

OBERNAUER, Wilhelm,

Tobacco products, 21Radstrasse

Translated by: Adrian Fernandez, Marie-Kristin Fischer, Paulina Hausmann, Nazanin Zoroofchi
Supervisor: Dr. Robynne Flynn-Diez,
Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg,
Institut für Übersetzen und Dolmetschen Englischabteilung

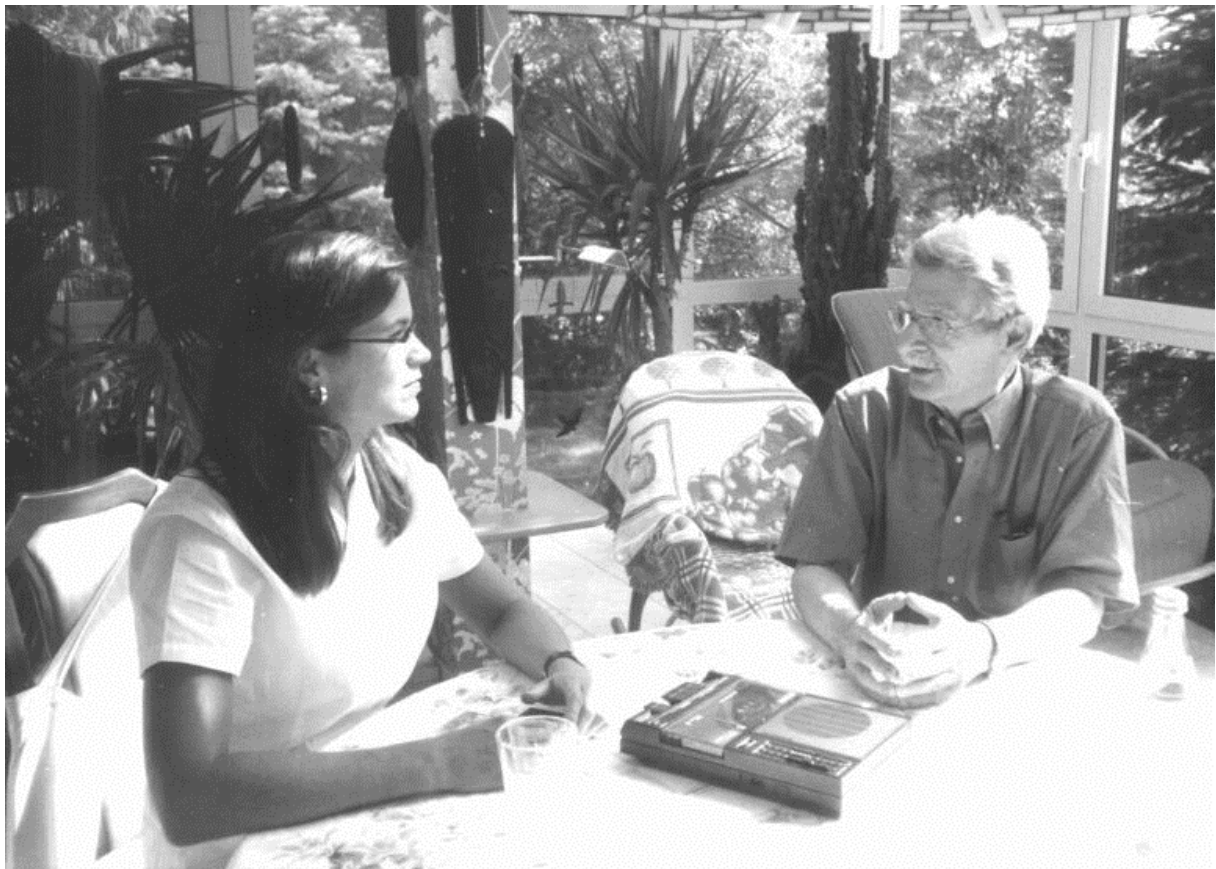
DR. ANTJE KÖHLERSCHMIDT / DR. UDO BA YER

Wilhelm Obernauer, born December 29, 1894 in Laupheim OO
Hella-Johanna, née Lindauer, born November 17, 1904 in
Esslingen, died January 6, 1938 in Wangen i. Allgäu,

- **Heinz Joachim Obernauer**, born January 3, 1925 in Ulm, died
1975 in the USA,

- **Max Paul Obernauer**, born February 27, 1928 in Laupheim, died
2004 in the USA. Emigration of Wilhelm Obernauer and his sons
Heinz and Max to New York, USA, on December 7, 1938.

