

## **19 and 21 Weender Street, Gottingen**

Until 1938: 39 and 37/38 Weender Street

1938-1945: 19 and 21 SA Street

Translator's note: SA stands for *Sturmabteilung*, literally “Storm Detachment”, also known as Storm Troopers and Brown Shirts. They were the uniformed and armed political combat troops of the Nazi Party.

The Gräfenbergs from Adelebsen were a merchant family with a long tradition. A pioneering spirit was always visible in everything they undertook, striving to develop new markets and introduce new ways of selling. This was the prevailing frame of mind in 1864 when two sons came to Göttingen in order to settle down there.

Louis, aged 27, opened a “manufactured goods store” in Weender Street. His young brother Carl initially worked there as a trainee, and two years later became co-owner of the business. For more than two decades it enjoyed an outstanding reputation in the local linens and clothing sector.

Working single-mindedly, the two brothers managed to work their way up, moving the business several times and finally locating it at its final premises at No. 39 Weender Street around 1875. Here they had acquired an attractive location in the city's main shopping street – one that would be maintained for the next 60 years.

Louis, the founder of the business, died early at the age of 56, but his son Richard would later continue the tradition. In the meanwhile, Carl carried on running the business on his own, transforming it. The beautiful, austere Art Nouveau façade with its curved gable dates from this period. As a “large local business,” the firm was able to advertise for clientele by offering its own custom-made tailor's shop for gentlemen's apparel.<sup>1</sup>

Both Richard and Hugo, Carl's son, received in-depth training as commercial employees. On numerous trips, both locally and abroad, they became familiar with the customs of their branch and made contacts with suppliers. In the 1890s, Richard traveled to the USA where he acquired experience at various American department stores and became familiar with the latest developments in this up-and-coming retail branch. Subsequently, the impressions and knowledge that he acquired there contributed greatly to the modernization of his family's own business. In 1900 the

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<sup>1</sup> Advertisement in the 1901 address book.

sons received powers of attorney, and the following year Carl retired from the business. The second generation now took over the running of the business.

In the meanwhile having become a partnership in commerce, the firm expanded. A visibly more varied range of goods covering manufactured articles, fashion items and ready-made clothing expanded the volume of business. The apparel business developed into a department store selling linens and clothing. There were departments for ladies ready-made clothing with a made-to-measure tailor's shop, for fabric for garments, linings, gentlemen's suitings, bathing costumes, underwear and linens and linen goods for the house and kitchen, gentlemen's articles, ladies' stockings, gloves and leather goods, umbrellas, crafts, needlework, fashion items and notions. It supplied not just all tailoring needs, but also carpets, linoleum, curtains, furnishing and upholstery fabrics. However, after the war the gentlemen's ready-made apparel department with its attached made-to-measure tailor's shop was dropped. The firm was associated with MITEX Inc. of Berlin, which as a buying group of similar businesses made it possible to purchase large-scale amounts of goods at lower prices. The owners also made frequent buying trips to the industrial centers: to Plauen for net curtains, to Chemnitz for stockings, to Bielefeld for linen and to Berlin for ladies and children's ready-to-wear. In addition, various items could be sold on at especially attractive prices as "seconds" or "surplus" goods.

With its wide range and attractive prices, the department store attracted an enthusiastic clientele. But apart private households, a considerable part of its turnover came from its ties with large-scale clients, public and private alike. As an example, they supplied the university hospitals with linen for beds and kitchens, doctors' white coats and surgical cotton wool. Knitting wool went to the sanatorium and nursing home for the patients to work with. Inns and boarding houses in Göttingen and environs, all the way to the Harz area, ordered linens, tablecloths, net curtains, and furnishing material. One of the last major customers in the Nazi period was the well-known Lipfert coffee house.<sup>2</sup> Large numbers of the tailors from the town and its environs bought their accessories and necessities at the store, and also sent their clients to choose material. A special book was kept for these professionals, in which every purchase was recorded and the commission discount calculated. The same

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<sup>2</sup> Whose owner, Otto Lipfert, Master Pastry Chef, district head of the Chamber of Trade and Crafts, Executive Head of the Pastry Chefs Guild, during the war District Economic Leader, only considered himself bound after 1945 to settle his debts to the former owners of the Gräfenberg department store.

service was offered for interior decorators, who were thus able to obtain their materials at special prices. Even smaller businesses from the *Landkreis* (administrative district) obtained various articles from the department store because the prices were more attractive than from wholesalers. Additional passing trade came from the fact that there was an official agency that sold stamps in the store, signposted by a notice at the entrance.

