

The Jewish Community of Laupheim and its Annihilation

Book Pages 512 - 520

STERNSCHEIN, Hermann,

Restaurant "Zum Kronprinzen",
70 Kapellenstrasse

Translation by: Markus Ganser

ROLF EMMERICH

Hermann Sternschein, born October 11th, 1882 in Ullstadt/Mittelfranken, died October 1957 in New York City/USA,

OO 1. **Babette Sternschein**, née Friedberger, born June 18th, 1885 in Laupheim, died June 30th, 1933,

OO 2. **Else Sternschein née Hellmann**, born January 6th, 1906 in Gunzenhausen, died June 1979 in New York City/USA.

– **Max**, born February, 23rd, 1911, died 1975, New York City/USA,

– **Kurt Sternschein** (in Israel: David Sohari), born November 22nd, 1919; lives in Ramot Meir/Israel, died in January 01th, 2015

– **Ilse Sternschein** (in Israel: Esther Chafri), born August 28th 1922, died Nov. 2002, Kibbutz Maabarot/Israel,

– **Ruth Bechhofer**, born January 13th, 1937; lives in New York City/USA



Hermann and Babette Sternschein (Hermann Sternschein in the car, next to it, his wife Babette and their children, Kurt and Ilse, 1925).

In 1910, Babette and Hermann Sternschein took over the property with the restaurant „Zum Kronprinzen“ (Crown Prince) from Babette's parents, Max and Klara Friedberger (property known as Greek restaurant "Alexis Sorbas" since 1978). Hermann Sternschein was already experienced in wine trading, and he managed to increase the business after various purchase and sale business trips. Wine was delivered in big casks and then filled into bottles and smaller casks to finally be sold to restaurants and private persons. To support the company, Sternschein employed the barrel maker Mr. Els and the accountant Samuel Rosenberger in the twenties. A visible sign for the economic success was Hermann



Hermann Sternschein

*Notel, Cafe u. Weinstube
zum Kronprinzen Laupheim
empfiehlt auf Sylvester!*

Rotweine:

Alter Heilbronner-Trollinger — Alter Heilbronner-Schwarz Riesling

Weissweine:

Alter Weinberger — Alter Heilbronner-Weiss Riesling
prima Tischweine, offen, das Liter versteuert je 1 20
— Flaschen mitbringen —

Eine gute Flasche

Wein, Sekt, Weinbrand, Kirsch, Zwetschgen, Likör oder
Malaga dunkel, extrafein, alt,
in bester Qualität und billigster Preisstellung.

Sternschein's Opel "Laubfrosch" (tree-frog) Convertible (see photo), which he used for business trips to distant suppliers and customers.

A small incident, reported by Sternschein's son David Sohari, shows how strict the family rules were. During lunch time, the children were not allowed to talk at all. Once during a family lunch, when Max was around ten years old, he was sent to the cellar to fill a jug of wine. It took him a while to return and when he returned he tried to urgently explain something with many words. "Silence, we don't talk during mealtime!" was his father's loud reaction. Quite some time after lunch was over the son finally confessed why it had taken him so long to

return to the table: "I couldn't get the tap closed." What an embarrassing situation. Because of it, many liters of good wine were spilled on the cellar floor.

With regards to the restaurant 'Zum Kronprinzen', Sternschein's daughter Eshter Chafri reported: "The restaurant was known for its kosher cuisine, which was my mother's home turf. Customers included people with a distinct taste, many of them Jews from the surrounding area. Many guests used to come for years and some of them turned into friends over time. The family and household were traditionally Jewish. The Jewish community held many festivities in the big ball room of the 'Kronprinzen'. Even Jews from Ulm came to celebrate at our place."

Hermann and Else Sternschein

Two years after Hermann Sternschein's first wife Else, née Friedberger, had passed away, he married Else Hellmann, who was 24 years his junior. (The photo shows the couple after their marriage at Lake Constance in 1935.) At the beginning of 1937, Else gave birth to their daughter Ruth. The girl was the last baby to be born to the formerly large Jewish community of Laupheim.

After 1933, the restaurant and wine trading were faced with massive boycotts and the formerly flourishing wine business came to a complete halt. This resulted in the economic ruin of the family. The big restaurant was subject to expropriation in 1936, and the family was forced into very humble living conditions. The new restaurant owners soon renamed the house to „Deutsches Haus“ (German House), which for the Nazis was a perfect example of "successful aryangement". The family didn't have enough to live, but too much to die", is how David Sohari characterized this situation later.

