

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 71 - 82

BERGMANN, Max

13 Schiller Street

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Max Bergmann (December 9, 1879 – August 1, 1952)
married Henriette ("Henny") Stern (February 21, 1886 – January 8, 1974) their children

John Hans (October 28, 1908 – November 27, 1996)

Gertrud ("Trudl") (November 5, 1911 – December 5, 2002)

The entire family immigrated to the USA between 1934 and 1939.



The early years

Max Bergmann was Josef Bergmann's fourth child and second eldest son. After having finished the public Jewish elementary school, he attended Laupheim's *Lateinschule* (secondary school), but left after only four years. This early departure at the age of 14 was common for those who wanted to learn a trade. Max trained to be a barber and his father taught him how to bleach and dye hair, which was the line of work of the family company *Bergmann, J. & Co* (for further information, see separate article: Neidlinger, "Bergmann, J., & Co."). Like his brothers, he

then went abroad. However, his stay in the USA was not very successful, so he came back to Laupheim in 1897 "a little richer in wisdom and experience, but otherwise as poor as he left" (Bergmann 34). Isaac David Einstein, a cousin on his mother's side and a successful textile businessman in New York, had promised to help Max with his new start, but never did. Therefore, Max, son of a businessman, had to be content with odd jobs at the bowling alley or as a barber's assistant. Once Max had saved enough money for his return, in steorage, he traveled back to Laupheim. His subsequent journeys through Germany proved more successful: he was able to establish contacts with different chemical companies such as *Degussa* or what would later become *IG Farben* ("Syndicate of Dyestuff-Industry Corporations"). Through the years, he kept in touch with these contacts, which ended up being very important for his business.



In 1908 Max married Henriette ("Henny") Stern from Hattingen, Westphalia, and entered the management of *Bergmann, J. & Co* as an equal shareholder. The Stern family was a long established Jewish family from Westphalia, where Henny's parents owned a men's clothing store in Hattingen. Max and Henny had met five years earlier at the wedding of Flora Bergmann (Max's older sister) and Samuel ("Uhl") Stern. Despite the physical distance, the relations with their Westphalian relatives were well maintained; and each summer between 1909 and 1914 Henny spent a few weeks with her children, Hans and Trudl, at her parents' place in Hattingen.

Henriette ("Henny") Bergmann, née Stern

When the war broke out in 1914, Max was not immediately drafted, as he belonged to the "untrained reserves", which means he had not served in the military yet.

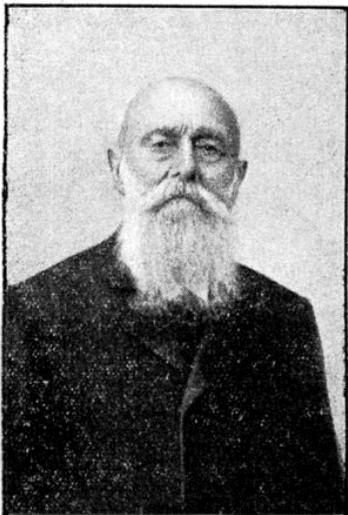
However, he was eventually drafted in 1915 and spent most of the next few years in the field artillery, on the Russian front. In 1918 he returned home unharmed and in 1919 the family could finally move into their own home on 13 Schiller Street. Since there was not much space around the house, which had been bought and renovated during the First World War, Max Bergmann also bought a garden lot on the opposite side of the street. He must have made a true masterpiece of the flower garden, for many sources, and eyewitnesses to history mention it particularly for its diverse and colorful dahlia splendor.

Suche per sofort ein
Mädchen,
 welches gut bürgerlich
 kochen kann, außerdem ein
 ordentliches
Zimmer-Mädchen.
 Frau
Senny Bergmann
 Schillerstraße 13.

