

BACH, Hugo,

Clothier, 38 Kapellenstrasse

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Hugo Bach, shopkeeper, born February 18, 1888 in Laupheim, married Selma Bach, (née Stiefel, born January 2, 1889 in Menzingen/Bruchsal), died in California.

- Max Bach, born January 24, 1921 in Laupheim
- Heinz Bach, born March 23, 1922 in Laupheim, died in the USA.

Brother: Ernst Bach, born 1894

Grandmother: Mathilde Bach, née Friedberger, born February 28, 1866 in Laupheim, died November 24, 1936 in Laupheim. Widow of Max Bach, born 1852 in Muehringen/Oberamt Horb, died April 6, 1916 in Laupheim.

Escaped to France with his family on March 30, 1933; in 1938 emigrated to the USA (California).



*Hugo Bach (middle) as a first grader in the
Israelite Elementary School of Laupheim, 1894-5.*

(Collection of John Bergmann, donated to the Leo Baeck Institute, NY)

The ancestors of the Bach family, who lived in Muehringen, Oberamt Horb, wrote their name "Bachmann" until 1828. The name was derived from the location of the family's home in Muehringer Dorfbach. According to the results of John H. Bergmann's genealogical research, the name was then simplified to "Bach." Max Bach, who was born in Muehringen in 1852, married in November of 1877 in Laupheim; however his first wife Helene Neuburger died in 1885 at the age of 29. His second wife was Mathilde Friedberger, a sister of Markus Friedberger (see pg. 213), and she married in 1886. The trade in textiles and household goods, as well as articles for everyday life, constituted the family's financial base after Max Bach's arrival in Laupheim, as indicated by the 50-year anniversary sale advertisement from October, 1928 displayed above.

Ein seltenes Ereignis

ist mein



Jubiläums-Verkauf



Jeder Käufer erhält als Festgeschenk bei Einkauf von

- 5 Mark an einen schönen Brotkorb,
- 10 Mark an einen Kochtopf mit Deckel aus gutem Aluminium,
- 20 Mark an einen Fleischtopf mit Deckel aus gutem Aluminium oder eine schöne Küchenwaage,
- 30 Mark an einen großen Fleischtopf mit Deckel aus gutem Aluminium oder eine schöne Tortenplatte mit Nickeleinfassung,
- 40 Mark an eine kupferne Bettflasche,
- 50 Mark an ein schweres elektrisches Bügeleisen.

Jede Dame und jedes Mädchen erhält bei Einkauf eines fertigen Mantels in der Preislage von Mk. 25.— an eine schöne und gut gehende **Armbanduhr**.

Jeder Herr und Jüngling bei Einkauf eines Wintermantels, Anzuges oder Gummimantels eine gut gehende **Taschenuhr**.

Hugo Bach, Laupheim.

50th anniversary sale, 1928

Thus Max Bach must have entered the textile trade in 1878.

(Laupheimer Verkuendiger, 11th October, 1928)

All three of Max Bach's sons, Fritz (born in 1878), Hugo, and Ernst (born in 1894) served in the First World War as soldiers and returned home unharmed after the end of the war in 1918. For most of his enlistment Hugo was assigned to the Ulm infantry regiment. He participated in the battle of Verdun through its entire duration and was made a non-commissioned officer.

On 30 December, 1918 (immediately after his return from the war) he married Selma Stiefel of Menzingen bei Bruchsal. Their sons, Max and Heinz, were born in 1921 and 1922. Until 1926, Hugo managed the family business on Kapellenstrasse 37 with his mother. Then Mathilde Bach sold the business to her son in exchange for a steady monthly pension, continued residence in the house, and a purchase price that by 1933 was still not paid in full.





Kapellenstrasse 40 and 38, two nearly identical houses with neo-baroque gables facing the street. The building on the right (Kapellenstrasse 38) housed both the Bach family and their shop, and was until recently home to the Dilger company. (photo: K. Neilinger)

The advertisements for the company (a selection of which can be seen on the following pages) were unusual in their day for their unique ideas, large formats, and at times slogan-like wording. In some ways they seem truly modern! Hugo Bach had to deal with considerable competition in his location: the business of D. M. Einstein with his modern, spacious shop in the marketplace; and that of Hugo Hofheimer and Julius Heumann on Mittelstrasse, who carried a similar range of goods.

Bach's business relied on the wholesale of small wares and notions as a second source of income. He supplied a regular group of peddlers who operated primarily in the region of Bavaria.

