

Paul Wolfgang Merkel Family Foundation

**A Mirror of Heidelberg and German History
1918 - 1958**

The Guest Book of Hildegard von Baeyer, née Merkel

English version of the German publication

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Cornelius von Baeyer

**Publication Series of the Paul Wolfgang Merkel Family Foundation
Volume 3/2019**



Hildegard von Baeyer, née Merkel, painted by Fritz Cauer in Kassel, 1943



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Das Gästebuch der Hildegard von Baeyer, geborene Merkel

EIN SPIEGEL DER HEIDELBERGER UND DEUTSCHEN GESCHICHTE 1918 - 1958

Essay by Cornelius von Baeyer, Ottawa, Canada, 2016/19

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The Guest Book of Hildegard von Baeyer, née Merkel

**Cornelius von Baeyer
Ottawa, Canada**

German version edited by Alexander von Baeyer

Munich 2019



Heidelberg, the view of the Neckar River from the von Baeyer home,
drawn in June 1926 by Eugenie Piloty, née von Baeyer (1869-1952)¹

The Chatelaine

Hildegard von Baeyer, née Merkel (1882-1958) was 36 years old when she moved into a lovely big house facing the Neckar River in Heidelberg, near the northern end of the Old Bridge. It was late 1918 and the Great War had just ended. She had been married to Hans von Baeyer for 15 years, and the move to Heidelberg was occasioned by his appointment as professor of orthopaedics at the university and head of a new orthopaedic clinic.² The house had enough room for their four children (aged 14, 11, 9 and 6), a live-in nanny, two resident maids, and a variety of short and long-term guests. Hildegard was to live there until her death at age 75 in 1958, although there was a significant interruption from 1935 to 1943.



The Pater Familias



Hans von Baeyer (1875-1941) was a pioneer of orthopaedics and the founder of a modern orthopaedic clinic in Heidelberg.³ The clinic was exemplary, transforming the “home for crippled children” into a centre for rehabilitation. He was recognized for ingenious prosthetic devices for victims of war and the physically disabled. He was also noted for contributions to surgery involving tendons. He was highly respected by staff and patients alike. (Photo by Robert Herbst, Heidelberg, circa 1935.)

In the Guest Book, we read that he loved to own the latest automobile and would use any excuse to go out for a spin. We know that he liked kayaking and photography, for example producing a trick photo of himself dressed as a doctor talking to himself dressed as a patient. The photo shows Hans and Hildegard on a ramble.





He was emotionally very reserved, even distant from his children. His son Erich sketched him in 1932.⁴ The sketch shows this trait in a few strokes. Contact with his children was rare, although it could be warm and caring. The lady of the house had more time for the children, but she was busy presiding over the running of the household and an endless series of social engagements. The four children were not particularly close, with different and sometimes competing interests. Day-to-day warmth was provided by the nanny, who on the other hand also taught her charges the fear of the Devil. As they grew up, the children developed close friendships outside the family. Such a pattern was not unusual for that social milieu at that time. While not ideal by modern standards, it allowed the children to remain remarkably free to develop their talents and interests in their own way.

In 1933 Hans's career was suddenly interrupted. He lost his positions at the university and clinic in the Nazi frenzy to cleanse official positions of all Jews and those with Jewish ancestors or spouses – there were two connections to families of Jewish ancestry in his family tree (see below). He decided against a move to Basel because he would not be offered an equally worthy position there. He opted to return to private medical practice. From 1935 to his early death from a heart attack in 1941, Hans and Hildegard lived in Düsseldorf. Then between 1941 and 1943, Hildegard stayed in their summer home on Lake Starnberg while making arrangements to move back into the Heidelberg house.

The Home



For 40 years the house would see visitors from a great many walks of life – an endless parade of professors and students, natural and social scientists, engineers and technicians, artists and clerics, musicians and actors, writers and social activists, politicians and businessmen. There was also a stream of members of the large Merkel family (unrelated to the German chancellor). The garden was always a small paradise. There were many opportunities to host overnight guests, as well as semester-long and year-long visitors. Heidelberg was a small town, and in

any case travellers liked to stay in each other's homes if possible.

Signing the Guest Book was not compulsory, but some 500 names occur (including the author's, in a childish hand).⁵ Hildegard had a particular interest in demonstrating the prestige of the home. Hans was after all an important figure at the University of Heidelberg.

While the crème de la crème of German intellectual and artistic society were among those who flowed through the house, the mood of the guests was always relaxed and cheerful, never snobbish. This is attested by countless entries in the Guest Book where the visitors describe the welcoming spirit. It was important to Hildegard to create a haven where playfulness could be let loose, among folk whose day-to-day work required serious deliberation. The Guest Book shows them engaged in wordplay, drawing funny sketches, and getting up to all sorts of party antics.

After the horrors of the Great War, there was a strong appetite for calm and beautiful surroundings, and Hildegard knew how to provide them. In the words of Karl Stern (who married Liselotte, Hildegard's daughter, and became a noted Montreal psychiatrist and writer): "Furniture, paintings, sketches, musical instruments and books looked as though they were strewn about by a careless spirit, without obvious planning, without the air of the museum, yet perfectly harmonious. All this was the work of Frau Professor."⁶



The author, January 25, 1950 [Page 137]

The Times

The timeframe of the Guest Book encompasses three eras.

More than half the entries in the Guest Book were produced in the years of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). This was the parliamentary liberal democracy that succeeded imperial Germany after its defeat in World War I.

[An explanatory note for the English reader: Weimar was a bold first experiment in democracy for Germany. An example will give the flavour: Germany had not previously had political parties with actual power, but voting in the new Republic was by proportional representation with a low threshold of support required to form a party, which allowed small extremist parties to gain a foothold. The government was initially composed of Social Democrats, the Centre Party and left-liberals. Even in the face of the highly punitive provisions in the Versailles Treaty that ended the World War I, the government was able to decrease lawlessness, and after a time, increase the stability of the currency.]

This government was fiercely opposed by the communists on the far left, as well as by some (but not all) right-leaning conservatives, and later by the Nazis on the extreme right. Hans and Hildegard were among the political conservatives, but without any lessening of their cultural liberalism and humanistic temperament.

The Weimar period saw a grand cultural revival called the Golden Twenties – think of cabaret and Bauhaus. This revival was not, it must be said, to everyone's taste. The family of Hans and Hildegard

counted itself among the avant-garde. The crisis began with the Great Depression of 1929 and massive unemployment, although the economic situation did not affect Hans and Hildegard and their children. The national parliament descended into squabbling. Various centre-right Chancellors ruled for a time by presidential decree. Finally, Weimar democracy, never very strong, crumbled in the face of the Nazi dictatorship. The von Baeyers suddenly found themselves on the side of the persecuted.

One-third of the Guest Book was produced during the Nazi times (1933-1945). Most of those pages were written before 1939. In the social milieu of the von Baeyers and their guests, there were different reactions to the Nazis' ascent to power:

- a few of the visitors to the house joined the Nazis,
- some avoided any activity that would draw attention to themselves and stayed in Germany,
- many lost their official positions but remained in Germany,
- a number left Germany under pressure of circumstances,
- several were taken into custody, and
- some were killed by the Nazis or committed suicide.

