

The Art of the Other Thannhauser Family and the Courbet

By Kitty Munson Cooper

Art appreciation and collecting seems to run in our Thannhauser family. Most of the art world have heard of Justin and Heinrich Thannhauser, whose Impressionist collection has its own wing in the Guggenheim museum (see <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/about-the-collection/new-york/thannhauser-collection/1647>). But their cousin Siegfried, a famous medical doctor and professor, also collected, as did his daughter, my mother, Gretchen Thannhauser Munson.

The German Jewish Thannhauser family were wealthy merchants, art collectors, and scientists. Our great-grandfather Joseph was awarded the title “Kommerzialrat” by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, which is a noble title awarded to important merchants. Joseph collected beer mugs, and his ceramics factory also made pewter beer mug lids, so look for “Bruden Thannhauser” on old mug lids in antique stores. His wife was known informally among her detractors as the chamberpot queen since that was one of the items they manufactured.



Munich of the 1800s was the capital of the kingdom of Bavaria which flourished as a center of culture and the arts. According to Wikipedia. “Many of the city's finest buildings belong to this period and were built under the first three Bavarian kings. Later Prince Regent Luitpold's years as regent were marked by tremendous artistic and cultural activity in Munich (see [Franz von Stuck](#) and [Der Blaue Reiter](#)). “

The name Thannhauser means “from Thannhausen,” a town in Swabia near Augsburg under the rule of the counts Stadion, who had kicked out their Jewish community in 1717/1718 for reasons unknown. This was a common practice among small German principalities. The duke or prince would invite the Jews in, borrow money from them, run up too much debt, and then find some religious excuse to expel them without paying them back. The Thannhausen Jews went to various places; our ancestors went to Mönchsdeggingen, while Justin's went to Hürben (Krumbach). Others went to Fellheim, Ichenhausen and other places nearby.

When Napoleon controlled Bavaria he mandated that all Jews take surnames; this gradually took effect in the period from 1813-1815. Before then they had been known by their name and their father's name.



Siegfried's study in the Heidelberg home



Pictures from Heidelberg 1929

Thus many of the former members of the Jewish community of Thannhausen took the name Thannhauser. So when Mina Thannhauser of Mönchsdeggingen (sister of my great-great-grandfather

Abraham Thannhauser) married Jonas Thannhauser of Hürben (Krumbach) it was not necessarily a cousin marriage. Both Mina and her brother Abraham moved to Munich, which was clearly the place to be in those days. Their sons Heinrich and Josef were three years apart and the cousins grew up spending a great deal of time together. When they each had sons, Siegfried and Justin, (seven years apart), they again saw a lot of each other. As is often the case, when families live in the same area they tend to stay close.

Neither family was very religious. They had bar mitzvahs and went to synagogue on high holy days, but were much like the reformed Jews of today in the USA. Like many prominent Jews of that era, they considered themselves Germans first and Jews second. My grandfather was among the first generation of Jews to go to university. He collected two doctorates, one in medicine and one in chemistry, and became a medical doctor, researcher, and professor doing important work in the understanding of metabolism and lipids. His book on metabolism is still in print.



Opa's Study in Dusseldorf ca 1931

The way my mother told it, as a young man Uncle Heinrich went to study in Paris and kept sending home for more money to “matriculate.” But in practice he was buying paintings from impecunious artists, many of whom became famous impressionists. This story has not been corroborated by either of my mother's sisters so may be apocryphal. On the other hand my mother knew Justin well in New York.

Heinrich wanted to be an artist, but he did not have the talent. When his father died, he sold his family tailoring business and became an art dealer, introducing many of the modern, at that time, artists to Munich society with his Gallerie Thannhauser. See the wikipedia article https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thannhauser_Galleries

His son, Justin, was happy to enter this family business and became close personal friends with Picasso. It is possible my mother's story about matriculating is really about Justin and I got that confused. Cousin Mark got a Picasso plate for his bar mitzvah from "Uncle" Justin!



Opa in his study in Brookline home ca 1945?

My grandfather, Siegfried Joseph Thannhauser, or Opa to us, was also an avid collector. He collected “plastik” - German gothic carved religious figures, as well as French Louis XV and XVI furniture, and German romantic art. His few French paintings tended to be landscapes, like the Courbet and the Signac. He did own one Renoir nude sketch. All of these came from Heinrich and Justin, whose medical needs he took care of at no charge. There are some wonderful stories in the biography written about his life.

My mother contributed this story. When Uncle Heinrich tried to sell him a Van Gogh Sunflower for 500 marks, Opa said “500 marks for that junk! Why for that I can get a beautiful plastik!”

