Rosenberger Family

AR 5824

Item 21
OBITUARIES

Ludwig Rosenberger, 83; businessman, book collector

By Tom Gibbons

Ludwig Rosenberger, 83, a German immigrant who amassed perhaps the largest rare-book collection of Judaica ever privately owned, died Thursday at Wellington Plaza Nursing Home in Chicago.

Described by his friends as an "American success story," Mr. Rosenberger came to this country penniless 58 years ago, but succeeded in the wholesale business and pursued his passion for collecting works on the Jewish people.

In 1980, with 22,000 rare books in his private library, Mr. Rosenberger donated the collection to the University of Chicago. Valued as high as $20 million, the collection is one of the most valuable ever donated to the university.

"It is a great collection that is now part of the culture of Chicago," said Robert Rosenthal, curator of the U. of C.'s Department of Special Collections in the Joseph Regenstein Library.

"These books reflect one man's attempt to understand his fate as a Jew," he said, noting that Mr. Rosenberger "rarely bought a book he did not read."

Alan J. Altheimer, who was Mr. Rosenberger's attorney and longtime friend, said "he was a very modest man, but he was amazing."

"He would buy these books and carry them when traveling around the country as a salesman. He built a very successful business and he could read and write in six different languages," Altheimer said.

There is no religious literature in the book collection. Instead, it is a massive history of Jewish social and political thought dating back to 1200. Many of the books were published before 1451 in the first 50 years of printing. Many are first editions, such as Das Kapital.

Mr. Rosenberger attended college in Munich, Germany, and left before the Nazis rose to power. He lived in Palestine four years before immigrating to Chicago.

His one-man wholesale business, Ludwig & Co., sold goods to stores throughout the nation.

Mr. Rosenberger is survived by his wife, Hmgard.

Services will be at Furth Chapel, 5206 N. Broadway, on Sunday at 4 p.m. Burial will be private.

ROSENBERGER

Obituaries

U. of C. book donor
Ludwig Rosenberger

By Kenan Heise

Ludwig Rosenberger, 83, founder of a one-man wholesale business, Ludwig & Co., collected and donated to the University of Chicago one of the most important, and perhaps the largest, collection of Judaica ever privately owned.

Services for Mr. Rosenberger, a resident of Rogers Park, will be held at 4 p.m. Sunday in the chapel at 5206 N. Broadway. He died Thursday in a North Side nursing home.

The immense importance of the Rosenberger collection of more than 22,000 rare books and significant ephemera is underlined by the fact that so much historical Judaica was destroyed in Nazi-controlled Europe. Hitler and his aides demanded that Jewish books be burned, and the mere possession of them was a crime.

Mr. Rosenberger, who was born in Munich and attended the university there, left his native country in 1924. It was before the rise of Nazism, but in a post-World War I period, when, according to Mr. Rosenberger, "everybody hated everybody else."

He immigrated to Palestine, where he stayed for four years before coming to this country.

Here, he started a wholesale housewares business that took him from city to city. He acquired a hobby of visiting bookstores in the various places where he traveled, purchasing books on Jewish social and political thought and history.

The books are all in the six languages he could read: English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Latin. None are religious books.

Some of the volumes date to 1200 and contain a number incunabula or books published before 1501 in the first 50 years of printing.

A booklet that was acquired by Mr. Rosenberger was written in Germany by Julius Seligsohn several years after the Nazi ban on Jewish writings. The pamphlet urged Jews to leave Germany.

Seligsohn did not take his own advice because he wanted to try to save Jews there, and he died in a concentration camp.

The collection holds many important first editions, including "Das Kapital" by Karl Marx, as well as letters by Marx, Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

In 1980, Mr. Rosenberger donated his extensive library to the U. of C., which agreed to give it its own room and not to split it up for at least 50 years. Estimates of its value have been as high as $22 million.

Ludwig Rosenberger

"He rarely bought a book he did not read," according to Robert Rosenthal, curator of the U. of C. department of special collections of the Joseph Regenstein Library.

"It is almost impossible for a person with my life history not to become interested in the troubles of the Jewish people," Mr. Rosenberger told a writer for the University of Chicago Magazine. "It wasn't anything but natural that a person thinks about the underlying problems."

Mr. Rosenberger received an honorary doctorate in 1970 from Spertus College.

He is survived by his wife, Irmgard.

ROSENBERGER

Ludwig Rosenberger, beloved husband of Irmgard, fond son-in-law of Eugene and the late Morris L. Kaufman of Richmond, Va.; beloved brother of Lotte, of Chicago, and Herbert, of Century, Md.; dearly loved grandfather of Michael and Elana, of Chicago. Service was held at 11 a.m., Saturday, at the 9th Ward Synagogue. Memorial will be held at the Shabbath Home, 909 W. Argyle, Chicago, 60626. Interment: Shohab Cemetery, 7644-1005.