Max Bergmann as a local politician

What made Max Bergmann stand out from his brothers and cousins was his great social and political commitment to Laupheim. He devoted his life to the town for almost 30 years and would have never stopped had it not been for the Nazis, who forcefully and ultimately put an end to it all in March 1934. Maybe it was the negative experience in America that made him become particularly involved in his home town soon after his return; or maybe it was the fact that he had maintained equally good contact with both Christians and Jews since his early youth; or maybe even the fact that he had learned a skilled trade instead of a commercial profession, which had made him more down-to-earth.

Die Vorstände des Vereins



Albert Magg, 1879—1912



Max Bergmann, seit 1912

Another characteristic of Max Bergmann was his passion for nature, as his son Hans mentions in the Bergmann family chronicle, from which most of the information in this article has been taken. It is no surprise his first social involvement was in the *Verschoenerungsverein Laupheim* (association for the beautification of Laupheim, VVL), which he joined shortly after the turn of the century.

Until then, the association had worked rather insularly and with moderate success. Max Bergmann was elected secretary of the VVL in 1909 and three years later president, a position he held until November 1933. Starting in 1913, trees were planted along the streets of Laupheim and in the 1920s the *Hoehenanlage* was created, a city park at the city's highest point (VVL, *Verkehrs- und Verschönerungsverein e.V.*); Laupheim's citizens replaced the rather bureaucratic and abstract sounding term *Hoehenanlage* by the beautiful, but now forgotten name *Max'a Gaarta*, which means "Max's garden" in Swabian dialect. All these projects were financed by various campaigns of the VVL and its president. During the war, when Max served on the Russian front, the then local administrator Schick wrote him a letter, explaining how much the city missed him and how he had to hurry, win the war and come back as soon as possible.

Since he had not been drafted yet, Max Bergmann was still able to hold the annual meeting of the VVL on January 25, 1915, which took place in the *Schluessel*, a restaurant in Laupheim. The *Laupheimer Verkuendiger*, a local newspaper, published Max's speech verbatim from this event. The main extracts quoted here document the patriotic and nationalistic mindset of that year, which of course also infected the German Jews:

"Seventy-five of our members are fighting a war instigated by a world of enemies against our beloved fatherland. They followed the call to arms with courage and patriotic fire in order to defend our homes against the enemy's criminal rage. Thanks to God's help and the heroic courage of our troops, the war is fought in hostile lands in the East and in the West and our fatherland is protected from any invasion. Although the work is not yet fully done, we believe we can already say that this, the biggest war of all, will have a fortunate outcome for us and our children and we will be spared such a misfortune during our lifetime. However, this terrible war has already left behind shocking gaps among our armies. ..." (Neidlinger, "Bergmann, Max")



1928, inauguration of the town gym:
On the left, Max Bergmann as a member of the construction committee and behind him, member of the Town Council Anton Ganser. On the right, bank director Richard Heumann and local administrator Konrad.

Max was not only the president of the *Verschoenerungsverein*, but also president of the local Red Cross unit, which he co-founded in 1911. In the same year, he was elected member of the Town Council for the first time. However, he never belonged to any political party.

In May 1919 two members of the Bergmann family ran as candidates for the first election of the Town Council after the lost war: Max Bergmann received the most votes of all 26 candidates, whereas Elsa Bergmann, his cousin Marco's wife, was only a few votes short of making the Town Council. She had compiled

her own list of women including two candidates, but for all that, Laupheim was obviously not ready for a female member of the Town Council yet, since women's suffrage had only recently been introduced.

Max's social involvement became particularly apparent during the crisis year of 1923, when he and a few citizens in a better financial position organized a soup kitchen for fellow citizens and schoolchildren in need. Every day until 1925, the soup kitchen provided a warm meal for up to 150 pupils and 120 elderly people.

After the flood catastrophe of 1926, he launched a fundraising campaign for the victims, collecting 20,000 *Reichsmarks*, and after this, he vehemently promoted the regulation of the Rottum River to prevent such incidents from happening again.

