



Ignatz Wittmann, Vojtech Wittmann and their factory for Bryndza cheese (specific manufactured sheep cheese) and cheese under the name "I. Wittmann & Son" in Zvolen

Ignatz Wittmann was born in December 1867 in Zemianska Ludrová. He graduated from the Piarist^{*1} Gymnasium (Secondary Grammar School) in Ružomberok (Rosenberg). His picture can be found in the group photograph of students with Vavro Šrobár (former Czechoslovak politician and first minister with whole power for administration of Slovakia) who was born in a neighbouring village of Lisková. Ignatz's parents - Bernhard Wittmann (timber merchant) and Betty Schlesinger had six children together. Mother passed away in 1877, at the age of 40.

Ignatz Wittmann (hereinafter also referred to as "Ignác") had founded his sheep-cheese factory in Zvolen back in 1891. He married Ms. Julia Kríser from Beluša in 1893. They had two sons (Karol and Vojtech). During the World War I Ignatz Wittmann had established - in cooperation with other fellow sheep-cheese producers (A. Vagač, Detva; P. Molec, Zvolenská (former Velká) Slatina; and G. Blüh, Zvolen) - so called Upper Hungarian Joint Sheep-Cheese Works (i.e. Hornouhorské spojené bryndziarne - former Upper Hungary is Slovakia now) that subsequently split up after the war in 1922). Wittmann's Bryndza factory was transformed into The Factory of Bryndza and Cheese „I. Wittmann and son“. His son Vojtech Wittmann had become a partner of Ignác since 1920. In the early thirties, they also began to cooperate with German cheese manufacturer Zwick^{*2} in the production of boxed processed cheese - with the label Wittmann and Zwick, and logo of a sparrow hawk under the name Jastrab / Czech language version - Jestřáb / Sperber in German. In 1934, Vojtech Wittmann married Marie Šnejdárková (Catholic), daughter of General Šnejdárková (Schneidarek). Ignác Wittmann passed away in 1936. The Zvolen Chronicle had published the following obituary (excerpt): *„... the founder of now widely-known company in Bryndza and cheese industry: the firm Ignác Wittmann and Son. In him, our city has lost one of its leading citizens.“* Until the Second World War, I. Wittmann & Son had been regularly ranked amongst the best producers at various cheese fairs/exhibitions. They had cheese manufacturing plants located in surrounding villages of Babiná, Bacúrov, Radnovce, Sása and Zolná, had cooperated with Sub Carpathian Ruthenia and they had their stores in the city centres of Prague, Brno, Moravian Ostrava and Bratislava - utilizing their own laboratory and employing several Czech experts. Their products variety had outclassed all other cheese producers in Czechoslovakia. I. Wittmann & Son produced Bryndza (specific manufactured sheep-cheese), hard cheeses, soft cheeses, moldy cheeses, processed cheeses, yoghurts etc. Over the period between the wars, the Wittmanns were mentioned in the National Representative Lexicon for Slovakia and Sub Carpathian Ruthenia (Bratislava, 1934). Dairy Letters in 1931, 1934 and 1937 report about the awards for cheeses produced by I. Wittmann and Son Co. and also about their modern production methods. From 1936 till 1939, - I. Wittmann and Son Co. - possessed the first place in sales of Bryndza (sheep-cheese) from the total of 48 Slovak producers of Bryndza (sheep-cheese). Vojtech Wittmann had implemented his deep knowledge, advertising and the rationalized transport routes to the perfection. Back in the thirties he firmly resisted the so-called "regulated economy" of the clerks when there were attempts to limit his manufacturing via questionable restriction orders from the syndicate related to Bryndza (sheep-cheese) sales - under the disguise of government regulations. However, even worse events came soon afterwards.

