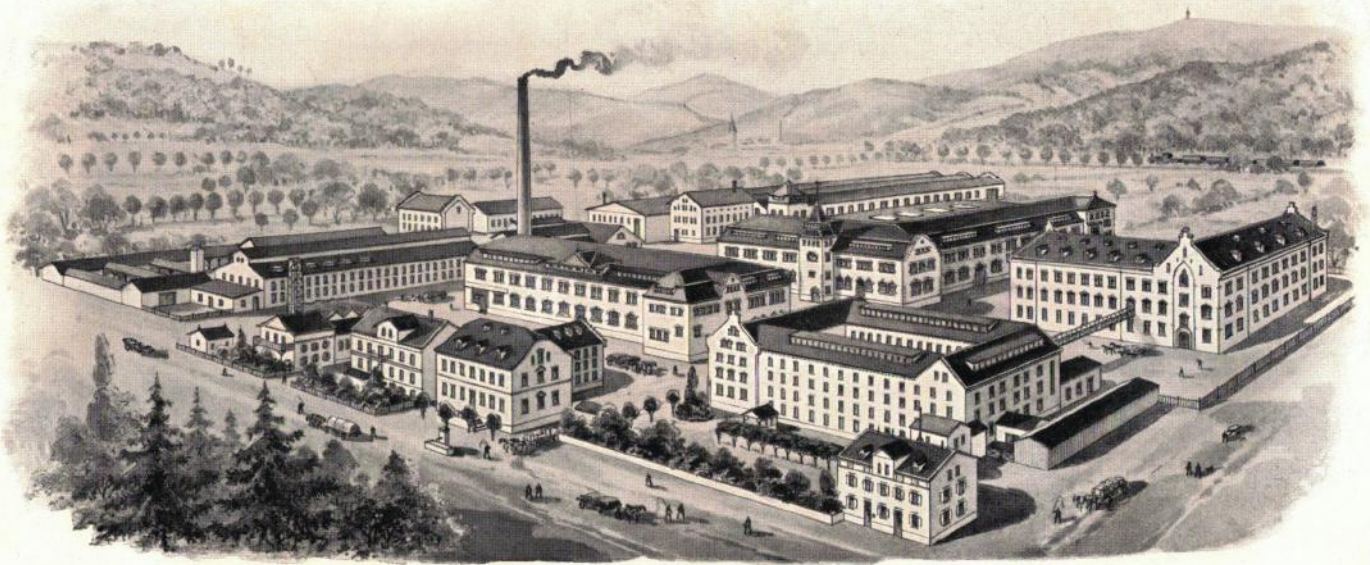


GEBRÜDER KRAFFT FAHRNAU

Since 1854

Industrial History from the Wiesental



Gesamtansicht des Werkes in Fahrnau (Baden).

GEBRÜDER KRAFFT, FAHRNAU (Baden)
Gerbereien und Schuhfabriken.



Editorial

In the mid-19th century, the Wiesental began to undergo a profound transformation. New businesses were established, machinery was introduced, and increasing numbers of people found work in the factories of the region.

Among the companies that helped shape this transformation was Gebrüder Krafft in Fahrenau.

The story began in 1854 with the reopening of an existing red tannery. From what was initially a craft-based business, a company in the leather and footwear industry developed over the following decades. Factory buildings were constructed, new production methods were introduced, and the workforce grew.

But the story did not remain confined to Fahrenau.

Who were the people behind the company? Which decisions determined its future course? What roles did family, technological development and new markets play? And how did the company's path eventually lead beyond Fahrenau?

These questions formed the starting point for my research.

For this booklet, historical photographs, company records, commemorative publications, newspaper reports and other contemporary sources were examined and compared. The focus is not only on the development of a company, but also on the people and the wider environment connected with Krafft.

Some aspects are well documented, while others can now be traced only through scattered evidence. Where different sources survive, they may complement one another, but at times they can also present differing accounts of events.