In practice, it was my grandmother Fanny who collected much of the good art and antiques. She audited art and chemistry classes at whatever university Opa was teaching at. She befriended an upcoming artist, Heinrich Knirr, later famous for his portrait of Hitler. She employed him doing family portraits and portraits of Opa's patients.



Oma and Opa's Bedroom Frieburg ca 1933

Opa was paid in gold pieces by his many foreign patients which helped during those hyperinflationary times and our grandmother bought much of the French Louis XV and XVI furniture then.

When the last Guggenheimer, maiden aunt Therese, died in Regensburg in 1911 no one else had the time to go there and wind up the estate except mother's grandmother Charlotte Langermann Thannhauser. This is when our family aquired all the Biedermeier furniture and the Guggenheimer china and family portraits seen here: <http://kittymunson.com/index.php?page=guggenheimer>

Apparently the Erlanger cousins were quite annoyed not to get any of these things, but since that line has died out now, no harm done.

My grandmother (“Oma”) was the one who insisted the Thannhausers leave Germany after Opa was “retired” or pensioned off when all Jews were dismissed from university posts in 1933. Like many German Jews he thought it would blow over. When the Rockefeller foundation courted him for a job at Tufts Medical School in Boston, the family story is that Oma telegraphed the acceptance and then told him they were leaving. However they did go to Boston for a look see first, and clever Oma measured all the windows in the new home for drapes made more cheaply back in Germany. That first home was a Beacon St apartment with only 18 rooms, quite a bit smaller than what they were used to! Also she had the family wedding veils for her daughters made or refurbished at that time. It was easy to take things, but not money out of Germany,.

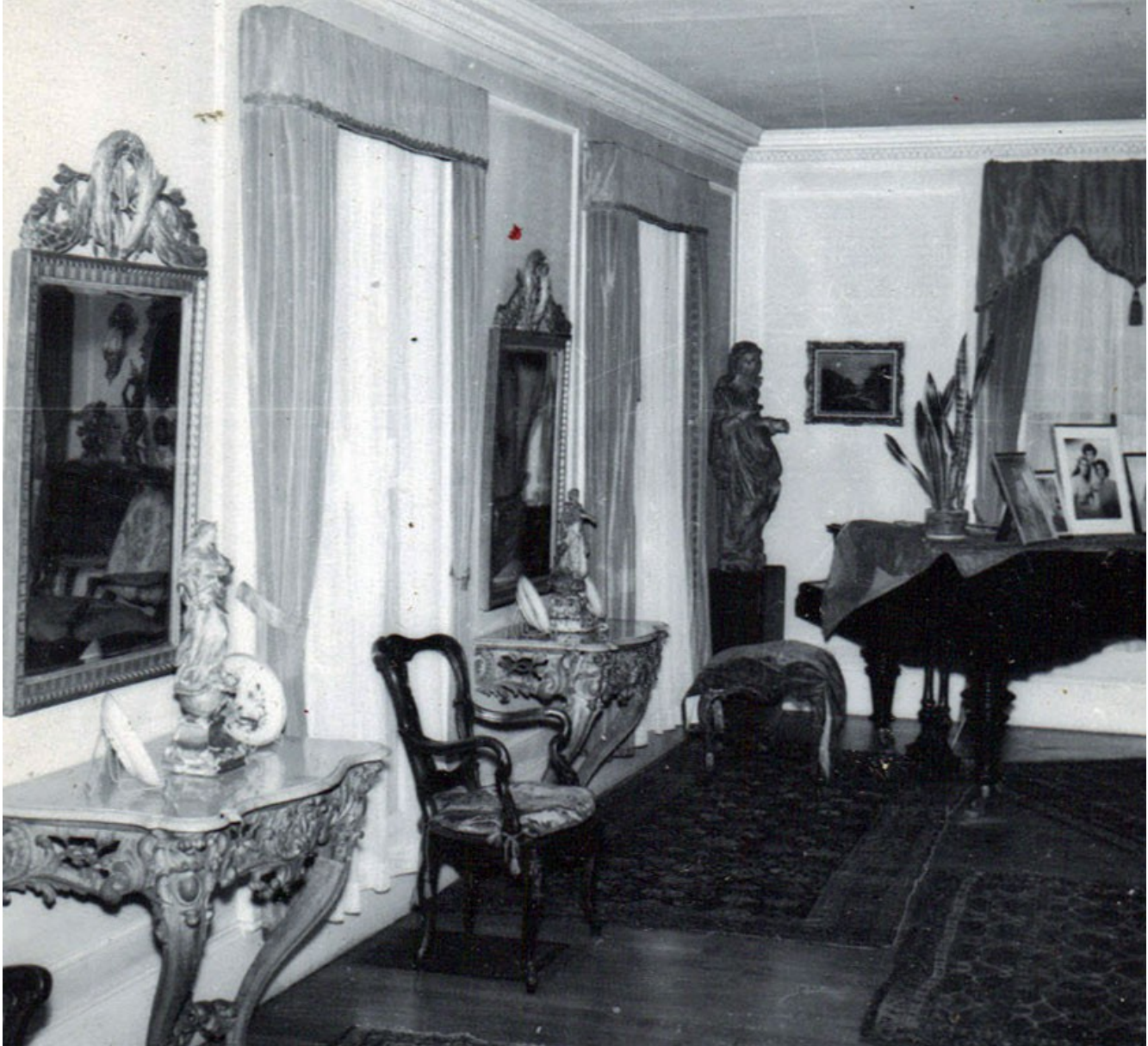
There is also a family story that she ran gold to Switzerland on many a weekend. When the time came to pay the emigration tax and the tax man was going through the books (which she kept) he asked, “Where did the money go?” She batted her big blue eyes and said “Och, my husband asks me the same question!” Apparently that worked and she got his future pension allocated to pay off the very large exit tax.