In July 1941, the factory was aryanized. The aryanizer was Teofil A. Babala, secretary of the extreme right-wing nationalist and fascist party „HSLS“ with the seat in Bratislava. The Company logo had to be changed and - in one of his requests for reclassification of a vehicle - he reasoned that - as the biggest cheese and dairy producer in Slovakia, it had to be classified as the company important for national defense interests. After the upcoming front line developments, Babala disappeared and the factory was taken over by the Union of Dairy Associations. Vojtech Wittmann was involved in SNP (Slovak National Uprising movement) and on 28th August 1944, the night before the uprising declaration, the very first meeting of the secret National Committee took place at Vojtech's home. After the military suppression of the Uprising, the family was secluded in hiding. After the war, Vojtech Wittmann started with construction of a new, modern dairy factory, investing all his assets. The February's events and the emergence of a new totalitarian era resulted in yet another massive blow to the long-suffering family - that is why the Wittmanns left Czechoslovakia illegally at the turn of 1948-49. Wittmann's name were forgotten to be mentioned as well^{*3}. The highly skilled labor techniques and the predictions made by Vojtech Wittmann about the future of the dairy industry in Slovakia were forgotten as well. There are three known works in the archives: of 52 pages (1944), 30 pages (1938) and 8 pages (1947).

After the regime fall (of regime) in 1989, Katarína Wittmannová (Katharine Ann Wittmann) decided to follow the footsteps of her father Vojtech. After the years of disputes, she reclaimed the buildings, land, purchased much needed supplies and equipment and succeeded to restore the family brand under her direct leadership for the coming years. At present, there is no one from the Wittmanns family directly involved in the production of cheese and Bryndza (sheep-cheese). The dairy was sold to a French group in 2001.

Footnote:

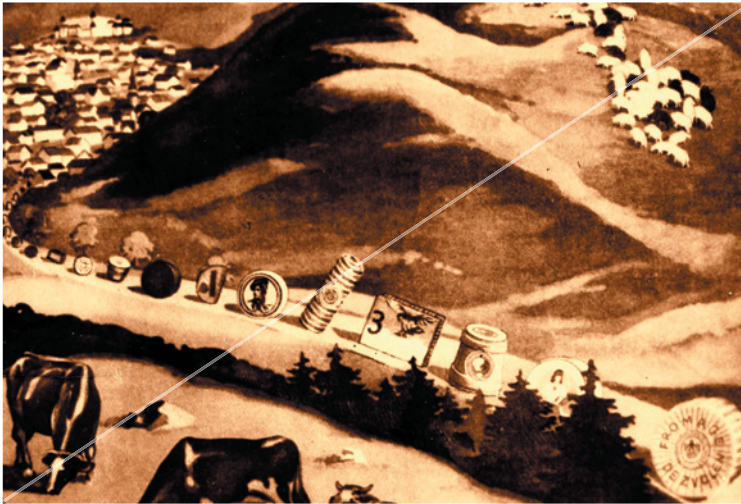
The introductory text on the first page was sent to the editor of Wikipedia by the author, hence it is not a copy, but rather it is the basis for the data herein.

*1 The Order of Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools

*2 Mr. Zwick had his cheese factory in the town Ulm southern Germany, Swabia, prealpine lands Allgäu.

*3 that applied to all refugees - name was forbidden to be mentioned

Labels and inscriptions for cheeses in the Factory I. Wittmann and Son in Zvolen before the World War II



Folk and Slovak national themes were typical for traditional labels for cheese and Bryndza (sheep-cheese) products from the Wittmann's factory. Particularly, Vojtech Wittmann had a very positive relationship towards folk themes. His apartment had been tastefully decorated with many of them: a fresco (Author Bertalan Pór), inlay, paintings, a sculpture above the fireplace (probably by Fraňo Štefunko), several small statues by Július Bártfay. He generously supported local artists too (M. Staudt). After his emigration he had requested from his friends a calendar with paintings of Jaroslav Hála and monographs about Zvolen and surroundings – to be sent to Canada. The family still retains the beautifully embroidered decorative canvas wall – embroidery from Očová (Oczova) - crafted on black velvet.

Pustohradský cheese/Pustohrader • Očovský cheese/Ocovaerkäse • Zvolenerkäse

Before the World War II, Wittmann had promoted some of his cheeses brands/labels in close connection with Zvolen regional landmarks and the surrounding area. Therefore, there were: Zvolenský cheese, Pustohradský cheese (named after Pustý hrad - “Deserted Castle” built high up in the mountains above Zvolen at the turn of the 12th and 13th century) or Očovský cheese - after Očová, a typical traditional village near Zvolen. That must have been a very personal expression of local patriotism feelings of Vojtech Wittmann along with his respect of folk cultural heritage, costumes and creativity. The cheese label Dumbier can be another great example of his predilection (affection) for Slovakia.