According to the first transcript of the safe conduct (an official document that ensured one's safety by paying certain fees) and further documents from the eighteenth century, the Obernauers were one of the oldest Jewish families of Laupheim. They can be traced back to David Obernauer, one of four Jews, who found accommodation in Laupheim around the year 1730. In the course of many decades the descendants branched out. Therefore the Obernauers were remotely related to the Einstein family. In an interview from June 2000, Max Obernauer reported that Albert Einstein's grandmother was the sister of his great grandmother. When he was thirteen, his father, Wilhelm Obernauer, took him to meet Albert Einstein. Furthermore the Obernauers were also related to Carl Laemmle, the founder of Universal Studios in Hollywood.



*Dr. Antje Köhlerschmidt's Interview with Max Obernauer, 06/20/2000.
(Photo by Dr. Udo Bayer)*

Family connections made the acquisition of the affidavits for the families of the brothers Wilhelm, Max and Hermann Obernauer possible, which were provided by *uncle Carl* (Laemmle) and necessary for their immigration to the USA.

Wilhelm Obernauer was born as the fourth of five children of Israel and Paulina Obernauer, née Friedberger, on December 29, 1894.

His parents married on December 23, 1883 in their hometown Laupheim and lived at 56 Kapellenstrasse.

The five siblings had grown up there and visited the Jewish *Volksschule* (basic primary school and secondary school), afterwards the *Latein-* and *Realschule* (German secondary school with a Latin department) before they started working.

Wilhelm Obernauer and his brother Hermann ran a flourishing cigar wholesale on the second floor of the Jewish *Volksschule* on Radstrasse. For further information please refer to the article about Hermann Obernauer.

Just like his three brothers Hugo, Max and Hermann Obernauer, Wilhelm served as a soldier. More specifically, he was a miner of the infantry for the German Empire during World War I.

For his service he was awarded with the War Merit Cross with Swords. On the following group photo from the Archive Ernst Schäll you can see nine soldiers. Wilhelm Obernauer, dressed in a white jacket, is the third person from the left, casually leaning against a fellow soldier while looking into the distance. After the war he resumed working in the office of his own company, where his main responsibility was administrative tasks.



Wilhelm Obernauer, third from the left (white jacket)
(Photo: Ernst Schäll archive, Laupheim)

Wilhelm Obernauer married Johanna Lindauer on April 4, 1924 in Esslingen and they lived at 21 Radstrasse. They rented their house from Josef Bergmann & Co.. They had two sons Heinz Joachim, born on January 3, 1925 in Ulm and three years later Max Paul on February 27, 1928 in Laupheim. When Max Paul was invited to Laupheim in 1988 and visited his former home on Radstrasse with his niece, he said of his return:

"Mrs. Guggenheimer had lived next door (Authors note: she lived on Radstrasse 23.) and was always looking out the window. Now I'm standing here in front of my house and the window opens. Mrs. Guggenheimer would have to be 120 years old by now. (Authors note: she died in 1941 in Laupheim.) Who might that be? And the woman says: 'Mr. Obernauer, I was waiting at my window and I knew that you would come here today.' Then I said: 'Who are you?' That's when she came downstairs and said: 'Please come in for some coffee and cake.' 'I don't know who you are.' 'Don't you know your uncle Max always had boys and girls cleaning the house? I am one of them'."

It was not just uncle Max Obernauer who employed mostly Christian domestic workers, but also his parents, as an advertisement of Mrs. Wilhelm Obernauer from the year 1925 shows. After her first son's birth, a helping hand to lighten her workload must have been very welcome.