His son Hans further illustrates Max Bergmann's commitment in his chronicle:

"Charity was also important in our home on a personal level. Never were non-Jewish, well-wishers before *Rosh Hashanah* Holy Days or on

Christmas, nor even the most obnoxious of the many *schnorrers* sent away without an appropriate gift, a piece of clothing, and sometimes a meal. Each year, baskets filled with loaves of fruit bread (*hutzelbrot*), *knackwurst*, and freshly baked rolls were prepared the week before Christmas and delivered a few days before Christmas to the residents of the Home for the Elderly, located behind the old town wall. So that the Max Bergmann family retained personal contact with the poorest of the town, the children, Hans and Trudl, had to accompany the maids and help deliver the presents by pushing the wheelbarrow or sled, to the house for the needy. The word *tzedakah*, or charity, was never used in our home, but it was always practiced.” (Bergmann 121, rephrased by the translation team)

It must also be mentioned that Max Bergmann actively participated in the local festival commission, helped improve the provision of medical care in Laupheim’s County Hospital, organized a big agricultural exposition at the end of the 1920s and attempted to provide Laupheim with a swimming pool, since there were no lakes (however, when the pool was opened in 1933, a new sign indicated that Jews were prohibited). Those are just a few of the many examples of his social commitment. Many years later, his son recalled that they never talked about anything else but Laupheim at home. It is certainly not a coincidence that Max Bergmann’s son was to explore the history of his family and of Laupheim’s Jewish community.

Zur Bewältigung meiner **umfangreichen Vereins-**
geschäfte suche ich zum **sofortigen** Eintritt gegen
hohes Salär einen

Privat-Sekretär.

Gewandter **Stenograph**, flotter **Maschinen-**
schreiber und guter **Stilistiker** Bedingung.

Bewerber, die schon vorher **Aemter** als **Vorstände**,
Sekretäre, **Kassiere** etc. in **Vereinen** bekleidet haben,
erhalten den Vorzug.

Max Suppenpeterling.

Every year, the Jewish Choir Society *Frohsinn* organized a ball for *Purim*. In the years before the First World War, a program booklet was issued in which the community’s happenings were humorously and ironically commented on and a few individuals were jokingly made fun of. The advertisement on the left, taken from the booklet of 1912 is about Max Bergmann, the local politician.

On January 5, 1933, shortly before the beginning of the German catastrophe, Max and Henny celebrated their silver wedding anniversary with relatives in Chemnitz. They received over 150 greeting cards from Laupheim. However, it was in that very year that Max’s charitable commitment to the city would be forcefully ended.

During the Nazi Era

The dismissal of the opposition and Jewish members of the Town Council (part of the *Gleichschaltung* carried out throughout Germany) proceeded a bit slower in Laupheim than in other parts of the country, but on May 22, 1933, local administrator Konrad had to inform his good friend Max Bergmann that he was no longer a member of the Town Council, effective April 1. With great courage, Konrad mentioned Max Bergmann's major contributions to Laupheim twice in a public report in April 1934 on the occasion of his 10th anniversary of service.

Max had a particular preference for the *Verschoenerungsverein* (VVL). He was committed to it with heart and soul. On November 28, 1933, the local Nazi leader Abdon Lemmle wrote to Paul Schmidt, the VVL's second president and his own father-in-law, that the Nazi state would no longer allow a Jew to lead the VVL. Consequently, Max resigned from presidency and 24 other members (not all Jewish) left the association as well. Even the Nazi press had no choice but to acknowledge Max Bergmann's merits after his withdrawal because anything to the contrary would have been an obvious lie.

Between October 1933 and March 1934 Max Bergmann left the following clubs and associations: the Kneipp club (practice of water therapy invented by Sebastian Kneipp), the Navy League, the *Schwäebischer Albverein* (Swabian hiking club), the Laupheim poultry club, the shooting club, the *Musikverein* (music society), the gymnastics club, the soccer club, the *Kriegerverein* (veterans' association) and the Choir Society *Concordia*. His son Hans describes the situation in his chronicle as follows:

"It was difficult for Max to comprehend the change taking place. He continued for a while to frequent his favorite taverns to meet some of his old cronies, but by the end of 1934 it was evident that his presence was a liability to the innkeepers, who may still have been his friend[s], and an embarrassment to some of the patrons. He realized that the social isolation of the Jew[s] in Germany was now complete.