Today, Pustý hrad has become a popular venue for a wide variety of local/town events. The awareness of a historical monument is gaining ground - not only because of its archaeological findings, but also due to the fact that it is - possibly - the greatest hill-fortress built in Central Europe. The re-construction works and excavations have started only recently – since 1989 - under the leadership of Dr. Václav Hanuliak and the key investor – the town municipality of Zvolen. The renovation works have always been supported by the contributions from sponsors / donors, that also included Katharine Wittmann – the old-new owner of the dairy I. Wittmann and Son /each year until 2001/, walking the path chosen by her father.



K. W.archive Očovský/Otschovaerkäse

Zvolenerkäse

Pustohrader

Dumbier
-cream cheese

For pre-war labels of cheese and Bryndza (sheep-cheese), Vojtech Wittmann had chosen the themes depicting shepherds (3 different labels with shepherds), folk embroideries and ornaments, as well as unspoiled nature, where the cheeses had originated from. The labels art design and the creative inner thoughts along with their workmanship draw interest also today, e.g. nature themes used on labels of **Gentiana***, **Enzian**, **Erika** cheeses. The cheeses showing rather ethnological character of the country are typically Slovak - **Bača**, **Anča**, or a simple display of shepherd with sheep seen on stickers for Bryndza (sheep-cheese). The cheese label **Bella Viera** resembles Czech traditional clothes.



Gentiana, form the Laktos collection

Enzian, K. W. archive

Erika, Museum Zv archive

Bryndza-cheese, K. W. archive

Folk embroidery ornaments have been beautifully transposed on the labels of Fromage d'Or. Each label contains a story - preserved by the family – particularly this one, which was recorded thanks to discussions between Katharine Wittmann with her mother Marie Wittmann.

* Vojtech Wittmann paid M. Staudt's studies on the "Académie Julian" - an art school in Paris



Shepherd
from the Laktos
collection

Bella Viera,
K. Wittmann archive

Formage d'Or
K. Wittmann archive

Vojtech Wittmann used a beautiful bonnet - embroidery as a template on the above mentioned sticker with the diameter of 15cm

His wife liked this embroidery so much that, later on, her evening reticule was made out of this cap. This reticule was also amongst few things which they could take along on the journey without a prospect of returning back to communist Czechoslovakia.

For other labels, Wittmann used other designs/samples taken from the Slovak folk embroidery with its characteristic variety of colours, richness of different techniques and ornamental shapes.

In Očová and the surrounding villages, people practiced embroidery with the use of a curved needle as very common technique. Not only caps were decorated, but jackets, skirts,



From Laktos collection

aprons and different parts of traditional dress of women in particular, but also of men. Wittmann had ordered to embroider this characteristic feature on a gift prepared for President Beneš, but the course of events had caused that the gift was never handed over. **The embroidery dimensions were close to 2 x 0.9 m.** The artist had designed only the basic outlines of the tree of life - and the rest was realized by the skilful hands of folk artist from Očová in 1937. Most likely, this embroiderer was Ms. Válkova*. Vojtech Wittmann had her name in his notes, found after his death.



Jánošík - the second filmed version of the legendary forest robber named Juraj Jánošík was directed by Mr. Frič with Paľo Bielik in the lead role in 1935. The tall figure of Paľo Bielik started his career just in this film. The movie was received positively by the international audience and critics and sold to 32 countries.

Vojtech Wittmann supported several Slovak artists by buying their paintings and sculptures. The unique success of the Czechoslovak film production could not evade his attention. He responded as a right marketing expert and enthusiast as well, and started to produce processed cheese Jánošík with the main film character depicted with a handwritten signature of the actor Paľo Bielik. In addition, he produced a processed cheese called Anča, its label is similar to Jánošík's beloved Anička from the movie.



Jánošík with the
signature of P. Bielik

Jánošík and cheese Anča, K. W. archive Laktos collection archive

Labels for French-speaking areas - these labels were characterized by the fact that the inscriptions were mostly in one language only, i.e. French

Cheeses for German market - production started back in 1930-32, while co-producing the processed cheese the Wittmanns co-operated with Mr. Zwick - a German partner from Ulm (1932-1935). The cheeses and the relevant correspondence were marked as **Wittmann and Zwick** and the logo was „Sparrowhawk / Jastrab-Krahulec, in German **Sperber**“. Several types of such cheeses became known. The Sparrow-hawk logo was later used even without any direct involvement of the German partner. The Sparrowhawk logo was used on the following cheeses: Romadour, Tomatenkäse, Allgäuer / Allgäu Cream Cheese, Chive Cheese, The Finest Mustard Cheese and others. Except for the „Sperber“, logo - the labels for the German market had also other features in common. They illustrated women in traditional German clothes.