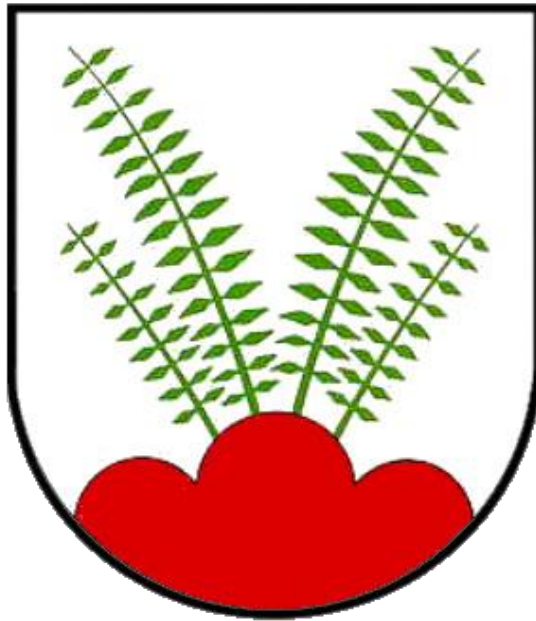
This booklet aims to bring these traces together and to follow the path Krafft took from its beginnings in Fahrenau.

I hope you find it an interesting and enjoyable read.

Armin Wolfarth

Contents

Fahrnau Before Gebrüder Krafft	4
An Old Tannery Comes Back to Life	5
The Journeyman Years	8
Albert Krafft and the Expansion of the Works	9
Leather, Water, and New Processes	14
From Leather to Technical Products	15
From Handcraft to Shoe Factory	20
From Work Boots to a Broad Product Range	21
Krafft Transforms Fahrnau	24
Housing and Social Welfare	25
The Bregenz Branch	30
Between Growth and Crisis	32
War, Shortages, and a New Era	33
A Working Life at Krafft	34
After 1929 – Crisis, Change, and the End	35
Questions and Further Research	36
Image Captions	37
Publication Information	38
Acknowledgments	39



Fahrnau Before Gebrüder Krafft

A Small Village Before the Transformation

Since the Middle Ages, the village had been connected with the local rulers and monasteries of the region and, for a time, had also served as a place where judicial matters were heard. Yet even in the mid-19th century, Fahrnau was still a small village.

In 1852, it had a population of 302. Agriculture, traditional crafts and small businesses shaped everyday life. The houses still formed a compact settlement, surrounded by meadows and farmland. Life was closely tied to the immediate surroundings. Many of the features that would later come to define Fahrnau did not yet exist.

The River Wiese played an important role in this development. The river had always been part of the landscape of the valley, but as commercial activity increased, its water took on a new significance. Water power became an important resource for mills, workshops and, later, factories. The tannery also depended on a reliable supply of water. Hides had to be washed and repeatedly treated with large quantities of water during the various stages of production.

At the same time, Fahrnau was close to Schopfheim and therefore not isolated from the economic development of the Wiesental. Craftsmen, merchants and travellers moved between the settlements, while goods were brought in, traded and transported onwards. Nevertheless, Fahrnau initially retained its rural character. Large factory buildings, extensive workshops and a sizeable industrial workforce were not yet part of the village landscape.

Within just a few decades, this was to change fundamentally.

An Old Tannery Comes Back to Life

The story of Gebrüder Krafft in Fahrnau did not begin with the construction of a new factory. Its origins lay in a tannery that, by then, had already stood unused for several decades.

As early as 1773, the local official Johann Nikolaus Flury operated a vegetable tannery in Fahrnau. It included a tannery building located beside the millpond, with the facilities needed to process hides. A path led across the pond to the tanning pits. Above the tannery stood a house with a storage building where the tanned hides could be dried.

A tannery of this kind was closely tied to its location. Water was needed for nearly every stage of the process. The hides had to be soaked, cleaned, and prepared for tanning. The existing tanning pits were therefore an essential part of the operation. Here, the prepared hides could be treated with tanning agents over an extended period of time.