For the von Baeyers, the Nazi times meant oppression. Hans was forced into retirement. Some of his colleagues turned away from him. The children either left Germany, or stayed behind and distanced themselves as much as possible from the Nazi regime. The Guest Book shows this situation only indirectly. The style of the entries remained largely as before.

The remaining 20 pages of the Guest Book were produced in the post-World War II period (1945 to 1958 when Hildegard died). After her husband's death in 1941, she became less active, and then ill. Old friends visited occasionally, expressing great joy to be re-united after the war. Many visits were from the family.

A Note on Family History

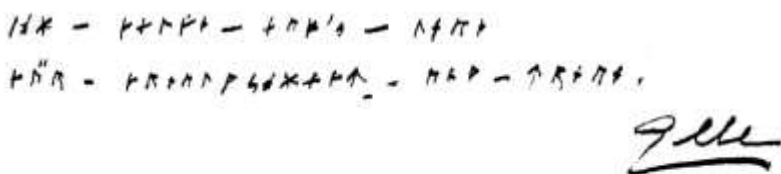
The Baeyers were originally farmers in the Palatinate (southwestern Germany). In the mid-1700s, they emigrated to Brandenburg (encircling Berlin). One farmer's son was Johann Jakob Baeyer (1794-1885) who went on to become a Prussian Lieutenant General and famous geodesist. He married Wanda Eugenie Hitzig, the daughter of an old Prussian-Jewish family of bankers and scholars, who had been baptised as a Protestant. Their son Adolf von Baeyer (1835-1917) became Professor of Chemistry in Strasbourg in 1872 and in Munich in 1875. He received a hereditary Bavarian knighthood (with the *Ritter* title) in 1885 and the Nobel Prize in 1905. He also married a woman from a family with Jewish roots: Lida Bendemann, the granddaughter of a banker who had himself been baptised as a Protestant, and whose relatives included senior civil and military officials as well as painters.

Such a symbiosis of Jewish and Protestant families was not unusual in the Germany of the 1800s and early 1900s. Among the notable personalities in the cultural and social life of Germany, many have such roots. The racial madness of the Nazis, especially the 1933 law requiring official positions to be cleansed

of all Jews and those with Jewish ancestors or spouses, put an abrupt end to this symbiosis. Hans and his family were excluded from further participation in German academic and public life. They were aware, to be sure, of the Jewish portions of their ancestry, but they did not identify strongly with them. Among those in a similar position in the wider family were, for example, the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and the writer Paul (von) Heyse who was awarded the 1910 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Hildegard's ancestors came from the Protestant Merkel family in Nuremberg, active in business and scholarly pursuits. Her father and grandfather Merkel were professors of law. The family of Hildegard's mother, Käthe Dollmann, included theologians, historians, art historians, architects and artists, among which were the Tischbein family of painters.

The social and intellectual history of the 18th and 19th centuries in Germany was to a large extent also the family history of the Baeyers.



The image shows a handwritten entry in Runic script, which is a form of Germanic runic alphabet. The text is written in two lines. The first line reads: "Ick - kenne - kenne - kenne". The second line reads: "kenne - kenne kenne kenne - kenne - kenne". Below the text is a signature that appears to be "Hildegard".

[German written using the runic alphabet, February 3, 1939:]

I give thanks again for friendship and loyalty! Elle [Lutz]

[Page 123]

The Guests

Most of the visitors to the von Baeyer home, at least those who signed the Guest Book, mirrored the social milieu of the host and hostess. This included the academic upper class (which senior professors belonged to at that time), and the upper-middle class (that is, well-educated professionals with comfortable incomes). Titles and academic rank were not used in the Guest Book, as would be expected among social equals.

They wrote mostly in German, using several different types of handwriting: classical German cursive (*Kurrentschrift*), a school-taught variant called *Sütterlin*, and modern Latin script, which was just coming into general use at that time. There were also some idiosyncratic mixtures and scrawls. Contributors also wrote in English and French, Latin and Italian, Dutch and Russian, German dialects and Indonesian. They wrote in Chinese, Cyrillic and even runic characters. Many only signed their names, but others contributed prose and verse, musical notation, drawings, diagrams and photos.

Nicknames used in the family were also used in the Guest Book. Hans von Baeyer was “Hanni”, his daughter Liselotte was “Weibi”, Hildegard’s sister was “Mädi”, Hans Piloty (1894-1969, Rector of the Technical University in Munich) was “Hansa”, his wife Maria, née Defregger was “Mai”, Maria von Conta née Piloty was “Manna”.

Visitors’ Careers

The range of professions of those who wrote in the Guest Book reflects the professions and interests of the von Baeyer family itself. Foremost was medicine.

1. Medical Doctors

Hans, the *pater familias*, was professor of orthopedics. Two sons followed him into medicine. Walter (1904-1987)⁷ became professor of psychiatry and neurology in Heidelberg. Erich (1909-1990)⁸ became a prominent radiologist in the U.S. The Guest Book also includes paediatricians (such as Ernst Freudenberg, 1884-1967, the author’s maternal grandfather⁹), internists, surgeons, ophthalmologists, gynaecologists, and physiologists. One of the guests was an active supporter of the Nazis, the professor of eugenics and racial hygiene, Eugen Fischer (1874-1967)¹⁰, who probably knew Hans from their joint time in Würzburg. One happy visitor (a distant Merkel relation) signed as Hans Kirste, “5-hour-old MD.”¹¹

2. Natural Scientists

Another large category of visitors was natural scientists, particularly physicists (for example, Hans’s brother Otto¹², Hildegard’s brother Erich Merkel (1886-1974)¹³, their son Hans Jakob von Baeyer (1912-1998)¹⁴, and his eminent teacher Walther Bothe (1891-1957)¹⁵, as well as an astrophysicist (Hildegard’s brother-in-law Walter Grotrian (1890-1954)¹⁶ after whom a crater on the moon is named), and several chemists.

Otto von Baeyer (1877-1946), was a particularly interesting person. He was a professor of physics in Berlin, a close collaborator of scientists such as Albert Einstein, Lise Meitner, and Otto Hahn. Over two decades, he was credited with providing critical help to others in their work, never wanting to be acknowledged in these studies himself. He never married, and, after an audacious robbery relieved him of most of his worldly possessions, kept an extremely simple household. In the Guest Book, he says laconically of a month spent in Heidelberg: “Uncle Otto, partly here, partly at the confectioner’s.” It was he who steered his nephew Hans Jakob into physics, when the expected family career of medicine failed to interest him.

