

## Archival Research: Germany

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Archival research is a solitary but satisfying experience. The very nature of the work demands a painstaking examination of documents. Everyone working at an archive pursues his individual topic with the persistence of a physical scientist who spends long hours peering through the lens of his microscope. In busy research centers such as the Federal Archives at Koblenz, a spirit of camaraderie may develop among the researchers, but most of the day is spent in self-directed study. Just holding the original documents and perusing private correspondence can be an engaging experience best understood perhaps by arm-chair detectives, voyeurs and paper fetishists.

Before he approaches the archive, the scholar must have thoroughly previewed his topic by exhausting the printed sources. For me this meant a careful examination of German political and economic history during the late Wilhelmian era and the Weimar republic. The man whose career I chose to analyze was Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1951). As a founder of the Pan German League and as director of the famed Krupp firm, as the organizer of a vast newspaper chain and film syndicate and as chairman of the German National People's Party, Hugenberg was a substantial figure in German affairs through 1933 when he was a member of Hitler's cabinet. Historians seemed to agree that Hugenberg was a political spokesman for heavy industry, that his newspapers favored the rise of Hitler and that his film syndicate contributed to the success of Nazism.

Before I could enter the archive at Koblenz, I had to prove that I was a graduate student and a serious scholar. German archives demand that a student reserve a research seat and that doctoral candidates - undergraduates are usually denied admission - produce a

letter of recommendation from their Doktorvater, i.e., their dissertation director. Once he is admitted, the student discusses his topic with archival specialists. These men direct the researcher to Findbücher, i.e., search books which summarize the contents of archival volumes. Certain collections of documents such as the papers of General von Schleicher are painstakingly arranged. Others such as the records of the Ufa film concern are less conveniently organized. Of course, the latter are more likely to contain new information. After hours of reading old correspondence and diligently taking notes, the student might find one real gem. Some days, pages and pages of old letters reveal nothing. For instance, the papers of Hans-Erdmann von Lindeiner-Wildau, an associate of Hugenberg, contained nothing but old bills and requests from his sons for money. The papers of Leo Wegener, on the other hand, were a veritable Fundgrube, i.e., a "gold mine" of information.

Koblenz is probably the most used archive in the Federal Republic of Germany. Its counterpart in the German Democratic Republic is the German Central Archive at Potsdam. Entrance into this research center depends on a multitude of factors. Fortunately 1967 was a good year for Americans to apply and I was permitted to work there for two weeks. Because of political differences with the West, researchers are not permitted to use the search books at Potsdam. The archivist lists those volumes which he considers pertinent. Technically, the scholars can order not more than ten archival volumes a day. Since these may contain nothing more than old electric bills, this could be a real disadvantage. Fortunately the archive does not enforce this rule. The necessity of rapid work is made clear at Potsdam. Researchers are encouraged not to take notes, but to have the desired documents microfilmed. With the pressure of time, the scholar is forced to



scan rapidly and order copies which can be studied at a more leisurely pace later. This is a practical, efficient and, if one counts hotel costs, relatively inexpensive way to use any archive.

The approach that I learned at Koblenz and Potsdam was valuable for work in regional archives at Schleswig, Aurich and Osnabrück and particularly useful when I began examining newspapers published by the Hugenberg concern. Since his press published three papers in Berlin and at least fourteen in the provinces, my task was considerable. The remains of these publications were preserved in cities scattered throughout Germany (and happily at the annex of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Versailles). Microfilming was invaluable for tapping the memory bank of these papers. However, some archives, such as the Institute for Social History in Amsterdam do not permit microfilming of documents. At the same time, the analysis of news reels and feature films produced by the Hugenberg concern demands a more traditional approach to note taking.

Up to this point, access to information had been relatively easy. The most difficult problem in any archival research is the problem of securing entry to private collections. Owners of such material frequently fear that the documents will be "misused." Fortunately, friends were able to convince certain archivists that I was a careful, unbiased scholar. The historical archive of the Gute Hoffnungshütte A.G. in Oberhausen was the first to permit me to examine its holdings - an opportunity as unique and weirdly exciting as vacationing in the vaults of ITT. Once a researcher secures entree to one industrial archive he is more liable to gain access to others. Archivists at the (formerly I.G.) Farben-Fabriken A.G. (Leverkusen) and the August-Thyssen-Hütte A.G.

(Duisberg) subsequently allowed me the opportunity to examine their records. Unfortunately the firm of Krupp, apparently distressed by the work of William Manchester, has closed its archives. However, the decision of the Hugenberg family allowing me to examine the personal papers preserved on the family estate at Rohbraken more than compensated for this disappointment.

From liquor store boxes crammed with notes, a new picture of Hugenberg is being distilled. The old image of the man must be changed fundamentally. Not only was Hugenberg not a spokesman for heavy industry, but he had bitter enemies in the Ruhr. His papers did not encourage readers to vote for Hitler and his films did not vaunt the cause of the Nazi party. Only an analysis of original sources permits the historian to challenge old interpretations and reconstruct the past accurately. Archival research may be solitary, but its rewards are many - not the least among them are the opportunities to travel and follow leads into ever broader fields of interest.