

SALAMANDER - LEVI FAMILY OF STUTTGART

VERSION 03

Extract of ancestral display by Rolf Hofmann (HarburgProject@aol.com) with help of descendants of the Levi family

The Salamander Story began in 1891, when the Jewish leather merchant Max Levi of Stuttgart founded a shoe manufacturing company in Kornwestheim (near Stuttgart in southern Germany) together with the Christian master shoe maker Jakob Sigle. In 1903 they started a joint venture with the shoe dealer Rudolf Moos in Berlin, who was in search of producers of excellent and inexpensive shoes in large quantities. This was the start of the Salamander Shoe Manufacturing Company. Within twenty years it became the largest shoe company in Germany, exclusively selling shoes in its own shops all over Germany. All of Max Levi's brothers (except Morris) and his Rothschild brothers-in-law participated in this shoe and leather business. When Max Levi died in 1925 he had just finished building his new family home, which in fact looked more like a castle. He also had financial problems, as he had acquired other shoe factories, and things had run out of control. His brother Sem Levi took care of the Salamander business in Berlin, his brother Siegfried Levi went on with the main business together with Arthur Levi and members of the Rothschild and Sigle family. Siegfried Levi had an amazing hobby: he had bought Stettenfels Castle near Heilbronn and was breeding horses for the Hoppegarten Race Track in Berlin.. When Adolf Hitler came to power only Siegfried Levi and his brother Arthur were still alive. Under pressure of Nazi authorities they had to sell their Salamander shares and other personal properties and finally managed to escape to the USA and South Africa. Max Levi's widow emigrated to Switzerland. The Salamander Company was again successful after World War II, but during the following decades increasing wages led to a decline in profits. Labor in Eastern Europe and Asia had become much cheaper and Salamander was forced to close factories in Germany. Around the year 2000 there was not much left of the once glorious shoe enterprise. The Villa of Max Levi in Stuttgart survived under the city's ownership and still reminds of the ups and downs of a shoe empire that once was unique in Germany. The Salamander brand is still well known in Germany, but only very few people really know of the Jewish aspect of this amazing story.