Sitting room in Frieburg home ca 1934

Because the Thannhausers moved to the U.S.A. so early, they were able to take almost all their possessions: the art, furniture, china, silver and so on. Including the valuable paintings such as the Courbet, Patineer, and Signac.

Also the remaining furnishings were in the only warehouse in Frieburg that was not bombed. So my father, an air force major, was able to bring these items back to the U.S.A. under his home furnishings allowance when we came back from living in England during the Korean War (he was recalled to active duty at that time). My understanding was that these were mainly old fashioned furniture and furnishings inherited from Opa's mother Charlotte, who died in 1933. My grandmother was not



The front part of the great room (living room) in the Ivy St house with the Courbet hanging over the piano ca 1950

fond of these items and there was no room in their new smaller home in Boston so they were left behind.

Since Opa became an American citizen well before the war he was able to get visas to bring out many family members such as the Julius Thannhauser family, the Honbergs, and others. He is also listed as the relative on Justin's immigration record.

Opa's mother had died in 1933, before they left Germany in 1935. However her sister, Opa's Aunt Lina, did not want to leave. She later committed suicide in Munich in 1942 because she thought both her daughters to be dead and things looked pretty hopeless. Her violin player daughter, Josie, did die on the way to Auschwitz but her other daughter, Bella, the doctor, made it safely to Israel with some financial help from our family.



The Courbet in outdoor lighting, Colorado 2013

Opa also received compensation from the US government for his “American” property destroyed by US bombing. This was arranged by his lawyer daughter, Stasi.

Many family members died during WWII. Some in concentration camps, some fighting against Hitler. Justin's son Heinz died on an Allied bombing mission over Italy. His other son was never quite right and died in an institution in N.Y. state. Being childless it was logical for him to give his art collection to the Guggenheim. Although I would have liked to have that Cezanne over his piano!

Our cousin Mitzi's son Sam Sherman wrote a marvellous report for school many years agoon Heinrich and Justin and the Thannhauser Gallery using a wonderful resource, the ZADIK archives - now on our site at http://kittymunson.com/Thannhauser/Uncle_Heinrich_Final.pdf



Picasso (left) gifts “Lobster and Cat” to Justin (center) and Hilde (right).
Picasso’s wife Jacqueline took the photograph.

The Rosengart branch of the family (Heinrich's sister Sara married a Rosengart) had long since moved to Lucerne to run a branch of the Thannhauser Gallery there. The last Rosengart is Angela, also childless, her collection of Klee and Picasso is part of the "Rosengart Collection" at the Lucerne Museum. You can read more about that on her web site at <http://www.rosengart.ch/benefactress.php5>. Also the Scharff family of California are from Sara Thannhauser Rosengart's daughter Irma. Of Werner who died in 2006 it was written in his obituary "[he] became a major Venice landowner and a patron of the arts who commissioned many of the area's murals." This is reprinted at <http://www.geni.com/people/Werner-Gunther-Scharff/6000000000198298588>

The Dutch Thannhauser family appear to be descended from Heinrich Thannhauser's ancestors from Hürben (Krumbach). Some of them moved to England, South Africa, and Australia. There are not art collectors among them that we are aware of.

There are no more Thannhausers that we know of from our family with that surname since all lines have "daughtered out." However there was at least one son of my great-great-great-great-grandfather Baruch Loeb Thanhauser who emigrated to the U.S.A. in the mid 1800s. This was Samson Thanhauser, who came with his family and a son Ben to Albany NY. We do not know his descendants nor whether they collect art!