During 1937 he was for a few days under Town Hall arrest [,] accused of '*Rassenschande*', a new word in the Nazi dictionary meaning 'consorting with an [A]ryan woman'. He was falsely accused of having a relationship with one of the workers. The source of the defamation was never discovered, but after a few days he was vindicated of all charges and let go." (Bergmann 123)

The Bergmann children

Max Bergmann's daughter Gertrud ("Trudl") was one of the first of the extended Bergmann family to leave Germany, having immigrated to Spain in May 1934. She had worked as a medical laboratory technician in a doctor's office in Munich and pursued this profession in Valencia. In 1935 in Madrid, she married Fred Faessler, a Catholic from Schwaebisch Gmuend, Germany. While they were on vacation in San Sebastian, Northern Spain, in 1936 the Spanish Civil War caught them by surprise and they were not able to return to their home, since the rebels had blockaded Madrid. Their entire belongings were lost. Eventually, they managed to escape to France on a British warship.

In July 1936 the couple was back in Germany, either in Laupheim or in Schwaebisch Gmuend, waiting for their exit and permission to leave visa for the USA. Fortunately, they had married shortly before the Nuremberg Laws were enacted, and as such they were able to obtain all the necessary papers to immigrate to New York in May 1937.

Gertrud's brother Hans immigrated to New York in November 1934. His school career in the 1920s was not very straightforward. He had to attend three high schools in Laupheim, Stuttgart and Frankfurt am Main before he, with much difficulty, was finally able to pass the high school leaving examination in 1929, two years later than scheduled. Afterwards, in order to follow in his father's footsteps and to be able to take over the technical management of *Bergmann J. & Co.*, he started studying chemistry at the University of Frankfurt am Main, yet with moderate success. But then, he had an identity crisis, as ironically described in his chronicle:

"Somehow to spend the rest of his life in Laupheim never appealed to him, nor did he anticipate with pleasure working for many years for his rather impatient and excitable father, nor his uncles. Since he was afflicted with chronic thirst for beer, his intention to become a master-brewer, against the violent opposition of his parents, was really not farfetched. The family had only one reaction, 'Jetzt verkommt er vollends' ('[N]ow he will go [...] to the dogs!'), and in the Ochsen in Laupheim one could hear 'Wann laesst er sich schmadden?' ('When will he get baptized?'). Though there existed quite a few breweries in Germany owned by Jews, (some with marriageable daughters), he was contemplating emigration right from the beginning of his brewing studies." (Bergmann 92)

Hans gave up on his chemistry studies in 1931 and went to the Faculty for Brewing Science at the Technical University of Munich in order to pursue his dream job as a brewmaster. In 1933 he worked in a brewery in Freiberg/Saxony and stayed with relatives in a city close by, Chemnitz, where he witnessed intense anti-Semitic rioting. After other workers had

seriously beaten up one of his Jewish colleagues, Hans decided to quit his job and to leave Germany for a short while upon the advice of his employer. He managed to cross the border to Czechoslovakia, where he hiked through the Sudetenland, from brewery to brewery, before returning to Germany without difficulty. During the semester break of 1933-1934, he worked at the Lowenbrau brewery in Munich, and in the summer of 1934 he graduated as a brewmaster and immigrated to the USA shortly afterwards. Prohibition in the US had just been lifted a year earlier and there was a high demand for skilled personnel in this field. He had only been able to graduate due to a provision for the children of Jewish veterans of the First World War: As an exception they were allowed to complete studies or apprenticeships they had previously started.