Another feature that attracted shoppers was the modern continuous window along the store front, interrupted only by the glass entrance doors. Sales took place on the first and second floors; the tailor's shop was on the third floor, together with a stockroom, while there was an apartment on the street front. Old business documents and the display window decorations were stored in the attic. Lastly, there was an extra stockroom in the basement, as well as a recreation room for the clerks. There was an entrance to the yard, where was located the garage for the delivery vehicles, and then continued to Gotmar Street. Goods were delivered through the 12 Gotmar Street site; in the later boycott period this second entrance was also used by customers who did not wish to be seen. Despite the large floor space already available, space requirements continued to grow. As a result, around 1928 a lease was taken out on the first floor of the building next door, No. 37/38, and the two store spaces there were remodeled. They were used as display areas and for sales purposes, with offices being fitted out at the rear. Both areas were connected to each other as well as with the main store. Two years later the business premises were renovated in order to bring them up to date. New display tables were acquired and modern light fittings installed.

The department store's personnel was on a similarly large scale. Even in 1932, a crisis year, 61 people were employed (two more than the previous year):

Clerks 45 (34 sales male/female assistants, 9 female tailors, 2 window dressers)

Apprentices 12

Manual workers 3 (2 domestic personnel, 1 female packer)

Company secretary 1

Most of the clerks had been with the firm for years; when there were closing out sales or during the Christmas period, former employees also helped out. Two of the owners' children worked in the business and drew salaries, Richard's son Walter

was the company secretary and was a company executive. Hugo's daughter Anneliese was in overall charge of sales.

Practically no businesses were not affected by the economic collapse that started to take place now, but major establishments such as the **Louis Gräfenberg Department Store** were able to better weather economic crises than small businesses with meager capital resources. Despite the sharp fall in turnover, until 1931 profits remained above the 50,000 Reichsmark level. Only in 1932 did profits take a tumble that was accompanied by a steady slide in turnover.<sup>3</sup> A major role was played in this state of affairs by Nazi Party members' calls for a boycott – calls which were effective even before Hitler seized power.

Denounced as a “Jewish-capitalist department store,” the business was subjected to an attack in the wake of the SA demonstration on March 28, 1933. As a result of the violence, its entire shop window front collapsed. At No. 11 Baurat-Gerber-Street, the house of co-owner Hugo Gräfenberg, who had fought in World War I, was also attacked by SA troops, who smashed in the windows.

The prominent department store now became an object of special attention by the Nazi Party and the SA. It was the largest such establishment in the downtown area, and seemed to be the most suitable object for a anti-Jewish hate campaign. In this period, an attempt was made to frighten customers and owners alike. Often uniformed party members stood in front of the display windows and pointed out the Jewish owners, and the shop front was daubed with slogans. But the old-established store enjoyed the confidence of its large clientele and could not be finished off in this way. The owners were primarily concerned about their overheads. On the one hand they were unable to take part in the economic upturn, but on the other hand they were unable to dismiss any of their staff. Practically the entire “entourage” (the new term for personnel, meaning “followers loyal to Hitler”) belonged to the DAF, the German Workers Front, which ensured that absolutely no employees were fired. Previously lavish advertising was now slashed. Until March 28, advertisements had appeared practically daily in the local paper, the GT, sometimes with the store's own supplement for special sales. Many ads also appeared in the local papers of the surrounding areas, bringing a large rural clientele to the store, particularly on market days. Billboards at the train stations in Göttingen itself as well as neighboring

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<sup>3</sup> No figures are available for 1925, 1933 and 1934 for profits (or losses); the same is true for the 1924 turnover.

locations from Northeim to Hann. Münden had pointed to the store's importance beyond the immediate area. In the city itself, the firm's logo had always been visible on the yellow postal vans. As the year passed, all of this was given up, and the firm's name practically vanished from the public arena. Plans to remodel the plot of land at 12 Gotmar Street for the store's own business purposes disappeared into thin air. The courtyard and site were to be remodeled for sale so as to make it possible to give up the two rented commercial premises.