K. Wittmann archive

*from the Laktos collection

Zvolen museum archive

As for cheeses intended for all markets under the name Wittmann family-owned factory, I. Wittmann and Son, the first letter/type „I.“ appeared equally - for all brands in French. It was rather similar to J. - used in bilingual inscriptions both in Slovak and German languages. There is an evident influence of German type - named Schwabach, used until WWII

As for the inscriptions, as German market of those days may be considered large Germany - plus other territories - such as three million Germans living in pre-war Czechoslovakia (repatriated by force after the war) and of course German speaking Austria. There were posters, prints of Jánošík in Wittmann's shop on the main square, along with a photograph of a blond child (with a German inscription on a postcard „Am liebsten Wittmann Käse“, - in German language “the favourite cheese of Wittmann, best-loved cheese of Wittmann” - where as you could be under impression that it was a German girlie. Seniors who have given us a description (for instance Mrs. Jozefíniová, born in 1926) told us that it was the little son of Mr. Schwarz - a teacher from Zvolen. The postcard photo contained a list of selected Wittmann cheeses on the backside.

Trade and patriotism - Wittmann wrote this text on the label of Bača cheese (Chief shepherd cheese) triangles: „This valuable packaged cheese is produced from the finest Tyrolean Emmentaler cheese. Each consumed box allows export of ¼ kg of Bryndza (sheep-cheese). Help us with our effort so that fujaras (long local shepherd's pipes) and our songs will not go silent *1.“ At that time, a similar text started to be used by other producers, such as Gejza Blüh*2. This was based on export and import rules (author of this text describes the theme in separate chapter about Czech and Slovak cheese business during the period between the two World Wars).



From Laktos collection

IWUS cheese (an abbreviation of the label inscription Ignatz Wittmann und Sohn) was an exception in the use of national motives. The packaging was all blue. This processed cheese became very popular.

It was made of three kinds of cheese, including Roquefort, called Zvolensky Blue by Wittmann.

Ceramic container for Bryndza (sheep-cheese)

The container in the photo was most likely used for export of Bryndza to France. It is 20 cm tall. It was a product from the mid-30ties, but, for that time-period, it had a very progressive design - neatly shaped ceramic container. Customers, who bought a container with Bryndza, could re-use the container at home for different purposes such as storing things, flower pots, liquid and solid food storage. Such progressive packaging belongs rather to the sale techniques of modern times. There is no information available, whether the package had to be returned to Czechoslovakia (Bryndza container is also mentioned in other parts of the book)



Notes to the text:

* Gentiana - Gentian plant, in Mýto pod Ďumbierom, is the most widespread and legally protected plant nowadays.

Encián, Enzian - another name of Gentian, mountain plant

* Mrs. Váľková ranked amongst the best embroiderers in Zvolen region. She was a master of Folk Art Production - embroidery of Očová (born 1903). She had been embroidering since the age of 11.

* The Zwick family company became after the end of World War II a leading manufacturer of machines for materials testing; since 1992 in connection with the Roell group.

* For the account completeness, it should be noted that there were also other producers operating in Zvolen area - traditionally the region with the largest concentration of cheese manufacturers and Bryndza (sheep-cheese) producers in Slovakia, who used the national or local themes, but those used by Wittmann were richer and due to the largest assortment of cheeses produced in his factory, much more recognized and known. Other producers used sheep and nature themed labels without a specific name on the packaging of Bryndza, without the need for another special name
Cheese Detvan, Detvus and Kriváň, producer Alexander Vagač, Detva
Cheese Polana and Slovenka, producer Peter Molec, Zvolenská Slatina
Cheese Salaš, producer Gejza Blüh, Zvolen
Zvolen castle theme used by the manufacturer of Bryndza Koloman Ipper, Zvolen



The text about labels is the basis for one of the chapters in the currently processed history of the Wittmanns.

The text has been shortened. Author of the text (Text author): Štefan Hvojník © Zvolen, 2010

For the label Bača, Wittmann used a picture according to the photo by Karol Plicka world-renowned photographer.