As far as the true intentions of the Nazi regime are concerned, Hans Bergmann already had a pessimistic opinion at the beginning of 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich; later his opinion was validated when he and his cousin Fritz Hofheimer witnessed the big military parade, "Day of Potsdam", in Ulm in March of the same year. Further confirmation of his apprehensions, which would subsequently become reality, grew stronger after a noteworthy encounter at the train station in Ulm in the summer of 1934:

"The highest ranking SS officer in Laupheim was Friedrich Rueckert *Sturm Fuehrer* (captain), a young bank official, personally known to and friendly with many Jews of his age group. Rueckert held an unjustified or possibly justified grudge against his former Jewish employer and became an early Nazi. One day during 1934 Hans saw him in his dreaded black uniform, skull and crossbones, swastika, shiny riding boots and all, at the Ulm Railway Station. Hans was extremely uneasy and embarrassed and tried to avoid him, but Rueckert approached him, shook hands, and asked him about his emigration plans. When he was told that [Hans] was presently finishing university[,], he suggested in all earnestness to leave Germany immediately and [to advise] all Laupheimer 'friends' to do the same, indicating that 'these people', namely the Nazis, meant business."
(Bergmann 148)

Max and Henny's emigration

However, it was not until the middle of 1938 that Max and Henny faced the painful truth that there would be no future for them in Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, the Jewish citizen Max Bergmann was no longer allowed to sit on the park benches that he had once paid for in the park that he had built. Members of the Hitler Youth organization were allowed to abuse Laupheim's once most-respected citizen and his employees in the firm were forbidden to get in touch with him directly. Contact was allowed only via middlemen. But before they could emigrate, Max and Henny had to experience the *Kristallnacht* on November 9, 1938. Like other Jewish men, Max was dragged out of his house by SA members and had to witness the destruction of the synagogue. All the while big stones were hurled from the neighboring carpenter's workshop, through the windows of his bedroom, where Henny had been left totally unprotected and alone. The arrested Jewish men were brought to the Dachau concentration camp the day after.

On the morning of November 10, 1938, as the news of the *Kristallnacht* appeared in New York newspapers, an indescribable panic broke out among the German-Jewish emigrants and was further escalated with the arrival of the first personal news from Germany. The Bergmanns in New York heard about what had happened in Laupheim from Uncle Max

Biedermann from Winterthur, Switzerland. He had expressly sent one of his employees who had a Swiss passport to Laupheim to investigate the situation. When it became known that people in concentration camps who could show exit visas or similar documents were more likely to be released, John Bergmann made intense efforts to get such papers faster for his father, but was not successful.

"The time and income lost for visits to consulates, meetings and telegraph expense[s] (...) was considerable." (Bergmann 128) The US consulate in Stuttgart always gave the same information: Max and Henny Bergmann's emigration was set for February or March 1939 and a preferential treatment or a faster handling of the process was impossible.

Konzentrationslager Dachau 3 K

Folgende Anordnungen sind beim Schriftverkehr mit Gefangenen zu beachten:

- 1.) Jeder Schutzhaftgefangene darf im Monat zwei Briefe oder zwei Karten von seinen Angehörigen empfangen und an sie absenden. Die Briefe an die Gefangenen müssen gut lesbar mit Tinte geschrieben sein und dürfen nur 15 Zeilen auf einer Seite enthalten. Gestattet ist nur ein Briefbogen normaler Größe. Briefumschläge müssen ungefaltet sein. In einem Briefe dürfen nur 5 Briefmarken à 12 Pfg. beigelegt werden. Alles andere ist verboten und unterliegt der Beschlagnahme. Postkarten haben 10 Zeilen. Lichtbilder dürfen als Postkarten nicht verwendet werden.
- 2.) Geldsendungen sind gestattet.
- 3.) Zeitungen sind gestattet, dürfen aber nur durch die Poststelle des K. L. Dachau bestellt werden.
- 4.) Pakete dürfen nicht geschickt werden, da die Gefangenen im Lager alles kaufen können.
- 5.) Entlassungsgesuche aus der Schutzhaft an die Lagerleitung sind zwecklos.
- 6.) Sprecherlaubnis und Besuche von Gefangenen im Konz.-Lager sind grundsätzlich nicht gestattet.