**Für kleinen Haushalt wird auf
1. April ein fleißiges und ehrliches
Mädchen gesucht.
Frau Wilhelm Obernauer,
Laupheim.**

(Laupheimer Verkündiger, 03/11/1925)

Only for the first few years of their lives did the two sons Heinz and Max grow up within the family and the synagogue community. Their mother, Johanna Obernauer, got a serious illness and the doctor recommended that the children not stay with her. Therefore eight year old Heinz and his

then five year old brother Max lived in a Jewish orphanage in Esslingen from 1933 until 1936. The grandparents supported the family financially. The brothers Heinz and Max, who had a close relationship, returned to Laupheim and visited the Jewish *Volksschule*. Back then only seven children attended the school and their teacher was Mr. Silbermann. Fritz Bernheim and Sofie Heumann were two of Max' Jewish friends.

In 1936 Carl Laemmle was staying in Zurich when Wilhelm Obernauer visited him. Carl Laemmle insisted that Wilhelm should come to the United States, but Johanna Obernauer's illness did not at first allow it. On January 6, 1938 after a long illness, she died at the young age of 34 in the hospital in Wangen im Allgäu. She was buried three days later at the Jewish cemetery in Laupheim. Wilhelm Obernauer did everything in his power to press ahead with the emigration of his two sons. He filed another emigration request at the consulate of Stuttgart; but before their emigration to New York on the *Aquitania* in December 1938 succeeded, they had to endure the Kristallnacht on the evening of November 9, 1938 in Laupheim. It was this night that the SA chased Jewish men, including Wilhelm Obernauer, out of their homes and to their burning synagogue where they were then harassed.

His son Max Obernauer tells the following story:

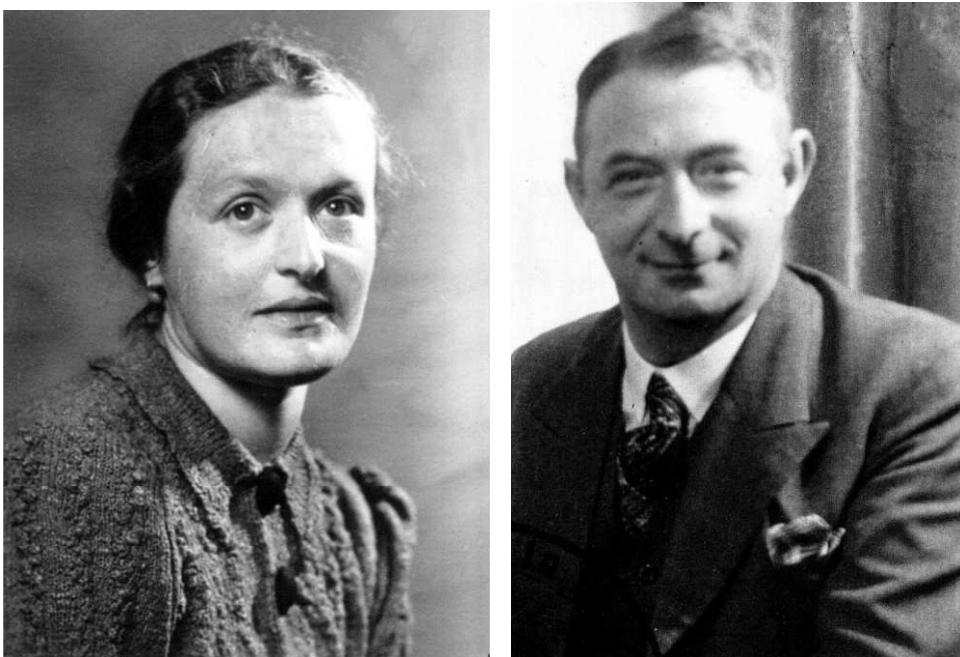
"I remember the day after the Kristallnacht. I rode my bike to the prison to bring blankets, food and money for my father. My brother was too scared and did not want to leave the house. When I got there I was told that my father had been released, that is why I gave everything to my uncles who were there . . .