3. Bookbinders

Hildegard and Hans had one daughter, Liselotte von Baeyer, later Stern (1907-1971)¹⁷ whose career led her to book binding and restoring, as well as calligraphy and hand lettering. After studies in Weimar, she

became a master in her field, and returned to Heidelberg. Over the years a half dozen colleagues and teachers were to come to Heidelberg as guests. For example, Else von Guaita (1875-1963) was a New Year's guest in 1924.¹⁸ She was described in a book about women in Weimar as having a disconcerting, decidedly exotic beauty. Another visitor was the head of the bookbinding school at the Bauhaus school in Weimar, Otto Dorfner (1895-1955).¹⁹

4. Social Reformers and Legal Scholars

The home in Heidelberg was also visited on numerous occasions by several remarkable women, leading lights of Weimar social reform and education. Here are a few brief examples.

Marie Baum (1874-1964) was a forerunner of German social work and very active in programs for youth and women.²⁰ She began as an inspector for working conditions in factories, documenting offenses. She was a member of the national parliament for a time. By the early 1930s she was teaching at the University of Heidelberg. She is loosely related to the von Baeyer family and, like Hans, lost her teaching position in 1933. After the war she resumed her post until 1951.

Ricarda Huch (1864-1947) was a poet, philosopher and historian.²¹ She was a friend of Hans and Hildegard from their early years in Munich. She made occasional visits to Heidelberg, and stayed there with Marie Baum from 1932 to 1934. She had studied in the 1890s in Zurich because women could not study philosophy and history in German universities at that time.

Else von Richthofen (1874-1973) was one of Germany's first sociologists.²² She too began as an inspector for working conditions in factories – in fact, it was her position which Marie Baum took up in 1902. Else became the wife of a wealthy retired businessman, Edgar Jaffé, who went on to become a professor of economics. Between 1909 and 1920, Else had a relationship with the sociologist Max Weber. When Edgar Jaffé and Max Weber both died in the early 1920s, she moved to Heidelberg to live with Max's brother, Alfred Weber.²³ Throughout this time, Else's best friend was Marianne, Max Weber's wife. (Else's sister Frieda was the wife of the writer D.H. Lawrence.)

Marianne Weber (1870-1954) was an author and researcher in the field of women's rights.²⁴ Her first books in this area were written while she was in Heidelberg. She was a member of a state parliament for a time. She married her cousin Max Weber, the author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. She helped publish his works after his early death in Munich in 1920, and returned to live in Heidelberg. Her home for three decades was just a few doors down from Hildegard's house, overlooking the Neckar River. Marianne's salon, known as her "menagerie", was more formal than Hildegard's. Every three or four weeks, someone from the university was asked to speak, followed by discussion. Not surprisingly, many of Marianne's speakers and visitors can also be found in Hildegard's Guest Book.

Legal scholars who visited the Baeyer home included Gustav Radbruch (1878-1949)²⁵ and Eberhard von Künssberg (1881-1941). Radbruch had been the Weimar justice minister and was the first professor in Germany to be removed from his post in Nazi times. It was he who in 1946 published the key doctrine

of German post-war times that an unjust, shameful law is not binding on a judge. He was a regular visitor at Marianne Weber's and occasionally signed in at Hildegard's. Künssberg was a noted legal historian, as well as the founder of the first German school for the one-armed, in Ettlingen, Baden.²⁶ Hans von Baeyer worked as a doctor in the military hospital in Ettlingen during the First World War.

5. Writers, Artists, Musicians, and Scholars in the Humanities

Hildegard's house was visited on several occasions by the novelist Thomas Mann (1875-1945)²⁷ and literary scholar Friedrich Gundolf (1880-1931).²⁸ Mann came with his wife Katia as well – her father, the mathematician Prof. Pringsheim, was a colleague of Adolf von Baeyer at the University of Munich. Gundolf's wife Elisabeth spent in Hildegard's home the week after his untimely death. But the category "writer" includes many others in the Guest Book. Alfred Neumann (1895-1952)²⁹ had a prolific career in Germany, but was forced out during the war and became a Hollywood screenwriter. Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948)³⁰ was also a prolific writer and translator who was forced out and ended up in New Zealand.

Ingrid Warburg Spinelli (1910-1989) was a Heidelberg University student and visited Hildegard's home.³¹ She was a friend of Erich von Baeyer. She went on to become one of the founders of the Emergency Rescue Committee which saved some 2,000 artists, writers and scientists from the Nazi occupation in France. She recalls in her autobiography what happened when Gundolf and Heinrich Zimmer (the Indologist³², 1890-1943) visited the von Baeyers. The conversation would turn to Goethe, Hölderlin and Schiller. The group discussed not only literary questions, but also the human problems of the poets, with such enthusiasm and immediacy that it almost seemed as if the poets were good friends of the family.

One imaginative Guest Book entry from 1925 appears to have been written by Wolfgang Hallgarten, who was to become the American historian George W. F. Hallgarten. It begins with a poem that tells of a wintry visit and hearty meal. The poem is then annotated in a parody of literary criticism that refers to the fanciful publication of his collected works in 2003.³³

Another amusing entry commemorates a summertime presentation of the German version of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* in the garden. The entry lists the actors, their roles, and some of their bons mots, with particular emphasis on getting drunk.³⁴

The archaeologist Berndmark Heukemes (1924-2009) documented Roman Heidelberg.³⁵ The theologian Wilhelm Stählin (1888-1975) was the husband of a cousin of Hildegard's.³⁶ The philosopher and Plato expert Ernst Hoffmann (1880-1952) was one of the most loyal friends and neighbours of Hans and Hildegard.³⁷

The literary scholar and language teacher Vilma Mönckeberg-Kollmar (1892-1985) was particularly known for reciting fairy tales.³⁸ The artist Milly Marbe-Fries (1876-1947) was highly regarded for her portraits, as well as flower and landscape paintings.³⁹ The artist Oskar Moll (1875-1947) taught at German art schools until 1933; his wife Marg Moll (1884-1977) was a prominent sculptor.⁴⁰

There was a lot of music in the house. Two members of the Wendling Quartet (Hans Michaelis and Alfred Saal) were repeat visitors and played.⁴¹ Numerous entries refer to concerts, both at home and in concert halls. As well, there was house music – each child played a different instrument and the mother was a good singer.⁴² The middle son, Erich, who became a radiologist, was also a sought-after cellist in his spare time and a founding member of the Cleveland Chamber Music Society.⁴³

Several visitors signed the Guest Book with music. One remarkable entry is late in the book, as Hildegard is losing her memory and her health. It does not have any words at all, just a line of music offered by Karl Stern (1906-1975), namely Schubert's Good Night, the first song in the Winter Journey series.⁴⁴ But the melody is shown in a major key, which points directly to the last verse: "Let me not disturb you in your dream, it would be a pity to spoil your peace."

6. Soldiers and Their Widows

Hildegard's brother Hans-Gotthard Merkel (1885-1945) must be mentioned first and foremost in this category.⁴⁵ He was politically conservative, deeply patriotic, a committed Christian, a loving father, well-educated and musical. He became a professional soldier in 1902 and served in the German army until 1920. There followed some unsatisfactory years as a civilian, during which time he wrote numerous entries in the Guest Book, even staying in the house for 15 months at one point. Then Hitler came to power and he rejoined the army. He became a colonel, but never joined the Nazi party. He died in action near Berlin in the last days of World War II. Contact with his sister Hildegard was sparse in those later years.