After Hugo's death in June 1934, his place at the head of the firm was taken by his 24-year-old son, who bore his grandfather's name. The young Carl Gräfenberg had completed his business training and until 1933 had been a deputy departmental head at the Braunschweig firm of Hamburger & Littauer. Later the third generation of Carl and his cousin Walter were due to manage the business.

Two years passed, and for many party members the department store again came to symbolize their inability to put the party's goals into practice.

When in the summer of 1935 "spontaneous popular rage" was once again organized in other towns and cities and violent riots against Jewish businesses took place, here too there was a desire to finally resolve "Gräfenberg Case" once and for all (see Part I, p. 81ff.) However, any repetition of acts of violence similar to those of March 1933 would be met by a complete lack of understanding on the part of the local population. Hence as of mid-August a vilification campaign was staged in the course of which Richard Gräfenberg was presented as a "ruthless exploiter" of his employees. The DAF accused him of paying wages below the going rate, and at the same time passed itself off as the defender of the "rights of German working folk." The prelude to the "campaign" was announced on August 15 by the appearance in the store of the DAF District Manager, Karl Ehelebe, accompanied by his Department Manager, Emil Sandrock. They turned the private office upside down and forced the elderly Gräfenberg to sign an undertaking before the entire staff to pay "back pay." At the same time, a unit of "Göttingen's German-aware population" demonstrated outside the department store. At the same time, vociferous protests were heard against the "absolutely Jewish unsocial behavior of the Jew Gräfenberg." The two ringleaders then closed the business for the rest of the day. The following day, Richard's son Walter was reported to the authorities for "Rassenschande" ("racial disgrace" – sexual relations between a Jew and an Aryan). The entire episode was orchestrated by the two Göttingen papers, the GT and the GN, which ran an "information operation about

the disgraceful goings-on in the house of Gräfenberg.” This involved training the big guns against the family, which in order to be on the safe side fled Göttingen.<sup>4</sup> In the meanwhile, it arranged for the business to be run by one of its employees. The Gräfenbergs stayed away for a week. Henceforth, individuals calling for a boycott were regularly posted outside the store, trying to prevent the clientele from entering the department store.

At several mass DAF rallies which took place one after the other, these events were also exploited for propaganda purposes. Both “managers” and “followers” were instructed to attend the demonstrations immediately after they finished work. The next day, they were able to read in the paper that the massive attendance proved that the DAF was not alone in its struggle and had Göttingen’s Nazi population behind it.<sup>5</sup>

While the propaganda offensive against the department store proved to be well designed, it failed to achieve its goal. Göttingen’s legal system did not manage to open any legal proceedings whatsoever against Richard or his son Walter. Among the population, there was outrage at the action against the “decent Jews.” And the press lashed out against the “Judenknechte” – the “Jews’ lackeys” – who continued to cling to the “exceptional Jews with their respected and old-established business.”<sup>6</sup> The Party would have liked nothing more than to present the aryanized department store to *Frankenführer* Streicher, who gave a speech in Göttingen’s Schützenplatz Square at the end of September. By way of “consolation,” however, he was informed that Carl and Anneliese, Hugo’s children, had been arrested on suspicion of involvement in black-market foreign exchange operations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The evening before they escaped, an unexpected incident took place in front of the now-empty residence at 12 Planck Street. A detachment of SA men in civilian clothing forced their way onto the plot with garden in order to demonstrate “popular fury.” A local resident – the wife of a physician, Dr. Kyropoulos – believed that the Gräfenbergs were in acute danger and cursed the SA men roundly from her window. Eventually she ran out into the street and threatened the detachment with a rubber truncheon. At that point the leader of the detachment took her particulars and stopped the operation. The incident was described in detail in the party paper, with the woman being described as a hysterical martyr (GN August 20, 1935). Even District Leader Gengler saw himself as having to provide an explanation and presented himself to like-minded persons. As a result of the fact that his wife had not “fallen into line sufficiently”, Dr. Kyropoulos was soon dismissed from his university post. See Dahms (1987a), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> GN August 31, 1935. The quotations in the last two paragraph are from GN August 16, August 17, August 19, August 24, August 31, 1935 and GT August 17/18, August 26, 1935.