Alle Post, die diesen Anforderungen nicht entspricht, wird vernichtet.
Der Lagerkommandant.

Absender: **Meine Anschrift:**

Name: *Max Bergmann*

geboren am: *9.12.79*

Block: *III*

Stube: *3*



Herr Henny Bergmann

Laupheim Tilly

Schiller 73

“When it was learned that somebody was arriving [in New York] from Laupheim, whoever had time welcomed the person at the pier. One of the first after the Dachau arrest was Dr. Josef (Seppl) Friedberger. He looked ghastly, his hair shorn; he had come straight from the concentration camp. His report was reassuring. The treatment was brutal and humiliating, but for those who could stand the strain there existed a good chance of survival. Sick people, however, were in danger.” (Bergmann 129)

Therefore, it was a great relief for the Bergmanns in New York when they learned that Max had finally been set free from Dachau on December 14, six weeks after his arrest. He was the last of the whole Bergmann family to be released.

Afterwards, Max and Henny stayed a good four months in Laupheim until they could emigrate. At the time, the Jewish community consisted of more than a hundred unemployed members who needed support, along with the numerous non-local Jews who had roots in Laupheim and had returned penniless and were also in need of support. Max, as a member of the synagogue executive board and of the *Chevra Talmud Thora* (*chevra*: Hebrew for “brotherhood”), helped wherever he could.

Before they could emigrate, Max and Henny were forced to liquidate the firm and their personal assets. It became increasingly clear that the Nazi state aimed for completely depriving the emigrants of their possessions. Many taxes were imposed, such as the Reich Flight Tax and the Jewish Property Levy (*Judenvermögensabgabe*), and the possibility to transfer capital was more and more limited. Furthermore, the family was only allowed to take some pieces of furniture with them, which were packed on March 9 supervised by a customs officer, who did not miss the opportunity to slit open all upholstered furniture to search for hidden valuables. The remaining belongings were packed under surveillance on March 21, and jewelry and precious metals were seized. On March 22 Max signed a declaration in the town hall to waive his claim on *Bergmann, J. and Co.* and the day after, Max and Henny Bergmann left Germany from Friedrichshafen toward Switzerland, where they wanted to say goodbye to their relatives, “(...) with \$4.00 each in their possession, broken in spirit, with their health impaired, never to see Germany again”. (Bergmann 131)

The son of a distant neighbor, also an eyewitness to history, remembers that several days before emigration, Max Bergmann, a totally distraught and broken man, had tried to sell some garden furniture in the neighborhood to collect some cash for the journey. The father of this eyewitness to history, who prefers to remain anonymous, had then actually bought the furniture for an unknown price.

A new beginning in the USA

At first, Max had found a poorly paid and primitive job in a wig factory for 12 dollars per week in Harlem, New York. Then, in 1944, at the age of 65, he borrowed some money and opened a small company in the field of bleaching and dyeing hair. Yet, if his cousin Marco, who had been more successful with his own business right across the street, had not bought most of Max's products, the small company would have gone bankrupt in next to no time. Max was able to work and earn a modest income for five years until he eventually had to quit due to illness in 1949. His generous cousin Marco kept paying him a small personal pension, which was, however, barely enough to live on.

What made Max Bergmann ill was most notably his homesickness for Laupheim, but also the anonymity of the big city of New York and the fact that he was a poor man, as can be taken from his letters to his old friends in Laupheim. His wish to return to his hometown for at least a few months became stronger and stronger. "Sadly he overlooked completely that so much had been changed in Laupheim and that many of his friends had died or were somehow implicated in the crimes against him and his people." (Bergmann 143) Yet, this did not keep him from planning his return when the restitution negotiations of his house and beloved garden began in 1950.

