

A note from MOAPH: Alex Haro worked for MOAPH for about 2 years while completing his education at California Polytechnic University in San Luis Obispo. Alex's mother was born and raised in Germany and only spoke to Alex in German while growing up (and continues to do so today). German is a difficult language to translate because many sayings and phrases don't translate directly into English. Alex (sometimes with help from his mother and grandmother) was able to navigate this difficult language and translate it into very understandable English. I don't think we could have translated the Ruhe company history without Alex's work.

Below is "Wild Animals, Free Delivery – The Epilogue" about the Ruhe company, written by Alex Haro, a talented writer in his own right and someone we miss at the museum.

Wild Animals, Free Delivery – The Epilogue

By Alex Haro

In reading Wilde Tiere Frei Haus, one cannot help but wonder what happened to Firma[1] Ruhe.

Officially, 1993 was the year that Hermann Ruhe III filed for bankruptcy – marking an end to the 150-year-old company that had been started in Alfeld by his great-grandfather Ludwig Ruhe.

However, to understand Firma Ruhe's fall, we must also understand their rise:

Animal trading for the first half of the 20th century functioned relatively without restrictions. This meant that animals could be imported and exported with little paperwork and governmental interference. As long as animals arrived in a healthy condition, they could be sold to zoos or trained for circuses. Colonialism also played a significant role in shaping the success of the Ruhe business, providing a steady flow of wildlife from territories under European control.

For Germany, this often meant utilizing the resources of its colonies in East Africa. This unchallenged access to wildlife allowed Firma Ruhe to expand

[1] MOAPH: Firma means company in English.

their networks and operations, cementing their business as key suppliers in the global trade of exotic animals.

World War I was a major test for Firma Ruhe and served as a testament to their resilience. Hyperinflation became a major problem during the Weimar Republic, causing international deals to be almost worthless. However, through utilizing their office in the United States, they were able to advance their business into more international markets, earning some of the largest contracts in the firm's history.

As much effort as the Ruhe family had put in, the aftermath of World War II was one that was impossible to fully come back from. Innovations in travel meant that animals were flown by aircraft, eliminating the need for ships, the main transportation system for Firma Ruhe. Moreover, their competitors were not subjected to the harsh international trade restrictions that post-war Germany had to endure.

Alongside those developments, animal trading was simply becoming too regulated for a for-profit company to exist. Guidelines from the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, restrictions as a result of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), as well as national and regional legislation made it almost impossible for a company like Firma Ruhe to continue.

A major reason for Firma Ruhe's long existence in such an unreliable industry was their true passion for animal keeping. Special cages were created often with one kind of animal in mind. Entire teams were designated just to make sure transported animals were as comfortable as possible during their journey to their destination. The number of shortcuts Firma Ruhe could have made is endless. However, to the Ruhe's and their team, animals were not a mere means towards profit. Their care and effort in how these animals were transported and treated meant that they simply had a better product than their competitors, and that is the true reason for Firma Ruhe's 150-year lifespan.

Firma Ruhe excelled in the wild west like era in animal trading. A lawless time, but where unspoken standards were upheld by those who cared most. However, it slowly dissipated with the globalization of the world in the aftermath of World War II.

Therefore, when Herman Ruhe III filed for bankruptcy in 1993, it was not a moment of defeat, but rather a moment of closure.