

Ralph Leopold von Klemperer Edler von Klemenau

Ralph Leopold (1884–1956) was the youngest son of the Dresden banker Gustav von Klemperer Edler von Klemenau (1852–1926) and his wife Charlotte (1857–1934), née Engelmann.

Ralph Leopold grew up in Dresden. From 1904 to 1910, he studied chemistry in Dresden and Jena and earned his doctorate in 1910 from the Technical University of Dresden. Between 1910 and 1913, Ralph Leopold worked as an engineer at the Škoda Works in Pilsen, Bohemia (Plzeň in Czech), where he served as general director in Vienna from 1913 to 1914.

In 1913, Ralph Leopold married Lili Huldshinsky (1893–1979), who was born in Berlin. She was the youngest daughter of Oskar Huldshinsky (1846–1931), a coal and steel entrepreneur, major industrialist, patron of the arts, and prominent art collector. Lili herself dabbled in painting and created miniature portraits of family members. Whether the passion for art was passed down from her father, Oskar, to Lili or from her father, Gustav, to Ralph Leopold—and whether the couple acquired their own art collection—can only be surmised; after all, both Ralph Leopold and Lili grew up surrounded by art in their respective family homes. What is known, however, is that they inherited Gustav von Klemperer's collection of miniatures and also owned paintings, valuable furniture, and several objects of Chinese art.

Between 1919 and 1920, the family moved to 86 Wiener Straße in Dresden with their three children (Hubert Ralph (1914–1999), Friedrich Oskar Oskar (1917–2010) and Ida Charlotte (1919–2015) built a villa. In 1923, Marie (1923–2012) was born as their fourth child. The villa, though slightly altered today, survived World War II. The families of Ralph Leopold and Victor settled very close to their parents, who lived at Wiener Straße 25. The third son, Herbert Otto (1878–1951), had found a home and a place to work in Berlin with his wife Frieda (1881–1945), née Kuffner, and their four children.

From 1914 to 1918, Ralph Leopold served in the Austrian Army. With the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1919, a new board of directors was appointed for the Škoda Works, and the headquarters were moved from Vienna to Prague. After World War I and the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, Ralph Leopold found a new field of activity from 1919 to 1936 as managing director of the “AG für Cartonnagen-Industrie” in Dresden. Even before World War I, industry in Dresden had developed significantly, and the city was regarded as a manufacturing hub for products such as chocolate,

cigarettes, cameras, typewriters, and sewing machines. Among the companies founded during this period was “AG Cartonnagen-Industrie.” It manufactured cardboard boxes, paper tubes, hat boxes, candy boxes, envelopes, pencil cases, bags, paper sacks, and much more.

Between 1920 and 1936, Ralph Leopold served as a member of the supervisory board of various trade and industrial organizations, as a member of the executive board of the Reich Federation of the Metal Goods Industry, and as a member of the main committee of the Reich Association of German Industry. In 1926, he also co-founded the Dresden Rotary Club. Even before 1933, anti-Semitic tendencies were evident in this club, which culminated in a demand that he resign in October 1935 and ultimately led to Ralph Leopold’s expulsion in 1936.

His eldest son, Hubert Ralph (1914–1999), had already emigrated to South Africa in January 1936 and asked his parents to visit him. Due to the increasingly volatile political situation in Germany and at their son’s urging, Ralph Leopold, his wife Lili, and the children still living at home left their home in Dresden as early as May 1937. They went into exile in South Africa on visitor visas. They settled in the town of Margate in the province of Natal and later obtained immigrant visas as well. To secure his family’s livelihood, Ralph Leopold, already 53 years old, reoriented his career. He purchased the company “The Standard Yoke & Timber Mills Ltd.” in Pietermaritzburg. To finance this new venture and support his family, he also sold part of the miniature collection he had inherited from his father. Beginning in 1939, Ralph Leopold served as chairman and managing director of this lumber

Ralph Leopold died on April 25, 1956, in Pietermaritzburg (South Africa). His son Hubert Ralph had joined the company as early as January 1948. He now became chairman and, together with his brother Friedrich Oskar, managing director of the firm. Hubert Ralph held this position until the end of August 1984, when his family sold the company and he retired.

References

The research project “The Reconstruction of the Porcelain Collection of the Dresden Banker Gustav von Klemperer (1852–1926),” conducted from November 2019 to August 2021 at the Porcelain Collection of the Dresden State Art Collections, documented its findings in digital form. All findings are compiled on a separate website of the Dresden State Art Collections and illustrated with a wide range of images:

<https://porzellansammlung.skd.museum/forschung/porzellansammlung-gustav-von-klemperer/>.

Five authors have contributed to the success of this project through scholarly essays. All relevant sources and bibliographic references are cited and traceable in these essays.

In addition, these essays have been published online in German and English:

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Lili von Klemperer, née Huldshinsky

Lili (1893–1979) was born on October 2, 1893, in the Wannsee neighborhood—now part of the southwestern Berlin district of Steglitz–Zehlendorf—as the youngest daughter of Oscar Huldshinsky (1846–1931) and his wife Ida (1860–1912), née Brandeis-Weikersheim, on October 2, 1893, in the Wannsee neighborhood of what is now the southwestern Berlin district of Steglitz–Zehlendorf, and grew up in a very affluent household. Her father was a powerful coal and steel entrepreneur, major industrialist, patron of the arts, and prominent art collector; her mother was the daughter of the Viennese wholesaler, banker, and British consul Salomon Brandeis-Weikersheim (1813–1877). Nothing is known about Lili’s youth, but it can be assumed that she received a thorough education befitting her social standing.

In 1911, Ralph Leopold had joined his brother Victor (1876–1943) and Victor’s wife Sophie (1887–1934) on a trip to Noordwijk. It was in this Dutch seaside resort—which had been internationally renowned for 150 years—that he met Lili. After overcoming the difficulties of obtaining permission from her father, Oscar Huldshinsky, to become engaged, Lili and Ralph Leopold von Klemperer were finally able to marry in 1913. In his memoirs, his brother Victor described this “union as a particularly happy one.” The couple was blessed with four children: Hubert Ralph (1914–1999), Friedrich Oskar (1917–2010), Ida Charlotte (1919–2015), and Marie (1923–2012).

In 1937, the family went into exile in South Africa. This period also proved to be a challenge for Lili. The initially small company “The Standard Yoke & Timber Mills Ltd.” in Pietermaritzburg grew into a high-performing factory in the 1940s. Since her sons Hubert Ralph and Friedrich Oskar were still serving in the military at first, Lili took over the entire bookkeeping in addition to her family responsibilities.

Later, when Ralph’s brother Victor’s health deteriorated, the two families supported one another. After Victor’s death in March 1943, his wife received permission to relocate to Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, where she lived near Lili until 1976.

On August 9, 1979, Lili von Klemperer died in Pietermaritzburg (South Africa).

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