The topic of soldiers must include the wives and mothers they left behind. A moving story is that of Hans's sister Eugenie Piloty (1869-1952). Her eldest son Carl died in action at the beginning of World War I. In despair, her husband Oskar (1866-1915, chemist, son of the painter Carl Theodor von Piloty) volunteered for active duty and soon thereafter died in action on the same front as his son. The tragedies continued – seven years later her youngest son Rüdiger was killed in an avalanche while skiing.

7. Other Professions

The industrialist Ferry von Berghes was an executive in the oil business.⁴⁶ Udo von Katte, an uncle of Wanda von Katte (1911-1997) wife of Hildegard's eldest son Walter, was a planter in the former German East Africa.⁴⁷ Chief ship's steward W. Laisch served on the Stinnes company tanker launched in 1927 as the "Adolf von Baeyer".⁴⁸

The children's longtime nanny, Kathi Huber, was referred to in entries about life in the home, and wrote an entry herself when she came back to visit years later.⁴⁹ Others named in the Guest Book were Hildegard's gardener, Herr Kaltenmark,⁵⁰ and her companions and caregivers in old age, Hilde Kahl⁵¹ and Marieluise von Bolschwing.⁵²

The Two Most Diligent Contributors

Two persons stand out as providing the most extensive series of entries in the Guest Book. One signed as Mädi. She was Eva Grotrian (1891-1958) Hildegard's younger sister.⁵³ Her husband Walter Grotrian did not visit Heidelberg as often. The other signed as Hutzi. She was Luise Cauer, née Scheffer, who also published poetry in High German and Kassel dialect.⁵⁴ She had loose genealogical links with both the von Baeyers and the Merckels.

The Grotrians continued to live in East Germany after the war, where Walter worked in the Astrophysical Observatory in Potsdam. Mädi made annual visits to Heidelberg almost continuously from 1919 to 1957. Each time, she left a long entry in verse. Both she and her sister Hildegard died in 1958.

Here is part of an early entry. It is Christmas, 1921.⁵⁵ (Translated freely and without rhyme.)

*Snow is falling, the Neckar is rising.
Flu creeps through the houses;
But with lots of hard liquor
It can be made to go away.
Yet to no one's pleasure it always forces
One girl to stay in bed.
The housewife is also often sick,
But not too badly, thank the Lord.
With sleep and walks
You see the Grotrians kept busy.
And they happily help the children
To reduce the stock of Christmas cakes.*

Here is part of a late entry by Mädi. The war has been going on for five years – it is August 1944.⁵⁶ Mädi will in fact not visit Heidelberg again until 1948.

*A circle of friends is still extant,
And most of them I saw,
Wonderful was the visit
Of the marvelous Ricarda Huch.
(Sadly she didn't sign the book.)
At such a time it's hard to part,
We two sisters feel it very strongly,
So now I say on my departure
God give us another meeting here!
21 – 31 Aug. 1944. Mädi, full of thanks.
P.S. For Piffi-dog's sore ear –
I hope it gets better soon!*

Hutzi lived in Kassel (some 200 km north of Heidelberg). She wrote 10 substantial entries, half in prose and half in verse, as well as a half dozen short notes. In one entry she parodies pop songs of the day,

while in others she described the life of the house with a deft touch. She wrote over the course of 23 years, between 1921 and 1944. She was killed in a 1945 bomb attack on Kassel.

Here is part of an entry she wrote in June 1924.⁵⁷

I also enjoyed Nordic Music Week very much, and found I could attend the entire Heidelberg program on Sunday afternoon without showing any overly visible amazement: church concert, loading of the festival participants onto garbage trucks, garden party at the Adler Hotel in Ziegelhausen, cruise on a pleasure boat to see the illumination of the castle, parade with music to the Castle Hotel, and jazz band with punch and dancing.

Here is a short extract from November 1936.⁵⁸

Hutzi, ashamed of spreading herself out so much in this book, gives thanks modestly, briefly...

Humour

Some entries were deeply heartfelt, others gently ironic, some both. Many entries were simply funny. Here is one from May 1923, translated freely. It is signed only with the pseudonym O. Jegerl that means "Oh dear" in the Bavarian dialect.⁵⁹



Love

Light

Life

Therein lies all!

*But on occasion
everything goes wrong!*

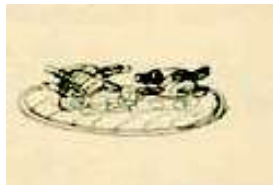
*A storm will break
the carefully tended bush,*



*put out the light that lit your path
so now you grope unseeing,*



*and tomorrow the love-bird pair
will be baked and served with herbs!*



*Thus I the pessimist seek places
Where one is happy.
As I was here,
Until the moment when this book
Was pressed into my hands
And a sleepless night ensued
With the result to be seen above.*

The Guest Book Itself and the Website

The book is 33 x 26 cm. It has an unremarkable cardboard cover, with dragonflies flitting over a rose-coloured background, and ribbons to hold it together.⁶⁰ The pages are high-quality paper and in good shape – only the binding and vellum spine had to be restored. Inside, there are 152 pages with writing on them, some blank pages, and two unattached but related pieces (a postcard with a sketch and a newspaper article).

A private website has been created for the Guest Book. By going to www.hildegard-vonbaeyer.net, you can request a password for the site. Access to the site is administered by Cornelius von Baeyer (cornelius@vonbaeyer.net).

Each page of the Guest Book was photographed and typed for the website. Under the image and text of each page, is a list of the names occurring on that page. This is linked to a register of all 500 names in the book.

Below the list of names on every page, there are comments about the people, places or events referred to on that page. Many of the 300 comments are detailed, with old photos, links to current websites and references to further literature. This material was assembled in various ways:

Biographical and occupational data were established (life dates, career, life path, special achievements, relationship to the von Baeyers).

Place names, musical references, and important events of the time were clarified.

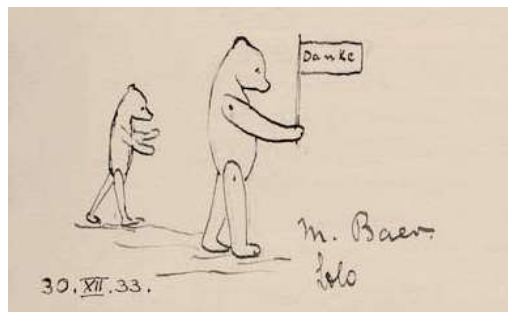
Anecdotal information was also assembled and documented, which went beyond the purely objective data.

Together, these comments expand the Guest Book into a family history that is also a mirror of a time and place in German history.

Comments can be added by readers – these appear on the website after approval by the webmaster. Readers are encouraged to submit errors, clarifications, and additions to the webmaster.

