

The International Ihagee/Exakta Convention, Dresden April 2012 (1)

by Mark Stuecheli (most illustrations are photos taken by the author; a few are mine HR)

Over a year ago, Jim Focht and I vowed to attend the Convention in Dresden, which took place on April 12-14. Luckily we were able to live up to our expectations, and we connected in Kansas City for our trip to Dresden as the only representatives from the United States. We have calculated that it makes us very special – two out of over 311 million!

I have organized the commentary sequentially by each day of our stay in Dresden.

These reports are also published on the Topica Exakta list. I have included photos from the trip in the Exakta List Photo Directory. A separate folder will be provided for each day's activities. Please forgive me, but all of the shots were taken with my low-budget Canon digital camera, I did take a few photos with my Exakta VX1000, but found that I usually was too rushed to pull out the Exakta.

Day One: Blue Wonder

Our flight departed on Tuesday morning, and after a rather unpleasant series of flights (including layovers in Chicago and Frankfurt), our plane arrived in Dresden around noon on Wednesday. We know very little German and discovered very quickly that not many Dresdeners are fluent in English (we understand that it's due to the preferred second language being Russian before reunification). After some confusion on our part in catching the train to the main station in Dresden, locating the correct tram to our hotel, and finding our hotel; we finally were able to crash in our rooms in the early afternoon.

We stayed at a pension hotel (Hotel Theodosius) located only a half-block from the Die Technische Sammlungen Dresden (identified as the Technical Museum in the rest of the commentary), where most of the Convention activities took place. The museum is located in the former Ernemann factory building, which later housed VEB Pentacon and which includes the famous Pentacon Tower. After arriving at our hotel, Jim decided that he was finished for the day and opted to stay in the room to recover from the grueling trip. I ventured out to see a bit of Dresden, since the weather was nice.



The hotel was situated only about a half mile from the Elbe River, so I headed in that direction and eventually located a commercial district near a major bridge over the river. I walked along the Elbe for a short while and took a few shots of the bridge, the riverfront and the funicular on the north side of the river. Only later did I realize that I had stumbled upon the Blue Wonder, the famous Loschwitz Bridge, the sole bridge in Dresden that made it through the war. It survived the 1945 bombing and was saved from being blown up during the German Wehrmacht retreat at the end of the war. It is painted blue – ergo its name.

Later in the day I took a tram downtown to the main hotel to see if I could find any of other attendees that I knew (the tram system is quite extensive and easy to use, once you learn the ropes). That effort was unsuccessful, but (unfortunately) I did locate one familiar sight, which is shown in the last photo. I lasted until early evening and then headed to the room to recover from my jetlag.



Day Two: City Tour & Opening Dinner

Because of our need to recover from our jet lag, we decided to forgo the very nice tour of Dresden that



had been arranged for the group. It included a driving and walking tour of Dresden, a visit to the Historical Green Vault at the Royal palace, a guided tour of the Semper Opera House, and an organ recital at the famous Frauenkirche (the Church of the Lady), the Baroque Cathedral that was destroyed in the 1945 firebombing. It was left in ruins for over 45 years by the Communists as a remembrance of the brutality of the air raids and was rebuilt after reunification as a symbol of reconciliation between the former warring enemies. The reconstruction work was completed in 2005.



We spent Thursday looking around the neighborhood of our hotel and acquiring cell phones for our stay in Europe. That night we arrived a bit early for the dinner at the host hotel, the Ibis (a communist era building), and were happy to spot several familiar faces. The dinner was a pleasant affair that allowed us to renew acquaintances with other Exakta collectors that we had met at the International Exakta Meeting in Oxford in 2008. They included Hugo Ruys of The Netherlands; Alan Hopwood and John Richardson from Great Britain; Michel Rouah of France; Svend Erik Jeppesen of Denmark and Olaf Nattenberg of Germany, among others. We also met collectors with whom we had been able to communicate only through e-mail: Miha Steinbücher and his wife Tina, from Slovenia.



Shortly after I arrived at the dinner I realized that I was party to an embarrassing fashion faux pas – refer to the attached photos for a shot of me and Alan Hopwood in matching photographic attire.

Rainer Dierchen, who organized the Convention, opened the dinner by thanking everyone for coming and providing information on the schedule of events. Hugo Ruys also spoke briefly, conveying the information in English for those of us who did not speak German. The dinner was excellent and consisted of a large variety of items on a buffet line. Jim and I sat at a table with others

who spoke English (thank goodness that nearly all Europeans are bilingual and many are fluent in