Vegetable tanning relied on natural tanning agents. In the Wiesental, oak bark was particularly well suited for this purpose. Obtaining and preparing the bark was as much a part of the tanner's craft as working with the hides themselves. Tanning was not a quick process. Numerous steps, and a considerable amount of time, separated the arrival of a raw hide from the finished leather.

For this reason, a tannery consisted of far more than a single building. Tanning pits, a water supply, workspaces, and facilities for storage and drying together formed a complete production site. Even if such a facility had remained unused for many years, parts of it could still be of considerable value to a tanner.

The facilities later remained unused for about four decades. It was not until 1854 that life returned to the old tannery. Karl Wilhelm Krafft, whose grandparents had inherited the Flury estate, had the property restored and resumed operations. The company itself later recognized 1854 as the year of its founding.

Karl Wilhelm Krafft's decision to become a tanner also had a family background. Among his ancestors was Hans Ulrich Krafft, who had worked as a tanner in Auggen from 1742 to 1790. More than half a century later, Karl Wilhelm continued this family craft tradition in Fahrnau.

Born on April 14, 1828, the son of wine merchant

Johann Georg Krafft and Maria Elisabetha, née Suter, he first attended the local school in Fahrnau, followed by the higher civic school in Schopfheim and finally an educational institution in French-speaking Switzerland.

When he decided to learn the tanning trade, he went to Säckingen for his apprenticeship. His apprenticeship certificate, dated October 25, 1846, confirmed that he had trained in the tanning trade for one year and six months under master tanner Aloisi Brogli. The young Krafft therefore possessed the practical skills needed for what was to begin in Fahrnau only a few years later.

Before returning, he gained further experience away from his home region. He brought back not only the knowledge acquired during his apprenticeship, but also experience with different businesses and working methods. When he eventually took over the old facility in Fahrnau, this knowledge was combined with an infrastructure whose original purpose corresponded precisely to the trade he had learned.

There was therefore a direct connection between the old Flury tannery and the industrial company that would later emerge. Existing buildings and tanning pits were brought together with a family that already had a tradition in the tanning trade.

When Karl Wilhelm Krafft began operations in 1854, he was not starting on undeveloped land. Instead, he built on what was already there and gave it a new future.

The old tanning pits were brought back into use, and the tannery once again became a place of activity. What began within the traditions of an established craft would soon grow beyond them. At first, however, the old facility remained the starting point. Only as production increased did additional space have to be created and the technical facilities expanded.





The Journeyman Years

Before Wilhelm Krafft established his own business in Fahrnau, he spent several years gaining experience away from home. After completing his training as a tanner, he spent more than six years traveling as a journeyman. His travels took him to Vienna, Berlin, Paris, and other places. There he worked in his trade and broadened his knowledge before returning to Fahrnau in 1852.

Wilhelm initially set up a tannery on his grandfather's property. When his grandfather died the following year, he was able to make use of the facilities already there. In 1854, he had the equipment of the old tannery, which had stood unused for decades, restored and put back into operation.

Wilhelm was the second oldest of five sons. His business soon became a family enterprise. His older brother Karl Friedrich, who had also learned the tanning trade, supported him from the beginning. Georg initially remained in the wine trade, like his father and grandfather, but later also became involved in the Fahrnau business.

The youngest brother, Albert, received commercial training instead. He spent time in Colombier learning French, worked for an English textile and dry goods business in Burgdorf, and then spent almost two years working at a watch factory in La Chaux-de-Fonds. These experiences would later prove important to the further development of the family business.

Surviving letters from the company's early years show how closely the family followed the progress of the young enterprise. In November 1854, their father wrote to his son Ernst, who was in London at the time, reporting on developments in Fahrnau. The tannery had been renovated, the bark mill and tanning drum were ready for operation, and finished hides were already in stock. According to the letter, Wilhelm and Karl Friedrich were working with great dedication on the first orders.

At the same time, the technical infrastructure was being improved. The canal was relocated to provide a greater drop in elevation for the tannery. A large waterwheel supplied the power required for the operation; turbines would later take over this role.