In the so-called Kristallnacht (Night of broken glass), Hermann Sternschein was threatened with a revolver, arrested and brought to the Dachau concentration camp together with other Jewish citizens from Laupheim. His hope that the medals once awarded to him for being a front-line soldier for four years during the First World War could save him were in vain. After having been severely mistreated, he returned to Laupheim on Dec. 18, 1938 in poor condition. His daughter Esther Chafri wrote: „At the age of 55 he came back from the concentration camp, alive, but a mentally broken man.“ The regime tried to destroy the self-confidence of any Jewish individual.



Humiliations by the Nazis were ceaseless. Here's a quote from the „Laupheimer Kurier”, dated September 7th, 1939, only a few days after the invasion of the German army in Poland; titled Jewish Insolence. “The Jew Sternschein, known all over town for his arrogant behavior, recently dared to greet a member of the German Wehrmacht with the German salute “Heil Hitler”, then asking him how things were going.

Obviously, he thought that the soldier would not notice that he was a Jew and would start a conversation with him. Now, being in jail, Sternschein has enough time to think about his insolent attitude”. As a matter of fact, Hermann Sternschein was rigorously interrogated, but finally released after several days of arrest. Hermann Sternschein considered himself a German patriot. This is illustrated by the following advertisement: „We offer price reductions for Reichswehr forces”, which he announced in 1924.

Staying in Laupheim was no longer an option: In 1939 Hermann and Else Sternschein felt forced to emigrate with their little daughter Ruth. The elder children had already left Germany. The required affidavits from the United States were hard to obtain. Carl Laemmle wrote that he had already done the utmost possible with signing 360 affidavits; finally support came from Else's emigrated brother. At the beginning of 1940, Hermann Sternschein managed to emigrate to New York before his wife. It was always a humiliating procedure when Else Sternschein and her little daughter Ruth were called for audition at the Gestapo in Stuttgart, and only after several iterations did they manage to get the permission to emigrate. With a flight ticket to Madrid, mother and daughter got out of the country literally “last minute”. It was shortly before the USA entered into the war against Nazi Germany. After that, emigration would not have been impossible any more. Simple jobs such as cleaning services kept the family alive. „My father didn't have a good ending in America”, said his son David later.

Einquartierung!

Truppen der Reichswehr erhalten
bei mir **Vorzugs-Preise.**

Prima Rot- u. Weißweine
das Viertel 30 und 35 Pfennig.

Diverse erstklassige
Liköre und Spirituosen.

Neues Billard und Klavier.

Angenehmer Aufenthalt.

Strenge reelle Bedienung.

Hermann Sternschein,
Weinhandlung :: Hotel z. Kronprinzen

Max Sternschein

After graduating from school, he completed a commercial training in a leather company in Ulm. He had a job there until it was forbidden by the Nazis.

After the 1938 November pogroms, he was also arrested, and taken into "protective custody" from Ulm to the Dachau concentration camp. After having been released in early 1939, he emigrated to New York. We could not find out more about his further fate.

Kurt Sternschein, later known in Israel as Israel David Sohari



„Until 1933 it was beautiful; we really loved our home town Laupheim“, This is how David put it even after 60 years abroad. David Sohari (Kurt Sternschein) and Ilana Sohari, Ramot Meir/Israel

Kurt Sternschein attended the Jewish elementary school together with [Siegfried Einstein](#), and from 1929 secondary school. He used to play soccer with the local talents Rudolf Rechtsteiner and Emil Esswein.

For two years he attended a trade school in Ulm and received business training at the company Sternweiler und Schlesinger (Herbo). According to David, the hatred could be felt in the air soon after 1933. It could be heard in horrible and racist songs. "Things got worse overnight", he said later. He took a job with the Jewish farmer Hermann Nördlinger in Buttenhausen which allowed him to prepare himself for emigration.

