

Sebastian Ganser

A dauntless man of the people with solid moral principles

By Ursula Volwiler und Markus Ganser

This article provides a glimpse of the world Sebastian Ganser, a native of Laupheim, lived in from the beginning of the 1920s until the post-war years of the past century. In particular, the article focuses on his grappling with national socialism and his social interactions with Jewish fellow residents in Laupheim.

Farmer and Member of the State Parliament

- October 12, 1882 to July 8, 1957
- Married to Kreszenz Ganser, née Hegerle (1887-1960),

The couple's children:

- Franz (1919-1992)
- Theresia (1921-2002)
- Sebastian jun. (1921 – gef. 1945)
- Antonie (1922)
- Eugen (1923- 1969)
- Eleonore (1928-1999)
- Josef (1929-2005)



Before 1933

Born in Laupheim, Sebastian Ganser completed vocational training at the agricultural college in Hohenheim and, following his graduation, ran the family farm in Laupheim. The property was located on 36 Mittelstrasse. Ganser – known around town as Bäuerles Baschde – was co-founder of the dairy cooperative in Laupheim and managed the local agricultural purchasing and marketing cooperative between 1919 and 1922.

Strongly influenced by his Catholic faith, Ganser was also a representative of the German Center Party (Zentrumspartei) in the Württemberg Parliament between 1920 and 1924. In addition, he was a member of Laupheim's city council. He took as a matter of course that a functioning community relied on an equal partnership between Christians and Jews. Accordingly, he maintained friendly ties with many fellow residents who were Jewish, such as the family of Max Obernauer¹.

Ganser's wife Kreszenz was a regular client at Hofheimer's Clothing and Linen Store, a Jewish business. One day, when she did not have enough money to pay for her purchases, Mrs. Hofheimer offered this simple suggestion: "Just bring a few eggs then!"²

Of course, this seemingly banal incident does not fully represent the social atmosphere in Laupheim before 1933, and yet it illustrates based on a specific case the uncomplicated interaction between people in Laupheim, with practically no regard as to whether somebody was Jew or Christian.

Events in Laupheim after 1933

Even after the National Socialists had seized power, Ganser held on to his attitude and “consistently maintained good relations with Jewish families after 1933.”³ According to eyewitness reports, SA-members (Translator’s note: SA = Sturmabteilung, the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party) and their supporters repeatedly directed acts of nighttime aggression at the Ganser farmstead on 36 Mittelstrasse (then renamed to Adolf-Hitler-Strasse), smashing windows and defacing walls with graffiti, while yelling threats. Sebastian Ganser’s daughter Antonie relates a childhood memory according to which she was called a “black sow” and beaten up in school. (Translator’s note: The term “black” was meant to denounce her family’s affiliation with a different party and opposition to National Socialism, symbolized by the color brown.) In another incident during that time, also historically documented, Ganser openly showed his aversion to an SA parade on Mittelstrasse by spontaneously hitching his manure cart, setting out to fertilize his fields and literally raining on the SA parade.⁴

An NS Victim in the Family

Verbal attacks by Nazis and their followers were one thing; another matter altogether was how the National Socialist regime showed its barbarous world view to the Ganser family firsthand: Augustin Ganser, Sebastian’s elder brother, was mentally handicapped and cared for over several years at a residential treatment facility in Heggbach. In the course of the systematic extermination of mentally handicapped people at the hands of the Nazi regime ([Aktion T4](#)) he was taken away from Heggbach as part of a cloak-and-dagger collective transport and immediately killed at [Grafeneck Castle](#). According to archived information at the documentation center of Grafeneck memorial, this happened on September 11, 1940.⁵ Sebastian Ganser’s daughter Antonie remembers well the gloomy day when the unsuspecting family received a letter from Grafeneck containing a formal note about the “unexpected death” of their family member.⁶

The Situation of Jewish Residents

After 1933, discrimination against the Jewish population of Laupheim became the norm. Amid forced expropriations many long-established Jewish families soon came to the conclusion that fleeing their homeland was the only remaining alternative; whoever was able to emigrate, did so. Most of the older Jewish residents who stayed in Laupheim and who were confined in collective housing in Wendelinsgrube or the former rabbinate, on the other hand, faced deportation and death.

Ganser reportedly helped Jewish families flee. As a horse-drawn hearse driver he took care of transporting deceased persons in Laupheim. Repeatedly he set out beyond the district boundaries when somebody had died in Heggbach or Dellmensingen, where Jews were forced to stay in camps.⁷ At the very least, he thus ensured the dignified burial of these victims of Nazism at the Jewish cemetery in Laupheim.⁸

As a result of his defiant behavior he was picked up and interrogated on several occasions, but managed to make it to the end of the war with nothing more than verbal threats.