For a time, the family even considered purchasing 150 looms and establishing a mechanized weaving mill. The plan, however, was abandoned. The available capital and resources were to be devoted entirely to the existing business.

Production began to grow only a few months after operations resumed. A letter from February 1855 reports that as many as 200 calf hides were being processed each week.

In October 1856, Karl Friedrich Krafft joined the business as a partner. From then on, the company operated under the name Gebrüder Krafft.

During its early years, the tannery primarily produced waxed calf leather for export to the United States. Other types of calf leather were also shipped there in substantial quantities. Strong competition and the company's still limited capital, however, made this business difficult. Krafft therefore expanded production to include sole leather, upper leather, and belting leather. At first, sole and upper leather were also sold through the company's own retail operation, as was common among tanners at the time.

The company was still operating on a relatively modest scale. Wilhelm and Karl Friedrich worked in the tannery themselves, assisted by a small number of journeymen. Yet within the first five years, sales had increased so significantly that the company needed its own commercial employee.

Albert Krafft and the Expansion of the Works

Then the family suffered a severe loss. In 1860, Wilhelm Krafft, who had established the business only a few years earlier, died at the age of just 32.

His own time at the head of the company thus came to an early end. Responsibility increasingly passed to his younger brother, Albert Krafft. He was only 23 years old when he returned to Fahrnau. What had originally begun as a commercial role became his life's work: for nearly four decades, the management of the company would remain in his hands.

Albert's background was primarily in business and commerce. At first, he knew relatively little about tanning. According to the company's later historical account, however, he quickly familiarized himself with the technical side of the operation and gradually became involved in every area of production.

Under his leadership, the appearance of the works began to change fundamentally.

The old tannery building soon became too small. At first, the rooms behind the old residential buildings were expanded for tanning operations. Larger tanning pits were constructed on adjoining land. As the business expanded and new lines of production were introduced, additional buildings followed.

New facilities were created for the manufacture of leather belts and, eventually, for shoe production. Warehouses, bark sheds, and machine houses were added to the complex. The factory grounds continued to expand. Additional property was acquired, access roads were created, and new routes were laid out within the works.

What Wilhelm Krafft had begun with only a few employees, Albert Krafft developed on an entirely new scale. The old tannery was now barely recognizable.

Portrait of Albert Krafft











Leather, Water, and New Processes

Tanning pits, water, and hard physical labor defined the early years of the Fahnau operation. But as Gebrüder Krafft grew, it was not only the size of the works that changed. The tanning processes and the types of leather produced also became increasingly varied.

While the tannery had initially produced mainly calf leather, other types were gradually added. These included sole leather, belting leather, and leather made from imported Indian hides. Depending on its intended use, the finished leather had to possess very different qualities. Shoe soles required a different material from industrial drive belts or shoe uppers. The tannery therefore had to adapt to an increasingly wide range of requirements.

At first, production continued to rely on a centuries-old process. The hides were tanned using vegetable tanning agents. Oak bark played an important role. It was ground and prepared in the company's own bark mill and remained the tannery's principal tanning material well into the 1870s.

Producing good leather required one thing above all: time. The hides remained in the tanning pits for long periods until the tanning agents had penetrated deeply enough into the material. At the same time, the operation required large quantities of water. Water was used to clean and prepare the hides and also provided power for the early machinery. The canal, which had already been relocated during the company's early years, provided the necessary drop in elevation. At first, the water powered a large waterwheel; later, turbines took over this task.

Krafft did not, however, remain permanently tied to traditional methods. In 1869, the company introduced a faster pit-tanning process. By treating the leather with various fats, flour, and salt, a particularly tough and durable material was produced. It was used primarily for drive belts on mechanical looms as well as sewing and other machine belts, and remained a sought-after product for decades.

The company also explored new sources of tanning agents. In addition to locally available oak bark, other tanning barks and plant extracts imported from abroad were increasingly used. These new materials also created opportunities to modify the tanning process and shorten production times for certain types of leather.