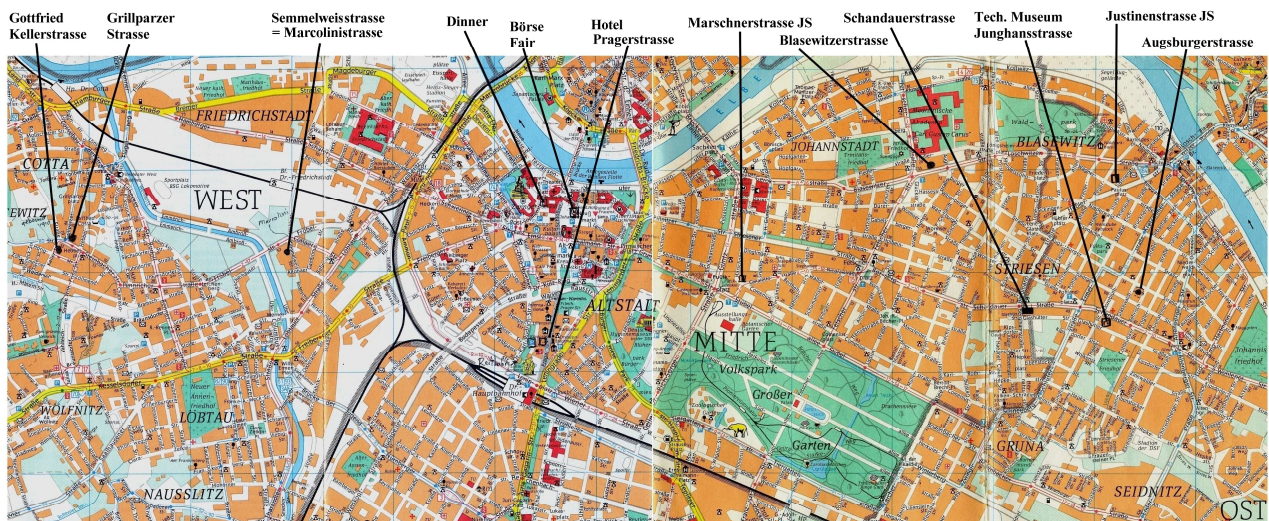


English), and our conversations covered lots of topics, including a bit of Exakta talk. At the end of the evening we caught a cab to our hotel, which was located about three miles east of the Ibis Hotel. Before we left, Hugo invited us to join him on a pilgrimage to the “Holy Sites” the next morning. But I would be getting ahead of myself if I were to explain that term in this message.

Morning, Day Three: Pilgrimage to the Holy Sites

On Friday Jim Focht and I were fortunate to be offered a “Pilgrimage to the Holy Sites” thanks to Hugo Ruys, who had driven to Dresden for the Convention. By “Holy Sites” I mean the former residences of Johan Steenberg and the sites of almost all of the Ihagee factories. We had time to venture out in the morning because the presentations were scheduled for the afternoon. Hugo had programmed into his GPS navigator the location of the each of the sites, so our pilgrimage was just a matter of driving to each one and spending time looking around.

(The image shown here is part of a map of Dresden which I bought there in 1990. Hugo Ruys)





We started with the location closest to the Technical Museum: Augsburger Strasse 88, a building that still exists. It was used as an administrative space for a short time in 1923 during the move from Gottfried-Keller-Strasse to Schandauer Strasse. The building now appears to be used for residential purposes.

Next up was a home in which Johan and his wife lived after their marriage in 1931 – located at Justinenstrasse 7. It's situated in the Blasewitz District in a residential area about 1/3



mile from the Blue Wonder bridge that I mentioned in a previous installment. It is slightly less than a mile north of the Schandauer Strasse factory (the factory that operated from 1923 until it was destroyed by the 1945 bombing), easy walking or bicycling distance for Johan. The home is very impressive and actually is one-half of an attached structure. We thought that it would be rather forward for us to knock on the door to see the inside, so we were content to take shots from the street.



We then headed about a mile west to Blasewitzer Strasse 41/43, the home of Ihagee from May 1945. That building stood until it was demolished in the 1990s and a new structure was erected in its place. Even though nothing remains of the old factory, one noteworthy Ihagee feature is worth seeing – the plaque commemorating Karl Nüchterlein. It was erected in 2006 in a special ceremony attended by Nüchterlein's son. Dr. Wilfent Dalicho, a retired German professor who donated the plaque, attended the Meeting and was one of the speakers.

Our next visit was unfruitful. We were searching for a building in which Johan lived before his marriage, that was supposed to be at Marschnerstrasse 2. That area has quite of bit of open space, a pretty clear indication that it had been heavily bombed in 1945. We finally located that address and found an extremely



nondescript building that looked like a pre-fab unit. Clearly, it was time to head across town.



The Ihagee factory from 1919-1923 was located in a building at Gottfried-Keller Strasse 85, situated about 2 ½ miles west of the Altstadt (Old Town) area and 5 miles from the Schandauer Strasse building. It still is very similar to its appearance from that time, although it has been turned into apartments. We took special pleasure in walking along the same cobblestone drives upon which Johan and his workers trod all those years ago. As we were walking around the building, we were approached by one of the residents who was concerned about our intentions. Hugo was able to calm his fears, but I'm not sure that he understood why we were so interested in the building.



We took a short stroll to another Ihagee-occupied structure located about two blocks away. By 1922 the business had grown to the point that the administrative functions were moved to the building at Grillparzerstrasse 51, on the corner of Steinbacherstrasse. It is a rather plain looking commercial building, and currently the ground level appears to be vacant.

Our last stop was to the beginning of Ihagee – the building at 8 Marcolini-

strasse, which was used as the first factory from 1914-1919. The street has been renamed Semmelweisstrasse, but Hugo knew where to find it. The building appears to be a residence now.



You may have noted that I haven't discussed the most famous Ihagee structure, the "*House of a Thousand Hands*" - Schandauer Strasse 24. That's because we didn't make a stop there. The site is located on the tram route that we took on several occasions to and from the Altstadt area, so we saw quite a bit of it. The building was destroyed in the war and the lot was

vacant for many years. After reunification the lot finally was sold and a new, rather ugly, residential block, with ground level retail uses, was built on the property.



Finally, at the meeting that afternoon, we heard that Johan had lived for a short while in a residence on the north side of the Elbe River, a short distance from the Blue Wonder bridge. So we didn't quite complete our "Pilgrimage to the Holy Sites". That will have to wait until we (hopefully) return to Dresden sometime in the

future.

Jim and I are extremely grateful to Hugo for his very generous offer. It provided us with memories of the Ihagee/Dresden connection that we will treasure for the rest of our lives.