One anecdote illustrates why Sebastian Ganser suffered no more than verbal threats in his community: He was quick-witted and usually had enough evidence against those who denounced him. For instance, a resident of Laupheim loyal to the party accused him of illicitly slaughtering farm animals and threatened to notify the police. Ganser took the wind out of his sails by saying: "Sure, and you came and stuffed your face each time, that's why you know about it so well."⁹

Post-War Years

Another historically documented event took place in the early post-war years, when a large American limousine with foreign license plates stopped in front of the Ganser property on 36 Mittelstrasse. Helmut Steiner, born in Laupheim, got out of the car in order to thank Sebastian Ganser for what he had done on behalf of the Jewish residents in Laupheim. Helmut Steiner had emigrated to Switzerland with his family in 1936.¹⁰



After the Second World War, Ganser was a founding member of the CDU (Translator's Note: Christian Democratic Union party) in Laupheim and its chairman until 1953. Between 1946 and 1948, he was again a member of the Laupheim city council. In addition, he was a member of the state parliament from 1947 to 1953. Sebastian Ganser was also well-known for his sense of humor and verbal wit.¹¹ „In agricultural circles he was esteemed as an open-

mindful mentor and he always shared with the public his vast life experiences." He is described as a „man of stately appearance, politically astute and humorous, who was able to elicit occasional laughter during an assembly with his strong voice."¹² He excused his occasional absence from parliament in Stuttgart in polished High German as follows: „While my colleagues in Parliament make laws, I must remain at home, tend my fields and spray 'Saich'."¹³ (Translator's note: The word Saich is dialect for liquid manure, which in proper German is called Jauche or Gülle)

Sebastian Ganser died on July 8, 1957 at the age of 74.



The Ganser residence (36 Mittelstrasse) in the 60s

Left picture: view from Anna-von-Freyberg School



Right picture: View of building from Schmidstrasse; torn down in the early 80s.

[1] see: Emmerich, Rolf: Kehillah Laupheimer Spuren. Stuttgart und Laupheim. 2012. ISBN 978-3-933726-44-5. (pages 165-166); (Details about the family of Max Obernauer in „Die jüdische Gemeinde in Laupheim und ihre Zerstörung“. 2013. ISBN 978-3-00-025702-5 or online edition at <http://www.gedenkbuch.de/KAPITEL/71%20OBERNAUER%20Max.htm>)

[2] as told by Eleonore Ganser, daughter of Sebastian Ganser; details about the Hofheimer family in „Die jüdische Gemeinde in Laupheim und ihre Zerstörung“. 2013. ISBN 978-3-00-025702-5 or online edition at <http://www.gedenkbuch.de/KAPITEL/50e%20HOFHEIMER%20Clara.htm>)

[3] *ibid.*

[4] as remembered by Antonie Seeberger, daughter of Sebastian Ganser (interview from 2010)

[5] written information by the documentation center of Grafeneck memorial, dated August 5, 2016

[6] further information about formalized condolence letters from Grafeneck at <https://grafeneck.finalnet.de/letter.php>

[7] These collective housing camps were nothing more than stopovers for dispossessed and displaced Jews, who were later deported to concentration camps in Eastern Europe. In this context, also see the Wikipedia post about [11. Verordnung zum Reichsbürgergesetz vom 25. 11. 1941](#). This regulation was used by National Socialists as an arbitrary judiciary tool to legitimize the expropriation of emigrated Jews, and later the expropriation of deported Jews.

[8] as remembered by Antonie Seeberger, neé Ganser; see also: Emmerich, Rolf: Kehillah Laupheimer Spuren. Stuttgart und Laupheim. 2012. ISBN 978-3-933726-44-5. (pages 165-166); the names of all victims of Nazism from the collective housing camps in Heggbach and Dellmensingen buried at the Jewish Cemetery in Laupheim are listed in Nathanja Hüttenmeister: Der jüdische Friedhof Laupheim. 1998. ISBN 3-00-003527-3 (pages 521-529);

re. the biography of Frida Dettelbacher, who was forcibly relocated to and died in a nursing home in Dellmensingen and is buried at the Jewish Cemetery, see [Webseite der Initiative Stolpersteine Göppingen e.V.](http://www.stolpersteine-gp.de/?page_id=1117) at http://www.stolpersteine-gp.de/?page_id=1117

[9] as remembered by Antonie Seeberger, neé Ganser

[10] as remembered by Antonie Seeberger, neé Ganser (Interview from 2010); details about the Steiner family in „Die jüdische Gemeinde in Laupheim und ihre Zerstörung“. 2013. ISBN 978-3-00-025702-5; details about the Steiner family in „Die jüdische Gemeinde in Laupheim und ihre Zerstörung“. 2013. ISBN 978-3-00-025702-5 or online edition at <http://www.gedenkbuch.de/KAPITEL/84%20STEINER%20SIMON.htm>)

[11] Article in Schwäbische Zeitung from July 19, 1957, also printed in CDU Stadtverband Laupheim: Festschrift 50 Jahre 1946 – 1996

[12] from: CDU Stadtverband Laupheim: Festschrift 50 Jahre 1946 – 1996

[13] cited from: Grötzinger, Marlies: Laupheimer Anekdoten & Originale. 1997. ISBN 300000954x. (pages 25-26), also mentioned in Eß, Robert: Bilderbuch Alt-Laupheim, Laupheim 2015. (p. 136)