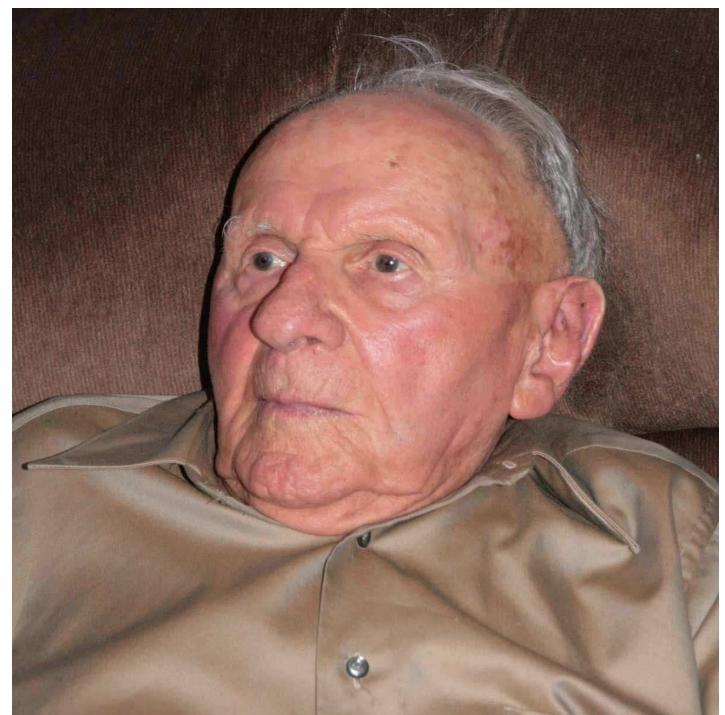
There it was better and calmer than in Ulm. "You tried to get your daily bread", he had recalled.

Before he turned 16 years old, he joined the Youth Aliyah to get to Erez, Israel. He went from Karlsruhe to Marseille by train and continued the rest of the journey by ship.

"Thanks to the emerging hatred in Germany I was warned and saved", is how he put it later. In the beginning, he lived and did farm work in the Kibbutz Tel Josef and Tel Hai. It was a life of hardship and hunger. He soon wanted to return to Laupheim. This is what he wrote to his father in 1937. "Stay where you are and eat dry bread", was the immediate response. David managed his way through these years. Then, he met his wife Ilona who was born in Berlin. In 1948 they married in the young state of Israel. On May 28th, 1949 their son Ruben was born. Ilona suffered from the displacement her whole life. In a way, she had taken the very last train from Berlin in 1941.

David Sohari settled in in the little village Ramot Meir close to Tel Aviv and became a farmer with land of his own. He ran a farm and agricultural business, which his son Ruben, a graduate of agricultural studies, continued intensely. Goods included, and continue to include flowers, rare exotic fruit, but also nectarines, peaches and citrus fruits. Up to today, they have continued to adjust the product offering to accommodate the market and wholesaler demands.

In 1968, David and Ilona Sohari visited Germany for the first time after their emigration. They also went to Laupheim and Mannheim. In the latter city, they visited the writer [Siegfried Einstein](#), his teenage friend from



Laupheim. More Laupheim visits followed in 1987 and in 1988, when he was officially invited with other Jewish citizens originating from Laupheim by the town authorities.

Until his death, David was mentally vibrant and interested in getting news from Laupheim. "Before 1933, Laupheim was a paradise for me. With the Nazis all the beautiful things came to an end." Sorrow sets the tone for the words that David Sohari used to express his youth under the name of Kurt Sternschein. See the picture right from 2014.

Ilse Sternschein, later known in Israel as Esther Chafri

In 1933, when she was only eleven years old, her world broke apart. Her mother died and the Nazis destroyed their harmonic life in Laupheim.

Whoever go to know her, cannot forget her. At least that's what her friends and relatives said. She did not have an easy living, but she was an extraordinary person. She wrote:

„In our town the Jewish elementary school went to the fourth grade. From the 5th grade on, there were secondary and junior high schools for those intending to continue their education. But after 1936 Jews were no longer allowed in these institutions. Already in the first years of the Nazi regime life became unsupportable, particularly in the small towns and villages, where everybody knew and observed everyone. Even my German (non-Jewish) girlfriend gave up her relationship with me over time“.

There was only one flaw on her report cards from 1933 on: the swastika on each page. She was an excellent student. Her school report was handed over to the Yad Vashem archive. Esther continues as follows:

“When I graduated from school in 1936 after eight years of schooling, I wanted to learn professional sewing, but being Jewish I wasn't allowed to attend the vocational college. So I started a job at a garment factory that was run by Jews. I was quite successful and earned good money, but this episode also came to an end. In a “clearance sale” the company got into “Aryan hands”. It was another severe blow for me and my family as we were forced by the Nazi regime to move to another house.