A search function on the homepage allows the reader to find any name or key word on the whole site. Family trees of the von Baeyers and Merckels are appended.⁶¹

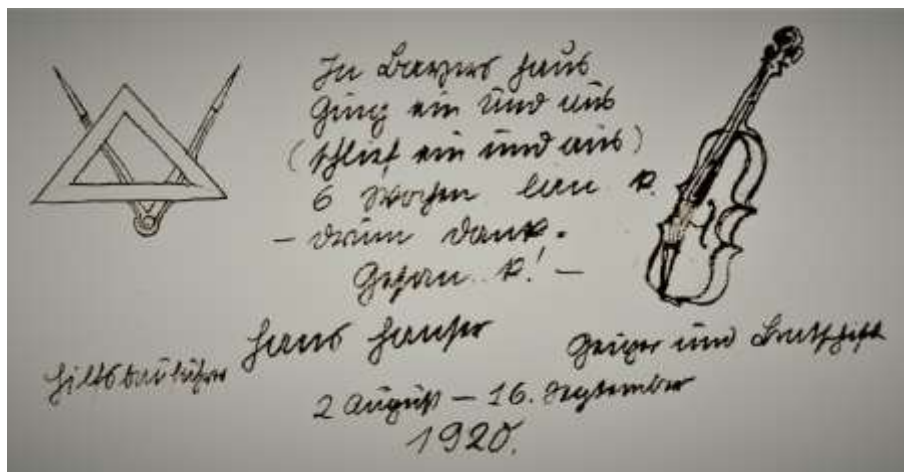
The transcription of the entries in the hard-to-read old scripts was the work of Eberhard Finckh (1929-2012, professor of experimental physics in Erlangen, brother-in-law of the author). Albrecht Merkel in Switzerland and Alexander von Baeyer in Germany, cousins of the author, contributed many comments and photos. Without these three collaborators, and the professional photographer and website designer in Canada, this website could not have been created.



"Thank you"
M. Baer, Lolo 30.XII.33

[Page 137]

Illustrations from the Guest Book



Assistant foreman

In the Baeyers' house

Violin and viola player

he went in and out

(slept in and over)

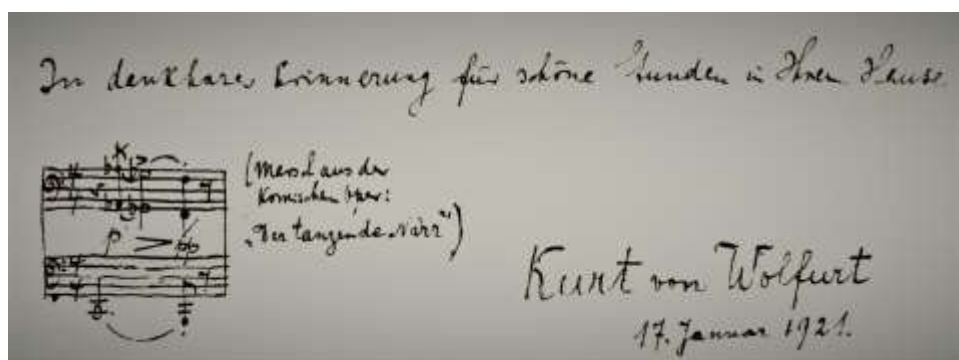
6 weeks long.

– So here's my thank-you song! –

Hans Hauser

2 August – 16 September 1920

[Page 6]



In thankful remembrance for lovely hours in your house.

[Music notes from his composition] (March from the comic opera: "The Dancing Fool")

Kurt von Wolfurt 17 January 1921

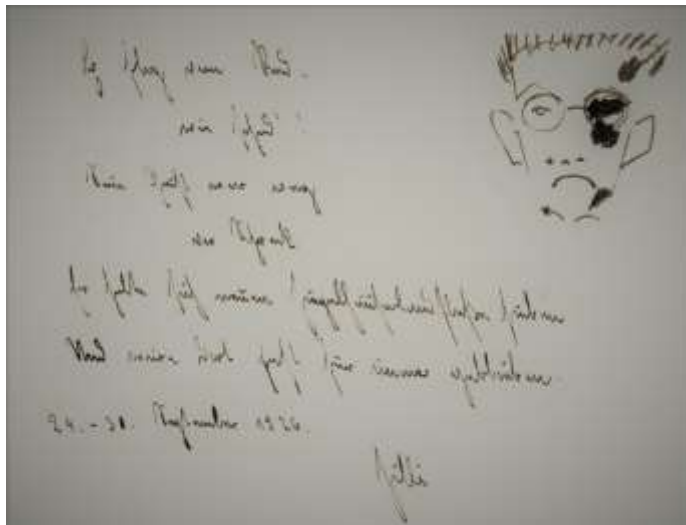
[Page 7]



Manna 12-27 April 1924 [Maria von Conta, née Piloty (1900-1978)
whose mother was Hans von Baeyer's sister]
[Page 22]



Heartfelt thanks. Deeply devoted. Angiola Bonn 22.2.1925
[Page 27]



He flew from the bike – how sad!

His spirit ran off from fright.

He got to Ziegelhäuser Landstrasse 7 again [the Baeyer home]

And would almost have stayed there forever.

24-30 September 1926. Zilli [Dr. Wilhelm Zimmermann, friend of Hildegard and Hans]

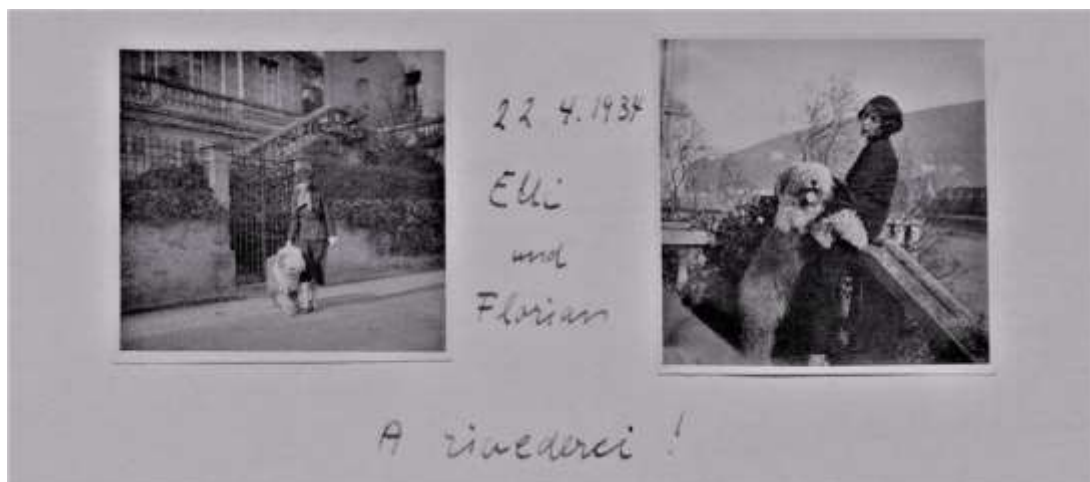
[Page 40]



[Marieluise Freudenberg: photographer with wedding photo.]