<sup>6</sup> GN October 1, 1935.

<sup>7</sup> In the subsequent “Gräfenberg black market foreign exchange trial” (GN May 6, 1936), the siblings were found guilty of attempting to carry out a RM 5,000 transaction in Czechoslovakia. The First Criminal Division of the District Court sentenced them each to 9 months in jail and fines of RM 5,000 each.

In the meanwhile, the department store's 65-year-old owner could take no more. He realized that his business had become a matter to be dealt with by "the bosses" among the party leaders, and that they would not stop until their ambition had finally been satisfied. In October 1935 he closed his business and began negotiations with potential buyers.<sup>8</sup> In the ten months of this year, the business had realized a profit of just RM 8,159; the revival in turnover which had been observed the previous year and nurtured hopes had not proven durable.

Heinrich Daalman from Fulda made the running. For the traveler in textiles, taking over the renowned business meant independence, while numerous local competitors were bitter that the department store that they so loathed was continuing in business. But since he did not have necessary resources to buy it, he went looking for a partner. He entered into a business arrangement with Therese Risch from Kassel, an arrangement that was designed to buy and continue to operate the Gräfenbergs' firm. Therese Risch's RM 70,000 made her a sleeping partner in the newly founded firm of Daalman, while Heinrich Daalman became the owner and head of the business. He used the RM 70,000 to pay the first installment on the purchase price, while the balance was to be paid off at the rate of 4% of turnover. In total, Daalman paid RM 151,900 for the stock-in-hand and RM 10,000 for the inventory; no value was attached to goodwill, although it related to a business which was the best performer in its field for many miles around.<sup>9</sup> On March 7, 1936 the purchase contract and the collateral contracts were signed. Twelve days later, Richard Gräfenberg deregistered the venerable company, and Daalman registered his own business (a rental contract for the premises had been signed as early as the end of February). The reopening took place on March 25.<sup>10</sup> The wholesale firm of Joh. Breitenbach, which dealt in bicycles, washing machines, and stoves, set up business on the sales premises

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the two owners did not hold a clearance sale, a state of affairs which reduced their own profits. It is likely that the reason was pressure from the city or the Party, which wanted to prevent the separate selling off of the business's inventory in the run-up to its aryazation.

<sup>9</sup> In his subsequent legal proceedings for restitution, Richard Gräfenberg estimated the value of the business at RM 200,700. The compensation authorities appraised the average assessed value for the goodwill calculation at over RM 400,000 for the (representative) years of 1928-1931. WgA 132/49; NHStA Nds. 110 W Acc. 164/94 No. 10.

<sup>10</sup> The change of ownership was announced in the JR on March 27, 1936, under the heading "from the world of commerce."

next door. They were joined in November by jeweler and clock dealer Fritz Schügler Sr., who had previously been located in Franz Seldte Street.<sup>11</sup>

Daalmann was not outstandingly successful at continuing the department store's operations. He clearly lacked the requisite initiative and drive to be able to run the business at even something like the significance that it had previously had for his predecessors.<sup>12</sup>

After completing his prison sentence, which he served in full to the very last day, Carl, now aged 28, tried to return to the world of commerce. At the beginning of February 1937 he registered a commercial agency business for ready-made clothing. However, the mayor, Bruno Jung, refused to issue him a special sales license. In addition, the district authorities' court rejected his objection that his offense had nothing to do with the business and that refusing him the special sales license meant a continuation of the punishment that had been imposed on him. An appeal on points of law to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal was dismissed as unfounded: this latter attempt to operate commercially had taken a year. Now, Carl Gräfenberg finally decided to emigrate. On December 1, 1938 he was living in Berlin when he received a message from Göttingen that all Jews who had committed a criminal offense were to be arrested and sent to concentration camps. He barely managed to hide before the Gestapo appeared at his apartment. The secret policemen left him a summons to report by a certain date. Carl immediately jumped into his car and drove to Hamburg, taking no luggage and with nothing but the clothes on his back. He took the next plane to Paris and from there continued to Haifa.<sup>13</sup> The previous year his brother Walter had already moved to Berlin and from there managed to reach the USA.

