was allowed any longer in Jewish homes. Fear and terror were aroused above all by the SA troops in their brown uniforms who were particularly fond of marching through the Kapellen Strasse and bellowing their anti-Semitic songs.

"The most important Nazi group was the SA; they had the brown uniforms. They were positioned along the street. There were often parades through the city, especially at night, with flags and blazing torches. I also saw a small tanks moving through the streets. A speciality of the German army is the marching song. One of the SA-songs ran as follows: 'When the Jewish blood sprays off the knife, then everything is good'. They cherished singing extremely anti-Semitic songs."

Paul attended the Jewish school in Laupheim from 1936; however there was by now only one single class with 12 pupils composed of all grades. The pupils were taught by their teacher Heinz Säbel. In 1938 the school was completely closed and was demolished in the pogrom of the Kristall Nacht (the Night of Broken Glass). Until their emigration to the USA, Paul attended Jewish schools in Ulm and Esslingen. During this time, the Obernauer family lived off the proceeds of the life insurance policy of Herman, which he had been forced to cash in because as a Jew he was no longer permitted to operate his business.



The pogrom night of November 9th 1938 known as Kristallnacht in Kapellen Strasse 56

" My memories of 1938, at 2 or 3 in the morning: heavy banging on the doors. Loud knocks, fierce banging, a lot of noise. Finally they broke the front door down. They didn't even have time to wait for anybody to open it. My aunt lived downstairs, she was all scared. The Nazis came upstairs and they wanted to arrest my father. My father was asleep in the bedroom. They pulled him out. And my mother told me one of them actually had a revolver in his hand. They just about let my father put on his pants and his jacket before they took him up to the municipal hall, And my aunt was struggling with one of the Nazis. She was tearing at his coat, saying "what are you doing," and so forth. We didn't know what was going on. The next morning my mother, my aunt and my other aunt, Tante Cilly, went up to the municipal hall. Cilly's husband had also been arrested, his name was Max Obernauer, my father's brother. And I remember my mother telling me she went up to the municipal hall with a bunch of military medals in her hand saying "what are you doing, this man was a veteran of the Imperial German army in WWI. He got these decorations." (...) -The funny part of it was if you were not at home that night you were not arrested the following day. And then they were transported to Dachau, the concentration camp, just for being Jews, for no other reason,"

Emigration

The decision to emigrate was taken only in the beginning of 1938 and didn't materialise until the end of 1939. It was more like a flight than an organized emigration. Hermann Obernauer was arrested and abused by the SA and then dragged to Dachau Concentration Camp on the Pogrom night in 1938 along with 15 other fathers from Jewish families. As one of the last concentration camp prisoners from Laupheim he was released on February 4th, 1939, after he like the others had pledged that he would seek permission to emigrate from Germany.

Immediately after his release from Dachau, the family tried for a second time to immigrate to the USA. On the first attempt to get an entry visa to the USA before Hermann's imprisonment in Dachau, he had failed the health exam at the US consulate in Stuttgart. The reason at that time had been a hernia, which. They also had the necessary affidavits that the US consulate required from immigrants. A relative of his mother named Baum and Carl Laemmle had provided those life saving papers. So in the summer of 1939 the family successfully underwent another test at the US Consulate in Stuttgart for the immigration visas which were only valid until November. In September 1939, the family was to leave via Le Havre in France, but September 1st Germany invaded Poland and since September 3rd, England and France were at war with Germany, which meant that the beginning of WWII had again made emigration from Germany impossible.

This development led Hermann Obernauer to a type of panicky knee-jerk reaction. Although the emigration was not yet imminent, Hermann told his family to just take a suitcase with the essentials and leave everything else behind in order to catch a train to France. On the way to the station they met Hermann's brother Max, who saw the absurdity of their plan quite clearly and convinced Hermann that he would not make it over the German-French border, so Hermann reluctantly turned back. After desperate inquiries all over Germany, they finally discovered a possibility of leaving Germany via Italy. An organization in Stuttgart was able to get the family tickets for the SS Volcania, which was to leave Genoa for New York on October 23rd, 1939.

Because their departure was delayed time and again, the family lived as renters for half a year in their own former home, the home which they had been forced to sell for much less than it was worth. The sale of the house had become inevitable in early 1939, as the family had no other income. Even the little money that they had left over from the sale, they were not allowed to bring with them when they finally left Laupheim for good on October 21st, 1939. With three dollars, fifteen Lira in their pockets, three big suitcases and forty marks, which they hid so well that German customs didn't find them, they made their journey over Stuttgart, Munich,

Milan for Genoa, where their ship left on schedule for a ten-day voyage to New York. At the train station in Munich, they said a last farewell to the parents of Olga Obernauer, who had come from Bamberg. They, like many other relatives, were not able to emigrate and within a short time became victims of the genocide.

New Beginning in the USA

The Ship "Volcania" aboard which there were predominately Jewish refugees, left Genoa harbour on the 23rd of October 1939. With this, the Obernauer family had only just managed to use their visas for the USA which had only one more month validity until the end of November. After ten days at sea, they arrived safely in New York Harbour on November 4th, 1939, where Paul's cousin Trudy Eppstein was waiting for them. Their family in New York and a Jewish aid organization called "The National Refugee Service" organized a place to stay and later supported them in the search for work.