[Topsy pronunciation:] Thanks for four jolly days of party-time from a photographer from the sticks!

16-20 February 1934. [Page 93]



22 April 1934, Elli and Florian; Until we meet again!

[Elisabeth Gundolf and her dog Florian]

[Page 97]



Besigheim [town about 100 km from Heidelberg]

[postcard to Hildegard from Vilma Mönckeberg-Kollmar]

[Loose in the Guest Book, page x2]



Merkel Sibling Day, Pentecost 1927.

Hans Gotthart with wife and 2 children.

Erich (sadly without wife and child)

Mädi with husband

[12 persons in the photo: upper right Hans Gotthart beside his sister Weibi, wife Ida in front of Hans v. B., beside her his daughter Gertrud with Hildegard, sitting in front of them his son Wolfgang, far left Erich Merkel, beside him Walter v.B. in front of Weibi: Mädi (from the side), behind Hildegard (slightly hidden) Walter Grotrian, bottom right Erich v.B.]



[4 persons in the photo: Hildegard, Mädi, Hans Gotthard, Erich Merkel]

[Page 43]

Author's Postscript: What I Learned from my Grandmother's Guest Book

And in conclusion, a personal comment from the author: More than a half century after her death, my grandmother has given me a priceless gift – historical insight into the land where I was born but never lived; information about a wide web of family connections, some never suspected; and details of specific traits that are common in the family. All that through the study of her Guest Book.

I had no idea about the true dimensions of the expulsion of the academics, although both my grandfathers lost their professorships because of their ancestry or marriage. (This program was responsible, in fact, for forcing entire sectors of academic life out of Germany.) I have come to understand at a more personal level how Weimar was both a spectacular failure, as well as the source of some key elements of modern German identity: an open, socially conscious democracy.

I learned about the full range of reactions to Nazism, whether supportive of the regime or subverting it by joining the underground resistance or helping individual targeted people to escape, or indeed finding a quiet spot and keeping one's head down. In this range of reactions, little was absolute and there were many shades of grey.

I had no idea how extensive the relationships were, both close and distant, that I share with other families who passed through Heidelberg. I have learned about the friends of my parents and uncles and aunts. I have learned a lot about my grandmother's Merkel family. I have entered the life of her sister, Mädi, through her many entries. I have found links with other families, through for example our 18th century forebear Daniel Itzig: he had 15 children who prospered mightily and are related to a huge number of German families.⁶²

Just recently I was contacted by an American scientist who had come across Otto von Baeyer's work on measuring beta decay, and was interested in his family connections. The scientist and I are distantly related through Daniel Itzig.

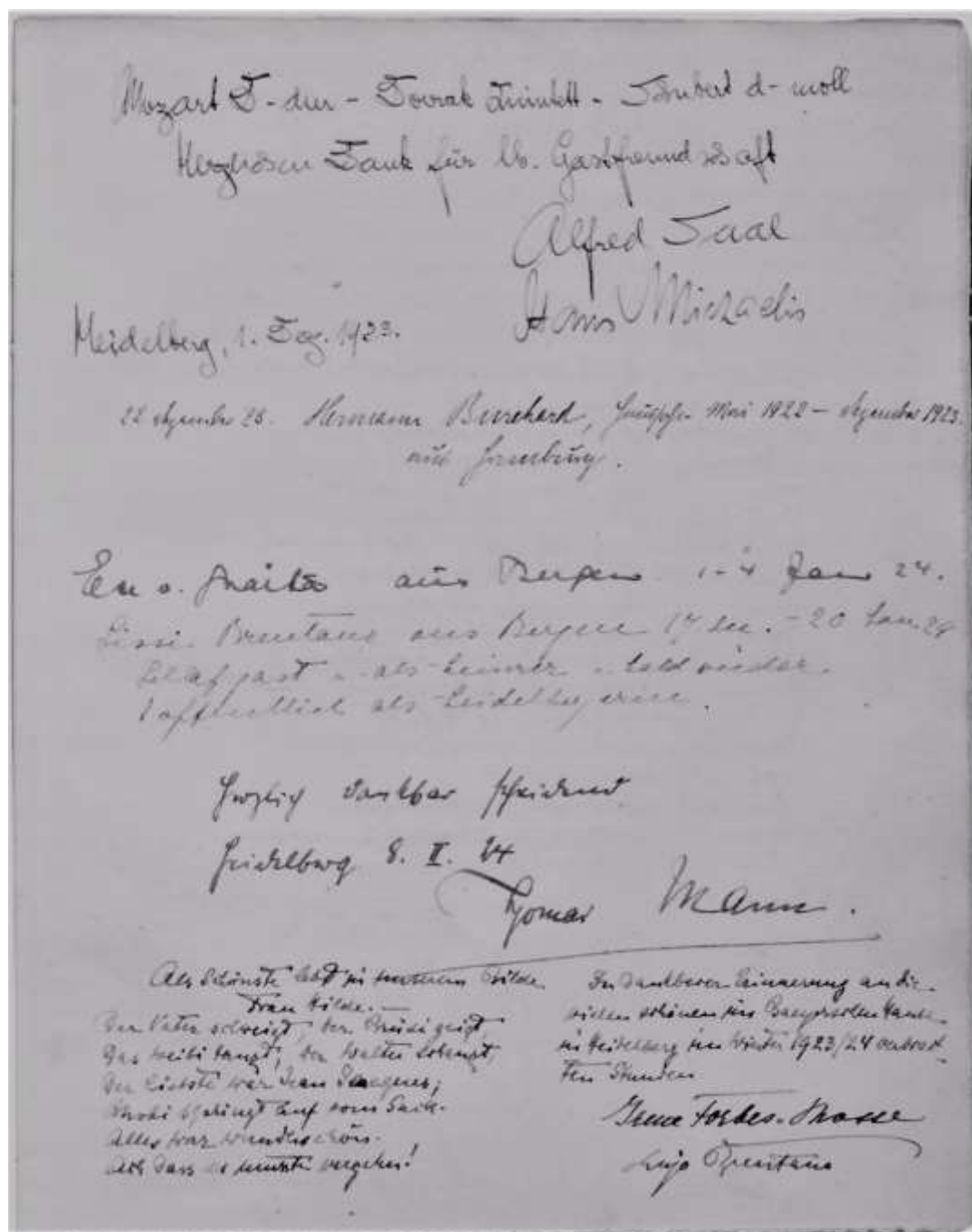
Finally, perhaps most importantly, the Guest Book stands as a testament to hope, even in terrible times. Let me translate an entry by Marianne Weber. At the lowest point of the disintegration of the Weimar Republic in the face of Nazism, in March 1932, she found in the house of her friend this reason for optimism:⁶³

Even as the report of the hostile fight among our deeply divided political representatives was upsetting us, a cheerful young kitten snuggled into the warm arms of the good mistress of this lovely, old-style home. In the midst of sadness that everything was being threatened by human stupidity, I felt a comforting assurance that there will always be happy, lovely and good beings, and their relationships to each other will bring happiness. For this we have the inexhaustible richness of life to thank.