When I came home, he was there. The Nazi official, who had apparently interceded for the family, had arranged for his release and made it possible for him to leave Laupheim . . . Two days later we drove to the Swiss border with his car and off into freedom . . . From Switzerland we went to Paris and there we learned that the Nazis wanted to confiscate our personal belongings, which were still in Hamburg, because of outstanding taxes. My grandmother had money in a bank in Laupheim, so my father and the German embassy in Paris agreed upon the return of our furniture if my father gave the remaining account balance to the Reich. That's how we got our belongings out of Germany. We came to New York on Christmas Eve in 1941 with \$2 in my father's pocket. My father worked as a busboy for \$6 a week. Going to school was not easy because we did not speak English. So I went to a kindergarten and a year later I was passed into the first grade. After my high school graduation, I left school. Two years later I was drafted by the US Marines."

According to his son, having arrived in the United States Wilhelm Obernauer refused to accept financial help from Laemmle because he

strived to provide for himself as much as possible and did not want to keep imposing on him. His two brothers Max and Hermann Obernauer and their families were still in Nazi Germany and helping them emigrate was top priority. At that time both of them were incarcerated in the concentration camp Dachau. Later Hermann Obernauer reported to his nephew that the SS would make them stand in the snow for two hours, barely clothed in the freezing cold.

As one of the last survivors of the prisoners from Laupheim, he was released February 4, 1939, on the condition that he would make an effort to emigrate, which he did at the end of that same year. His health had deteriorated; he was suffering from severe asthma and could only work a limited amount of hours as a door to door salesman in the United States.



Johanna Obernauer, née Lindauer. Wilhelm Obernauer.

(Photo: state archive Sigmaringen –Wü 65/T4 and T5)

In the beginning, life in the United States was very difficult for almost every emigrant, not only because of financial issues, but also because of the language barrier. The then ten year old Max was sent to live with another family for a year and had to visit kindergarten to quickly learn English. After his return to his father, he was sent directly to class 6 b, without having attended the classes 5 a/b and 6 a. He complained all his life that he had lacked certain basic mathematic skills. When he was sixteen, around 1944, he sold war bonds and for this purpose he sought out Carl Laemmle Jr. at the *Plaza Hotel* in New York. This is where he met two of the biggest movie stars of that time: Cary Grant and Ginger Rogers. For the subscription of war bonds, Laemmle Jr. made out a check for \$35,000. Time and again he encountered acquaintances from Laupheim, one of them was Ludwig Steiner who had sent him packages

during his service in the Marines. After his graduation he completed an apprenticeship in interior design and worked at a furniture store. Later on, Max married a Jewish woman and they had a son together.

His brother Heinz served as a US soldier during World War II and at the end of the war he was assigned to guard a German prisoner of war camp in Casablanca. There he met a young man from Laupheim who recognized him. Heinz, too, started a family and had two daughters. He was killed in an accident in 1975 when he was just 50 years old.

After having been invited, Max Obernauer returned to his hometown Laupheim in 1988 to which he developed close emotional ties. He especially liked the annual children's and town fair, but also typical Swabian food such as Dampfnudeln (yeast dumplings). He visited the Upper Swabian town multiple times, once accompanied by his niece Carol, another time by Marjorie, and in 1998 in the company of his son. For him it was a journey into his past whereas for the Obernauer generation born in the United States it was a search for their roots. For many years, Max Obernauer maintained his friendship with the family of Dr. Udo Bayer that took loving care of him.

Max Obernauer's wife became mentally ill which depleted his financial resources and was the reason he worked at a furniture store on Long Island into old age.

When asked about his relationship to religion, he said: "I'm Jewish but I'm not very religious. Until I was 10 or 12 I went to the synagogue every week on Friday night and on important holidays." In the United States he became one of the vice presidents of the society of Jewish communities in New York. But his relationship to religion was strained when he asked his rabbi to pay a visit to his severely ill wife in the hospital, which the rabbi declined by referring him to the local rabbi. He had also wished for support from his rabbi after his son married a Christian woman, as he wanted his grandchildren to be raised in the Jewish faith. Since the rabbi did not grant his wishes he distanced himself from the community. Max Obernauer owned a very special Chanukah candleholder, which is an important part of the merry Jewish festival of lights and starts in Kislev, usually in November or December. It lasts eight days and commemorates the temple's recapture and re-inauguration in Jerusalem during the time of the Maccabees. The eight candles of the Chanukah candleholder are lighted in a specific order.