For the family members who remained behind, however, the horror continued. In the night of November 9-10, 1938, Richard Gräfenberg, was in bed suffering from bronchitis with a high temperature when an SS heavy mob stormed the house in Planck Street. The men burst into the lavishly furnished seven-room apartment and

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<sup>11</sup> Schügl would subsequently become involved in the "dejudaization" of real estate. For example, in August 1938 he managed to gain ownership over the plot of land at 8 Wagner Street, located in the most desirable residential neighborhood. The owner, Viktor Moritz Goldschmidt, a professor of mineralogy, emigrated to Norway, selling him the property for RM 28,000. Schügl fought the restitution application after the war for eight years, before finally agreeing to a compromise settlement totaling DM 100,000. WgA 162/50.

<sup>12</sup> The opinion of the supervisory trustee was that "he also seems to be somewhat too soft on a personal level." Report dated February 12, 1950, NHStA Nds. 110 W Acc. 164/94 No. 10.

<sup>13</sup> The only reason why this precipitate flight was successful was that Carl had already obtained a valid passport for himself, with an English tourist visa for Palestine and a French transit visa.

immediately embarked on a frenzied destructive spree. Using axes, pickaxes and rifle butts they smashed everything within reach, wreaking over RM 10,000 worth of damage. When they withdrew, they took with them a variety of “mementoes.” They left behind a broken rifle butt and a long carving knife, which they had brought along. Like the other Jews, the Gräfenbergs finished up at the police lockup in the town hall. While Helene Gräfenberg was released around nine in the morning, about 4 p.m. her husband was transferred together with the other male Jews to the jail at the Reinhausen courthouse. Because of his illness, which even required him to be examined by a Göttingen doctor, he was released from “protective custody” after just one week.

In the years to come, he owed his survival to his wife. As a non-Jew she was able to protect him, since her marriage was classified as a “mixed marriage.”<sup>14</sup> Throughout the war he continued to live in his house, which the Gestapo classified as a “Jew house.” Attempts to get hold of him did not let up, however. In 1943/43 he was due to be sent to the aluminum works for forced labor. However, an official medical examination determined that the 72-year-old was “unfit for work.” When the last Göttingen Jews from “mixed marriages” were to be “deported” to Theresienstadt in February 1945, after a further examination Gräfenberg was found to be unfit for transportation.

The restitution procedure after the war proceeded with unusual speed. Six months after the Restitution Law was promulgated, the two parties to the proceedings initiated the first round of negotiations between themselves. However, no agreement about back payments by the respondents was reached. In June 1950, a compromise concerning the return of the business was reached before the Reparations Office. Richard and Carl Gräfenberg once again took over their old business, although given the economic circumstances it was on the brink of ruin, and a unique event took place: an establishment which had previously been “aryanized” reregistered for business. However, this was nothing more than a formality in order to underwrite claims for

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<sup>14</sup> As a result, during the war one of the things suffered by Helene was the allocation of a “short-rations” Jewish ration card. However, from time to time the Gräfenbergs were slipped food packages which Daalman had brought to them by apprentices from the old business (oral communication by a former female apprentice).

compensation, since ten days later the Louis Gräfenberg department store was once again unregistered and sold to the clothing firm of H. Hettlage.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In 1961 an out-of-town real estate company bought No. 19, which now gave way to a new building. At the same time, 12 Gotmar Street, which also belonged to the Gräfenbergs, was pulled down. In 1970 the C&A clothing chain moved into the rebuilt premises, which now went all the way through to Gotmar Street, as envisaged in the old development plans.