The same spirit emanates from a little drawing of young Matthias (Matthew) von Baeyer (1937-2006), made in the Guest Book at Christmas 1937 by Erich von Baeyer, his father:⁶⁴



Example pages from the Guest Book



Guest Book page 20, visitors in December 1923 and January 1924

[Page 20]

Mozart D major – Dvorak Quintett – Schubert D minor

Sincere thanks for the kind hospitality

Alfred Saal

Hans Michaelis

Heidelberg, 1 December 1923.

22 December 1923. Hermann Burchard, like a son in the house

May 1922 – December 1923, from Hamburg

Else von Guaita from Bergen 1-4 January 1924

Sissi Brentano from Bergen 17 December – 20 January 1924

Sleep guest and hoarse person, and hopefully soon Heidelberg woman again.

Cordially thankful on departing.

Heidelberg 8 November 1924

Thomas Mann

As the most beautiful in our tableau

lives Mrs. Hilde. –

The father remains silent, Brüdi plays the violin,

Weibi dances, Walter toils away,

The dearest is Jean Jacques;

Moki jumps up from the sack.

Everything was wonderful.

Oh, that it had to pass away!

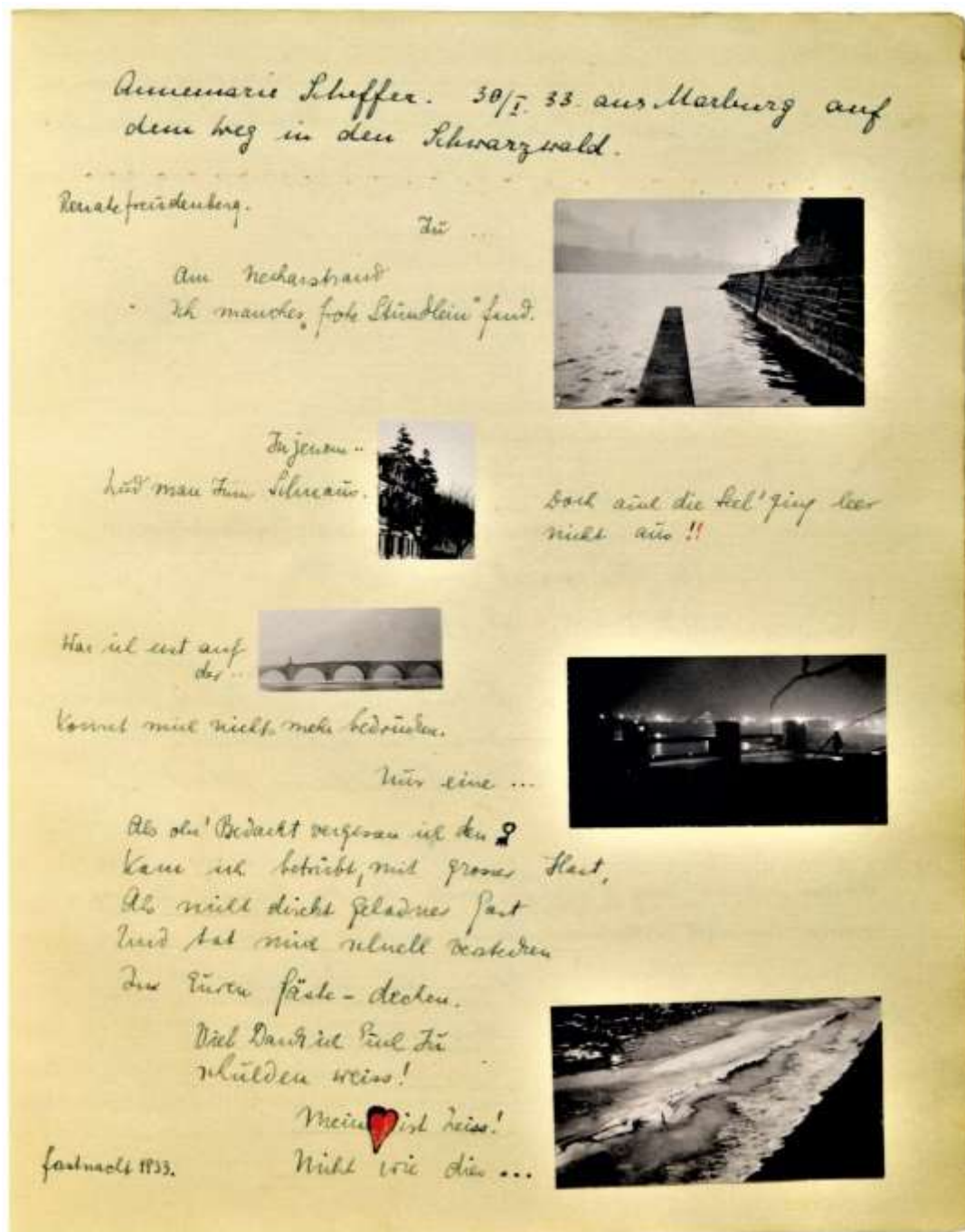
In thankful remembrance of the many lovely hours spent in the Baeyers' house in Heidelberg in

Winter 1923/24.

Irene Forbes-Mosse

Lujo Brentano

[The von Baeyer family in this "tableau": Mrs. Hilde – Hildegard; Father – Hans; Brüdi – Erich; Weibi – Liselotte; Walter – Walter; Jean Jacques – Hans Jakob; Moki – the dog]



[Page 83]

Annemarie Scheffer. 30 January 1933 from Marburg on the way into the Black Forest.

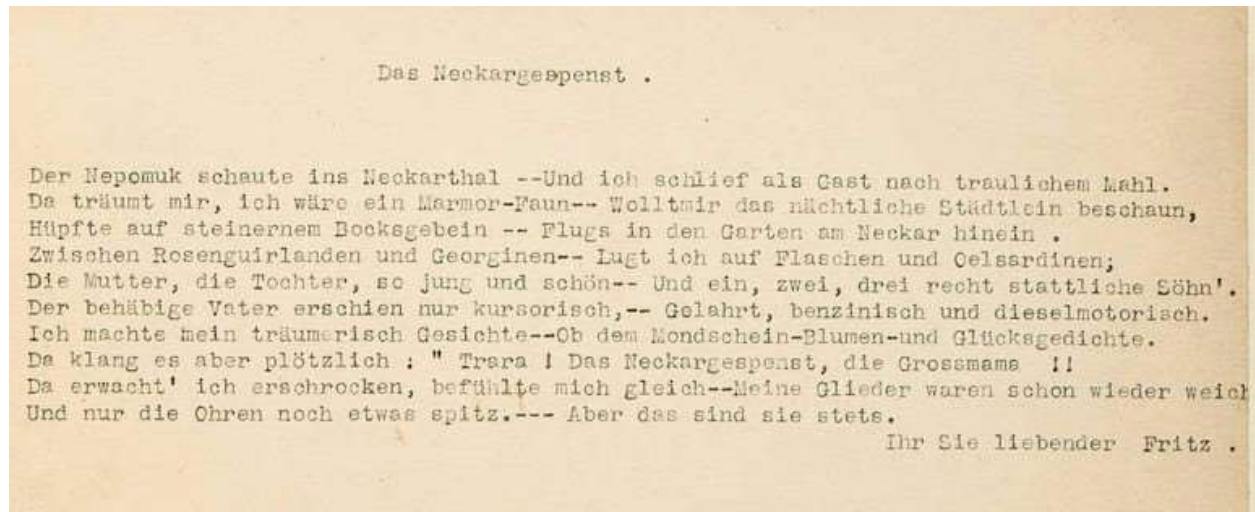
Renate Freudenberg [1911-1977; married Hans Jakob, youngest son of Hildegard in 1935]