Max Obernauer bringt Leuchter mit

Ein Geschenk an die Stadt der Väter

LAUPHEIM – Extra zum Heimatfest reiste Max Obernauer aus Hauppauge, Long Island (Staat New York), an. Und der gebürtige Laupheimer brachte etwas mit: Einen sogenannten „Chanukka-Leuchter“, den sein Vater 1938 fertigen ließ. Den wertvollen Kultgegenstand schenkte er gestern dem Laupheimer Museum.

Der silberne Leuchter hat eine besondere Geschichte: Fünfhundert Silbermünzen hatte Max Obernauers Vater, der Laupheimer Zigarrenhändler Wilhelm Obernauer, 1938 als Guthaben auf der Bank. Als die jüdische Familie ins Exil fliehen wollte, verboten ihm die Nazis, das Geld mitzunehmen. Deshalb ließ er von einem Juwelier daraus einen „Chanukka-Leuchter“ machen, der dann wohlbehalten in den USA ankam. Obwohl 1938 gefertigt, steht zur Tarnung die Jahreszahl „1934“ auf dem Leuchter. „Chanukka“ ist das acht tägige jüdische Lichterfest, das im November oder Dezember gefeiert wird.

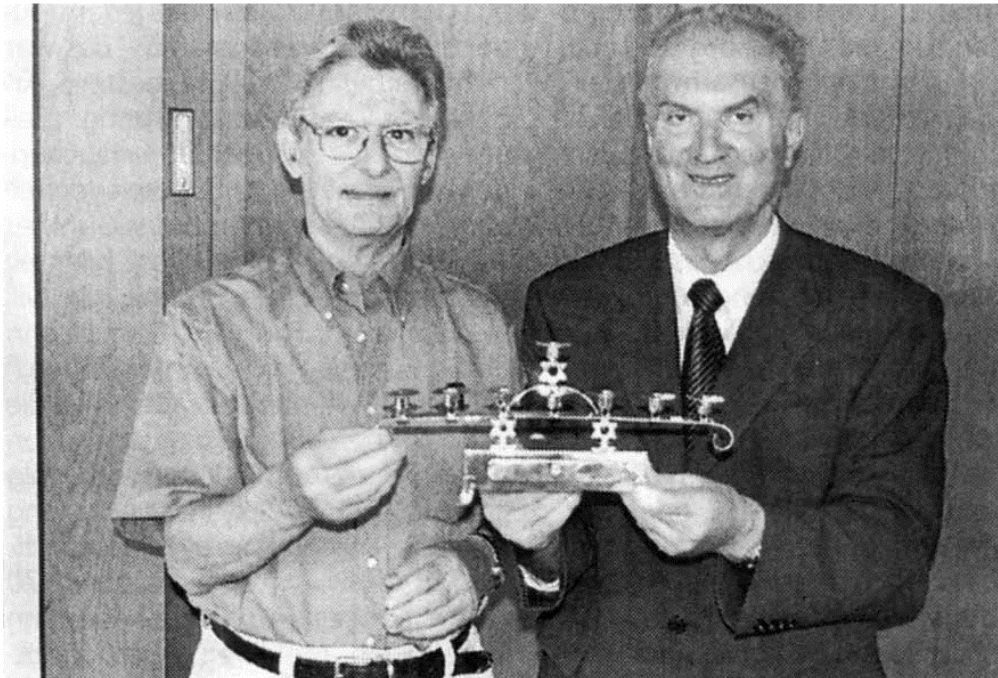
1928 ist Max Obernauer in Laupheim geboren, und zwar in der „Germania“. Dort hatte sein Vater sein Zigarren-