After Christmas, the two boys had to go to school. Most of their classmates were African-Americans as were their teachers. Paul learned English easily while Ralph had greater difficulty. At Paul's Bar Mitzvah in the winter of 1943, he received a chemistry set as a gift, which stimulated his interest in this field. He later studied pharmacy which eventually led to him opening his own pharmacy in Jersey City, New Jersey. He married Phyllis Miller of Brooklyn in 1959 and they went on to have three daughters. The oldest daughter, Audrey Obernauer-Cope, who was born in 1960, supplied the photos for this piece.

After completing his schooling, Ralph Obernauer served in the US Army and was stationed to Europe in 1953. He used this chance to visit his native city that same year. "It hardly has changed at all, it looks exactly like before", he reported on his return. A woman from Laupheim recognized him and spoke with him, unfortunately not much more from this visit has been documented.

Zu Besuch in der Geburtsstadt ihres Vaters

So oft und so viel hat ihr Vater von seiner Geburtsstadt Laupheim erzählt, daß die 17jährige Audrey Obernauer die kleine oberschwäbische Stadt kennenlernen wollte. Verstärkt wurde der Wunsch noch, als sie Bernadette Mayer in den USA begegnete. Diese berichtete ihr bei einem Amerika-Aufenthalt, daß sie „zwischen München und Stuttgart“ zu Hause sei und war nicht wenig erstaunt, als ihre Heimatstadt Laupheim der jungen Amerikanerin sehr vertraut war. Das war vor einem Jahr. Audrey Obernauer arbeitete neben dem Schulbesuch fünf Monate in einem Altenheim und verdiente sich so das Reise-geld für die Reise über den großen Teich.

Audrey Obernauer ist in Chester im Staate New Jersey zu Hause, in den Vereinigten Staaten, wohin ihr Großvater 1939 auswanderte und mit ihm der damals zehnjährige Paul, ihr Vater. Die Familie Obernauer lebte bis zu ihrem Exodus in der Kapellenstraße 56. Obwohl es fast 40 Jahre her sind, seitdem sie Laupheim verlassen haben, erinnert sich Paul Obernauer noch sehr gut an die Stadt, in der er geboren wurde, so gut, daß er seiner Tochter sogar einen kleinen Stadtplan zeichnete und mit auf die Reise gab. In ihrem Gepäck hat Audrey Obernauer auch ein kleines Büchlein mit Laupheimer Namen und Adressen. Im Auftrag ihres Vaters will sie Besuche abstaten, doch mußte sie gleich bei ihrer ersten Visite erfahren, daß die Adressaten verstorben sind. Erkundigungen soll die 17jährige Audrey, die sehr gut deutsch spricht und nur

mit dem Schwäbisch etwas Schwierigkeiten hat, über jüdische Familien einziehen, die früher wie die Obernauers in Laupheim lebten. In diesen Bemühungen wird sie von Hans Schantel, dem Obersulmetinger Ortsvorsteher unterstützt.

Als sie wußte, daß sich ihr Traum von der Reise nach Laupheim verwirklichen läßt, hat sie an die Stadtverwaltung, an Alfred Jerg geschrieben. So konnte die junge Amerikanerin auch



betreut werden. Mitte dieser Woche traf sie, nach kurzem Aufenthalt in Stuttgart, in Laupheim ein. Am Donnerstag spielte dann Rita Müller, Inspektoren-Anwärterin bei der Stadt Laupheim, Fremdenführerin. Sie zeigte Audrey Obernauer das Städtchen, in dem ihr Vater die ersten zehn Jahre seines Lebens verbracht hat. Von den Veränderungen in der Stadt sollen Fotos berichten, die sie aufgenommen oder gekauft hat, um ihrem Vater aufzuzeigen, wie Laupheim sich fortentwickelt hat. Ein wenig enttäuscht war die 17jährige vom Zustand des vormals Obernauer'schen Hauses. Es soll abgerissen werden.

Mit Interesse ist die Amerikanerin, die im September ein Sprachenstudium an der Universität Georgetown in Washington beginnt, auch dem Judenfriedhof begegnet, den Kirchen Laupheims, und dem Bihlafinger Gotteshaus, dem Schloß und nicht zuletzt dem angrenzenden Park.

Auf dem Programm Audrey Obernauers stand gestern eine Schwarzwald-Fahrt, zu der sie die Stadt einlud. Am heutigen Samstag will sie mit der Familie Mayer an den Bodensee fahren, und am Sonntag startet sie mit Rita Müller, mit der sie rasch Freundschaft geschlossen hat, zu einem Camping-Aufenthalt nach Italien. Nach einer kurzen Stippvisite nochmals in Laupheim wird sie dann noch die Landeshauptstadt erkunden.

Nur drei Wochen bleiben ihr für ihren Aufenthalt in Europa. Mit vielen Eindrücken wird sie dann zurückkehren, um ihrem Daddy von Laupheim zu berichten. Vielleicht verwirklicht er dann seinen Wunsch, seine Geburtsstadt wiederzusehen. Er ist Apotheker und sehr beschäftigt, wie seine Tochter sagt. Trotzdem hat er Laupheim nicht vergessen. Mögen die Eindrücke für die junge Audrey genauso bleibend sein.

(wtj)

Foto: Audrey Obernauer-Cope

1) Quelle: Autobiografie Paul Obernauers, englisch, maschinenschriftlich, 59 Seiten. Die Zitate in den Kästchen sind eigene Übersetzungen daraus (K.N.). Die Fotos zu diesem Kapitel stellte Audrey Obernauer-Cope, eine in Kanada lebende Tochter Paul Obernauers, freundlicherweise zur Verfügung.