Consequently Hugo Bach already owned a car in the 1920s: first a Steiger and then a Benz. According to the recollections of his son Max (born in 1921) he was sometimes away up to three weeks at a time on business trips. This line of business became increasingly important, and after the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s it became the most important one.

Meine



Pfingst-Angebote

bieten

beste Einkaufsgelegenheit!

Hugo Bach,
Laupheim.

Jhr **Vorteil** ist der **Einkauf** in den
billigen Wochen
bei der Firma **Hugo Bach, Laupheim.**

Für wenig Geld gute Ware
erhalten Sie durch mein Weihnachtssonderangebot!
Hugo Bach, Laupheim.

In
Schwerer Zeit
Erleichterung

bringen wir unserer Kundschaft
durch unsere

Spartage
verbunden mit
95 Pfennig-Serien.

Beginn **29. November.**

M. Bach & Sohn, Laupheim.

Quite mindful of the Christian clientele: Christmas, first communion, even Pentecost deals! (Hugo Bach probably also stocked rosaries)

This advertisement comes from the year 1914. The *schwerer Zeit* (difficult time) is believed to be the First World War, already four months underway. The hope of a speedy victory went unfulfilled.

Emigration

Hugo Bach's family became the very first Jewish family to leave Laupheim after Hitler came to power. On 30 March, 1933, the parents travelled with their two children via Saarbruecken to France; first to Strasbourg and a few months later to Paris. Political, economic, and personal motives contributed equally to the decision. According to the account of Max's son and the assessment of public authorities, the purpose was to escape.

Max Bach recalled that his father Hugo was not happy in Laupheim. The family was almost completely alienated from Judaism and the Jewish community, and Hugo Bach took almost no part in social life. He was "a very private person who has no opportunity to hide in this place," and would have greatly preferred living in an anonymous city. He formed his own thoughts with his attentive, critical mind, and then acted on them. "Better a wrong decision than none," was one of his principles.

The family had wanted to leave Germany since the onset of the Great Depression in 1931, but they were restrained by tax laws put in place by the Bruening government to prevent capital outflow. To avoid the so-called "flight tax," Hugo Bach gradually moved his assets abroad (especially to Swiss bank accounts), and safely managed to transfer his entire fortune before 1933. He continued to grow his wholesale business, which clearly still had earning potential; operations in Laupheim, however, were reduced.

Politically Hugo Bach was very conservative; he voted deutschnational (German National). His son said: "The party he chose would not allow someone of his parentage to join," but he was not politically active. As a DNVP voter he thought little of the Weimar Republic, and he frankly hated the chancellery of Bruening. During the economic crisis he became convinced that Germany would become either Communist or Nazi (which one made little difference to him), and democracy would have no future. He therefore sought the right to establish himself in Switzerland and received permission from the canton of Chur. Then on 30 March, 1933, things happened quickly and caused him to change his mind on the spot.

It was the last day before the Easter holidays, and Max Bach came home from his secondary school with a bad conscience. He expected a scolding because he had brought a soccer ball to school without permission, but things turned out differently. His mother greeted him anxiously and with no interest in the ball: "We have to get to Ulm," she said. Max ate

quickly, and after a quarter of an hour the four of them drove away: the chauffeur, Selma Bach, and the two boys – plus a couple of suitcases. Bit by bit Max learned the reason for the hasty trip.

That morning two men, probably from the customs investigation unit, came into the store to talk to Hugo Bach. He was in the garden behind the house, but the employee who went to fetch him had to tell the “police-looking men” that he wasn’t there but in Biberach. Immediately he borrowed a car and drove to Ulm. There he picked up all his cash (the chauffeur being quite helpful) and sent this message to his family, which was to follow after him: “we will go via Saarbruecken to France; not to Switzerland.” Max’s mother would rather have seen them move back to Laupheim, but she was accustomed to accepting her husband’s decisions. Since the customs officials thought he was going to Switzerland via Biberach, they sent his arrest warrant to the Swiss rather than the French border. Thus there was no difficulty crossing into France, and they settled in Strasbourg.