Under these circumstances, every new day imposed another heavy load on the hearts of all of us. In the “Kristallnacht” my father was arrested. They brought him to the Dachau concentration camp. There, something happened that would leave a decisive mark on the future. Along with my father, they had also detained my Jewish ex-teacher, Mr. Heinz Säbel. He was a young and progressive man. It was he who could finally convince my father to allow his 16 year old daughter to join the Youth Aliyah and

go to Erez, Israel. Nonetheless, he still acted against his inner feelings. „What is it you want in the desert”, was what he stated. But my elder brother (David) had already immigrated to Israel in 1936.

I remember having had a hard time fitting in to the new situation in the preparation camp north of Berlin. I had a strong Swabian accent and only a few people could understand me. Many times, my pronunciation alone gave way to outbursts of laughter.

Despite having signed the papers, my parents were actually against my emigration to Israel. They rather wanted me to go with them to the United States. However, I managed to go my way.

I was among the youngest in the preparation group. On January 1st, 1939 my father accompanied me on the way to Munich to say good bye, where I joined the group departing by train. I only saw him again shortly before his death. "

Esther and Ilitsch Chafri im Kibbuz Maabarot in Israel

"In the beginning we lived in tents, later in shantytowns with 4 people per room", reported Esther about the start in Israel. The Kibbutz Maabarot already had a children's home with bullet-proof concrete walls when Esther started to work there in the early forties. For decades she was in charge of child care and education. In these times, all the children of the community lived almost all the time in the children's home. Her husband Elijahu, nicknamed Ilitsch, was six years older and was the electrician of the Kibbutz until reaching retirement age. In the first years, one of Ilitsch's tasks was to fight the mosquitos. For weeks he was busy spraying poisonous "greengrass" dust in the swamps. Nevertheless, malaria continued to be the major plague in the pioneer years.

Esther and Ilitsch were highly respected in their community. As active members they contributed largely to the change from the originally 100% agriculture-based Kibbutz to an economic community geared towards industrial production of food and pharmaceuticals. Today, beautiful family houses, a swimming pool, a school, and a community center are visible signs of the commitment of the community members.



Their daughter Rea Davisch lives with her family in Maabarot; the other daughter Orit Dalman lives in the neighbor town Nathania. Their son Ilan Chafri moved with his family to Philadelphia in the United States.

Ruth und Guenther Bechhofer

Ruth was the last child born to the Jewish community of Laupheim.

"Why do these men look so evil?" asked little Ruth when she and her mother had to show up again at the Gestapo office in Stuttgart attempting to get the required permits for emigration. As she could not find an appropriate baby sitter in Laupheim, Ruth's mother always had to take the little girl with her on these repeated trips to the demeaning auditions in Stuttgart.

Six months after Hermann Sternschein had left the country, Else and their little daughter could finally follow him. A flight to Madrid was the late rescue. From there it was by train to Lisbon and then by ship to New York. It's hard to imagine such a journey taking place at the beginning of the Second World War.

Ruth grew up in NYC. The German language was a no go, that's how the little child experienced it. Every time her father picked her up at the Kindergarten, he had to speak English. "If you speak German with me, I'm going to run away", was her usual threat.

After school and vocational training she worked in school administration, lastly as assistant director at a large school. She has visited Germany several times, with Laupheim being a special destination. She has developed many good contacts and friendly relationships with some of the Laupheim residents from these visits. Guenther Bechhofer from Bechhofen/Franken, born in 1927, is still a high school teacher for American literature and history.

Else and Ruth Sternschein, approx. in 1948.





Ruth and Guenther Bechhofer.

Ruth and Guenther lead a culturally active life and are well informed in many respects. They live consciously in the Jewish tradition, for which New York City provides the right prerequisites.

For many years, Ruth has been a passionate Big Apple greeter, providing exciting city tours for tourists to show them the particularities of the city. Anyone participating in these excursions can feel that she loves to live in NYC and experience the stories she tells in her charming and lively way.

Special credit goes to the relatives of the Sternschein family, who were all willing to provide information and their knowledge as well as the photos for this documentation.