und Zigarettengeschäft, später war es in der Radstraße. Obwohl schon im Alter von fünf Jahren Laupheim verlassen musste, ist die Bindung zur Stadt geblieben: „Als ich 1988 das erste Mal wieder in Laupheim war, konnte ich mich genau erinnern. Jeden Straßennamen kannte ich noch. Und die Menschen brachten mir eine solche Warmherzigkeit entgegen, dass ich beschloss, öfter zu kommen.“ Das mit der Warmherzigkeit war nicht immer so: Max Obernauer erinnert sich auch an die „Reichskristallnacht“ in Laupheim, als sein Bruder sich vor lauter Angst versteckte. Oder wie er seinem Vater, der im Amtsgerichtsgefängnis inhaftiert war, Essen bringen wollte – der war aber mittlerweile schon wieder entlassen, und er ließ das Essen seinem Onkel da. Einige Verwandte von Max Obernauer sind im Konzentrationslager umgekommen. Die Flucht in die USA wurde Obernauers durch Carl Laemmle ermöglicht, der zur Verwandtschaft zählte. An Weihnachten 1938 trafen sie in New York ein – allerdings ohne die Mutter, die nach schwerer Krankheit gestorben war. Sie fand in Laupheim ihre letzte Ruhe – wie viele ih-

rer Vorfahren. „Insgesamt 26 Obernauers sind in Laupheim beerdigt“, berichtet Max Obernauer. Die Obernauers zählen zu den ältesten jüdischen Familien in Laupheim. Auf mütterlicher Seite von Max Obernauer gibt es gemeinsame Vorfahren mit Albert Einstein.

Den „Chanukka-Leuchter“ dem Laupheimer Museum zu spenden, war Max Obernauer schon länger ein Anliegen. „Mein Sohn hat mit der Religion nicht mehr so viel im Sinn. Und bevor ich nicht mehr bin, möchte ich in Laupheim eine Erinnerung an meine Familie hinterlassen“, sagt er in ausgezeichnetem Deutsch. Museumsleiter Alfred Jerg ist hocherfreut über die Spende: „Wir hatten bisher noch keinen jüdischen Kultgegenstand aus Laupheim in unserem Besitz.“ Mit dem Namen des Spenders und seiner Geschichte versehen kann der Leuchter demnächst im Museum bewundert werden. Max Obernauer wird nur noch heute in Laupheim sein – in den vergangenen Tagen hat er mit Dr. Udo Bayer viele Ausflüge in die Region gemacht. Ob er bald wieder nach Laupheim komme? „Mal sehen, was kommt“, sagt der 72-Jährige.

(Schwäbische Zeitung, 06/24/2000, Bernhard Raidt)



Max Obernauer presented Mayor Schick with a valuable Chanukah candleholder from New York.

(Photo: Bernhard Raidt, Schwäbische Zeitung)

The unique silver candleholder was manufactured from 500 of his father's silver coins by a jeweler from Laupheim because Jewish people were not allowed to bring any cash, but could bring objects of worship when they emigrated. Max Obernauer gave it to the *Museum zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden* in Laupheim (museum on the history of Christians and Jews in Laupheim), where it is now a significant contribution to the exhibition.

Sources:

Adreß- und Geschäfts-Handbuch für die Oberamtsstadt und die Bezirksgemeinden Laupheim. 1925. Archiv Ernst Schäll, Laupheim.

Hüttenmeister, Nathanja: Der Jüdische Friedhof Laupheim. Laupheim 1998. S. 517. Interview von Dr. Antje Köhlerschmidt mit Max Obernauer vom 23.06.2000 in Laupheim. Kreisarchiv Biberach 034 BüNr. 3 Az 6104/1.

Laupheimer Verkündiger vom 11.3.1925.

Museum zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden, Schloss Großlaupheim.

Schenk, Georg: Laupheim. Geschichte - Land - Leute. Weißenhorn 1976. S. 160. Standesamt Laupheim. Familienregisterband V. S. 216.

Weil, Jonas: Verzeichnis von Kriegsteilnehmern der israelitischen Gemeinde Laupheim. Laupheim 1919.