On May 29, 1951, Henny and Max Bergmann wanted to go to Europe by boat and stay there for three months. The journey was booked, the papers in order and his cousin Marco, who was already in Laupheim for business, wrote in a letter to Max and Henny on June 22 that their upcoming return was the talk of the town. He asked if the rumors were true: Did they really intend to spend their golden years in Laupheim? In this case, they would have been the only members of the town's Jewish community, since none of the Holocaust survivors had returned permanently after the war.

Unfortunately, the two of them were not able to travel to Laupheim since Max's doctor did not allow him to. Max Bergmann died one year later, on August 1, 1952, at the age of 72, near New York, only six weeks after his cousin Marco had been tragically killed in a car accident near Laupheim.

For John H. Bergmann, the beginning in New York was easier than for his father and most of his cousins. Only three hours after his arrival in the USA in 1934, he already had a job in a brewery, but he had to do hard physical work to climb his way up to brewmaster. Besides, in the New York breweries, which were strongly German-dominated at the time, there were quite a lot of Nazi sympathizers and John had to suffer from their anti-Semitic insults and attacks. John married Elsie Guggenheim from

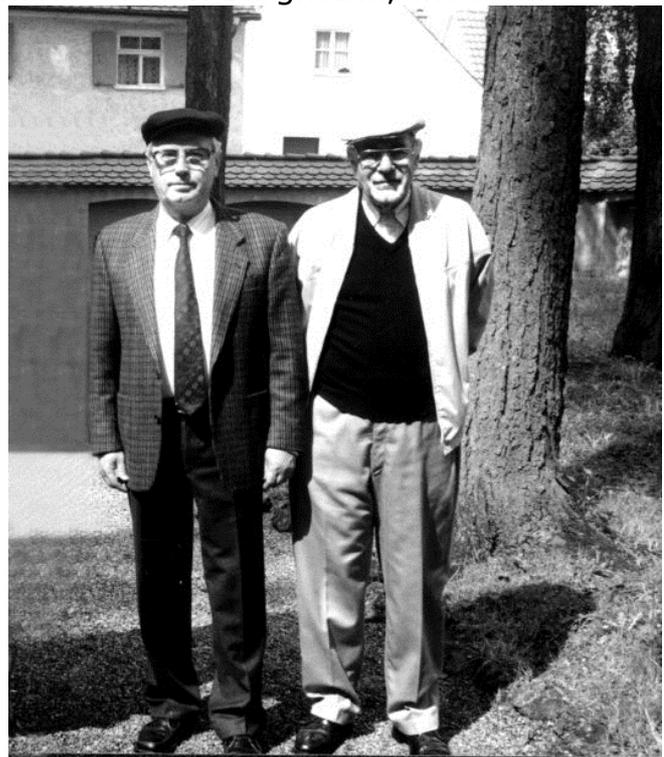
Pittsburg, whose father Jonas came from Laupheim and was a friend of Max's. The couple had two children, Barbara and Kenneth Joseph.



1945, John Hans Bergmann and his parents.

In June 1942 John H. Bergmann was drafted in to the US army. After being deployed to several different countries during the Second World War, he volunteered to take part in the invasion of Normandy in May 1944. In the fall of 1944 he was severely injured in a battle against Hitler-Germany near Aachen. His full recovery took an entire year so that he would not return to civil life before November 1945, with marks of honor. Afterwards, he continued his career in breweries around the world. After his retirement in 1975, John began thoroughly researching and recording the family history. Without his book *The Bergmanns from Laupheim*, completed in 1983, this article would not exist. John's pessimistic closing statement, which

expresses the fear of his father's lifetime achievements being soon forgotten, has not come true. The merits of Max Bergmann, the local politician and devoted citizen, and of the whole Bergmann family are still appreciated in Laupheim to this day. In fact, there is a memorial stone for Max in the *Hoehenanlage* park and an exhibition about Laupheim's Jewish community in the Museum for the History of Jews and Christians in Laupheim.



1989, Ernst Schaell and John Hans Bergmann at the Jewish cemetery in Laupheim.

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Photographs:

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