Hugo Bach had taken his considerable financial assets with him, and so the family was able to get along comfortably. “It was both the luck and tragedy of his life that he never worked again,” his son recalled. The grandmother Matilde, however, remained in Laupheim. In Hugo Bach’s absence the business was managed at first by Josef Biber under the name Zum Schwanen, and from February, 1934 on by Mathilde Bach herself. She wanted to re-purchase the house and business in order to have a livelihood, but this failed due to astronomical back taxes: The tax office demanded 50,000 reichmarks (RM) in flight taxes, and the city claimed additional trade taxes of roughly 4,200 RM – all this with an average of 437 RM monthly gross earnings from the store in 1933. Mathilde Bach also lost her monthly pension, and she had not yet received money from the sale of the house. The family’s attempt to be reunited in France failed in 1935. Due to “political reasons” and as security for the flight tax, German authorities refused to issue a passport for her. Seventy year-old Mathilde Bach died on 24 November, 1936 in Laupheim. In the cemetery she lies next to her deceased sister-in-law, Tirzah Ascher, who died in 1926 and was born a Bach. Both of them received identical grave stones.

“A once wealthy old woman:” Mathilde Bach

Early '30s, on a Friedberger family photo.

(Collection of J. Bergmann, donated to the Leo Baeck Institute, NY)



In the fall of 1938 the Bach family left France as quickly as they had left Germany in 1933. In late September, while the parents were on vacation in Switzerland, Hitler deluded the Western powers at the Munich Conference and was granted the Sudetenland. Hugo Bach broke off the holiday immediately and drove back to Paris to get visas for the United States. He was now certain that war was coming and would reach France. Because he was still able to demonstrate sufficient funds, he needed no affidavits for entry into the United States. By the year's end the whole family was in New York.

Max Bach

Thanks to an early emigration at the age of twelve and the good fortune never to have met Nazis or Nazi oppression, Max Bach was able to retain an unstained memory of Laupheim and Germany:

"My early teenage years were in Laupheim, and I have a warm feeling for the city and the people I knew at that time. I have never asked for reparations or anything from Germany. For me, emigration was a liberation. My years in Paris, my apprenticeship, and America gave me what is most valuable in life: choice, freedom. If my family had stayed in Laupheim, what would my future as the son of a Jewish merchant have been – even if there had never been a Hitler? My career choices would have been businessman, doctor, or lawyer, and I had not the slightest desire nor talent for any of them."

His younger brother Heinz, who died back in the '70s of last century, was a librarian. He taught himself languages, especially French, and later became a professor of Romance languages at the University of California, Davis. He met his wife in France as a US soldier in 1945, and she then became a mathematics professor at another university in California.

That the family landed in California was due to a negative trait of Hugo Bach: he could hate some people deeply, and most of all he hated his stepmother. He found the Stiefel family already in New York when he arrived, and so he had no doubt about what to do: "California is farthest from New York, so he moved there. If my mother's family had been in California, he might have moved to New York."



"For me, California is paradise – paradise unfortunately does not exist – but it's hard for me to understand how you can live anywhere else." Max Bach in front of his parents' first home of in Berkeley, California. Nevertheless, according to information from Ernest Bergman, Max Bach now spends his retirement in Hawaii. (Photo: Archive of Dr. Bayer)

In the early summer of 1945 Max Bach returned to Laupheim for the first time as a US soldier. He was stationed in Starnberg and was allowed a few extra days of leave to go to Laupheim. Many more visits would follow, and they only stopped when old age prevented him from travelling at will.

"When I come back to Laupheim I mostly visit people I've known: the Halders, the Sillers, and now I also know the Bayers. And earlier there were a few other employees of my parents who are now deceased."

The first time Max Bach saw his friend and former neighbor Herbert Halder after the war, Halder was working in a bakery. To serve the friend who disappeared so suddenly twelve years before, Halder pushed an extra sheet of pretzels in the oven; "and the Halders baked the best pretzels in the whole city!" However he could offer his guest very little to drink. He complained to his childhood friend that it is hardly possible to buy a beer anymore, but this was no problem for someone in the uniform of the victors with a Jeep sitting in front of the house. Max Bach promptly drove to the *Schlossbrauerei* and "liberated" a keg of beer: "Officially the

US Army has never seized, but only liberated!" It was a memorable reunion party, certainly the first Jewish-Christian one after the war in Laupheim; and it was celebrated with the liberated beer from the *Schlossbrauerei* in the bakery.

Sources:

1. From the museum files:

a) Dr. Benigna Schoenhagen's interview with Max Bach, held in Laupheim on 21 September, 1994 – 24 pages.

b) Copy of an extract from the council minutes from April 1934, without number or exact date: "Section 186, tax arrears of Hugo Bach, local businessman."

2. From the collection of John Bergmann, Leo Baeck Institute, New York (on microfilm in the town archive of Laupheim): family tree of the Bach family.

3. Advertisement from the *Laupheimer Verkuendiger*, town archive of Laupheim.