[A poem with pictures:]

To ... [Heidelberg - photo]
On the banks of the Neckar
I found many a "happy time".
In that ... [house - photo] we were invited to feast.
Yet the soul did not leave empty either!!
Once I was on the ... [bridge - photo]
Nothing could oppress me anymore.
But one ... [night - photo]
When without a care I forgot the [key - symbol]
I came sadly and in great haste
As a not directly invited guest
And quickly hid myself
In your guestroom blankets.
I know I owe you many thanks!
My [heart - symbol] is hot!
Not like this ... [ice – photo].

Mardi Gras, 1933.

Guest Book page 87, July 1933



The Neckar Spectre

Saint Nepomuk gazed into the Neckar Valley
 And I slept as a guest after a wonderful meal.
 I dreamed I was a marble faun –
 I wanted to look at the nocturnal little town,
 Hopped on stony ram bones –
 Flew into the garden by the Neckar.
 Between the rose garlands and the dahlias –
 I peeked at bottles and sardines in oil;
 The mother, the daughter, so young and lovely –
 And one, two, three fine sons.
 The portly father appeared only briefly, –
 Learned, benzine-y and diesel engine-y.
 I made my dreamy face –
 For moonlight, flowers and odes to fortune.
 But then a sudden sound: "Trara!"
 The Neckar Spectre, Grandmama!!
 I woke up in a fright, felt my body at once –
 My limbs were already soft again
 Only my ears were still a bit pointy –
 But they are always like that.
 Your loving Fritz.

[Fritz Salzer 1867-1952 Munich]

Guest Book page 151

Am 8. August 1958 verschied nach langer Krankheit im 76.
Lebensjahr unsere geliebte Mutter, Großmutter, Schwester
und Schwägerin

Hildegard v. Baeyer geb. Merkel

Witwe des o. ö. Univ. Prof. Dr. med. Hans Ritter v. Baeyer

In tiefer Trauer:

Prof. Dr. med. Walter Ritter v. Baeyer u. Frau
Lieselotte Stern, geb. v. Baeyer u. Dr. med. Karl Stern
Dr. med. Erich Ritter v. Baeyer u. Frau
Dr. rer. nat. Hans Jakob Ritter v. Baeyer u. Frau
Dr. rer. nat. Erich Merkel u. Frau
Ida Merkel, geb. Mirbt
und 12 Enkelkinder

Heidelberg, Montreal, Cleveland,
Ottawa, Wuppertal, Marburg / Lahn

Heidelberg, den 8. August 1958
Bergstraße 58

Die Trauerfeier findet am Montag, dem 11. August 1958 um 11 Uhr
im Krematorium des Bergfriedhofes Heidelberg statt. Urnenbei-
setzung im Familiengrab im Waldfriedhof München.

Died on August 8, 1958, after a long illness in her 76th year, our beloved mother, grandmother, sister and sister-in-law

Hildegard von Baeyer, née Merkel

Widow of the university professor Hans Ritter von Baeyer, M.D.

In deep mourning:

Prof. Walter Ritter von Baeyer, M.D. and his wife
Liselotte Stern, née von Baeyer and Karl Stern, M.D.
Erich Ritter von Baeyer, M.D. and his wife
Hans Jakob Ritter von Baeyer, Ph.D. and his wife
Erich Merkel, Ph.D. and his wife
Ida Merkel, née Mirbt
and 12 grandchildren

Heidelberg, Montreal, Cleveland,
Ottawa, Wuppertal, Marburg/Lahn

Heidelberg, August 8, 1958
Bergstrasse 58

The funeral service will take place on Monday, August 11, 1958 at 11 o'clock in the Bergfriedhof
Crematorium, Heidelberg. Urn burial will take place in the family plot in the Waldfriedhof, Munich.

[Page 151]

**Endnotes refer to page numbers in the
online Guest Book**

- ¹ Page 38
- ² Page 11; Image: Hildegard at the age of 61,
painted in 1943 by Fritz Cauer
- ³ Pages 44, x10; Image: Hans at about 60,
Photo R. Herbst
- ⁴ Page 1
- ⁵ Page 137
- ⁶ Home page; Image: House 1952, Photo Gärtner
- ⁷ Page 80
- ⁸ Page 34
- ⁹ Page 91
- ¹⁰ Page 16
- ¹¹ Page 5
- ¹² Page 7
- ¹³ Page 3
- ¹⁴ Page 34
- ¹⁵ Page 91
- ¹⁶ Page 10
- ¹⁷ Page 6
- ¹⁸ Page 20
- ¹⁹ Page 78
- ²⁰ Pages 62, x10
- ²¹ Pages 62, 92
- ²² Page 101
- ²³ Page 101
- ²⁴ Page 74
- ²⁵ Page 101
- ²⁶ Page 100
- ²⁷ Pages 20, 55
- ²⁸ Pages 55, 69
- ²⁹ Page 58
- ³⁰ Page 66
- ³¹ Page 69
- ³² Page 65
- ³³ Page 32
- ³⁴ Page 79
- ³⁵ Page 106
- ³⁶ Page 118
- ³⁷ Pages 91, x10
- ³⁸ Page 10
- ³⁹ Page 41
- ⁴⁰ Page 117
- ⁴¹ Page 16
- ⁴² Page 69
- ⁴³ Page 34
- ⁴⁴ Page 142
- ⁴⁵ Pages 3, x12
- ⁴⁶ Page 76
- ⁴⁷ Page 118
- ⁴⁸ Page 99
- ⁴⁹ Page 25
- ⁵⁰ Page 136
- ⁵¹ Page 144
- ⁵² Page 152
- ⁵³ Page 3
- ⁵⁴ Pages 9, x14
- ⁵⁵ Page 10
- ⁵⁶ Page 131
- ⁵⁷ Page 25
- ⁵⁸ Page 117
- ⁵⁹ Pages 17, 18
- ⁶⁰ Page x5
- ⁶¹ Pages x9, x11
- ⁶² Page 62
- ⁶³ Page 74
- ⁶⁴ Page 121