Another step forward came with experiments using rotating tanning drums. Instead of leaving the hides motionless in tanning pits for extended periods, they were placed in drums and moved together with the tanning solution. This brought the material into more intensive contact with the tanning agents and could significantly shorten a process that otherwise required long periods in the pits.

The transition, however, was not immediate. Early experiments around 1882 were not yet satisfactory. Only later, with improved tanning extracts, could the process be successfully used for certain lighter types of leather. Traditional tanning pits continued to play an important role in the production of sole and belting leather. Old and new methods therefore existed side by side for many years.

A fundamental innovation followed in 1896 with the introduction of chrome tanning. Instead of vegetable tanning agents, chromium salts were now used. The process made tanning considerably faster and produced leather with different characteristics from traditionally vegetable-tanned leather. At Krafft, chrome-tanned leather proved particularly suitable for machine belts and shoe uppers.

A description of Krafft's products from 1887 illustrates how far leather production had already developed. In addition to calf leather, the company was working with a broad range of specialty leathers, including morocco, fine goatskin, patent leather, kid leather, and other goat leathers. Waterproofed brown calf leather was also used for hunting and walking shoes. The growing variety of Krafft's footwear production was therefore closely connected with the increasingly broad selection of leathers available to the company.

This development clearly illustrates the transformation of the Fahnau tannery. It was no longer simply a matter of preserving hides. Leather increasingly had to be produced for a specific purpose: firm or flexible, durable or fine, suitable for soles, belts, or shoe uppers.

Leather production was not transformed by a single dramatic breakthrough, but by a succession of innovations that were gradually incorporated into the existing operation over several decades.

From Leather to Technical Products

Before long, Krafft was no longer limited to selling tanned leather. The company began manufacturing its own products from the material. As a result, leather processing and manufacturing became increasingly important alongside the tannery itself.

One of the company's important product lines was leather drive belts. Initially produced on a relatively small scale, demand increased as industry became more mechanized. These belts were used to transmit power and were needed in a wide range of workshops and factories. For Krafft, this opened up a market that extended far beyond the traditional uses of leather.

This part of the business received an important boost after Albert Krafft encountered new machinery at the 1889 Paris World's Fair. Once the equipment was introduced in Fahrnau, production increased rapidly. Additional specialized machines followed, allowing the company to expand this branch of production further.

A more unusual product was the picker, a leather component used in mechanical looms. British-made pickers were considered superior at the time. Krafft therefore began attempting to manufacture its own versions based on British models as early as the beginning of the 1860s.

The first experiments using improvised machinery were unsuccessful. Eventually, the necessary equipment was obtained directly from England, and an English specialist was brought to Fahrnau to set up the manufacturing process.

This created another problem, however: German customers continued to trust British products more than those made locally. Krafft found a remarkable solution. The Fahrnau-made pickers were initially sold through a dealer who marketed them as British products. Only after their quality had proven itself did Krafft begin selling them under its own name.

As sales increased, this branch of production was expanded as well. Hand-operated presses were replaced by mechanical presses, additional machinery was acquired, and eventually even the preparation of the required raw hides was brought in-house. Krafft was thus able to carry out an increasing number of production steps within the Fahrnau works.

This development shows how far the company had already moved beyond the beginnings of the old

tannery. Leather was no longer simply the finished product of the tanning process. Increasingly, it became the raw material for Krafft's own technical products.

Machines, presses, and new production spaces now stood alongside the traditional tanning pits. Water powered the machinery, while hides continued to be treated in the pits using long-established methods. At the same time, the company's position in the market began to change. Krafft no longer supplied only leather as a raw material, but increasingly manufactured products designed for specific technical purposes. The properties of the leather alone were no longer the only consideration. Dimensional accuracy, durability, and consistent quality became equally important.

This change was particularly evident in leather drive belts. In factories, they had to operate reliably over long periods, transmitting power from the main drive system to individual machines. The leather used for these belts therefore became an integral part of a factory's mechanical equipment.

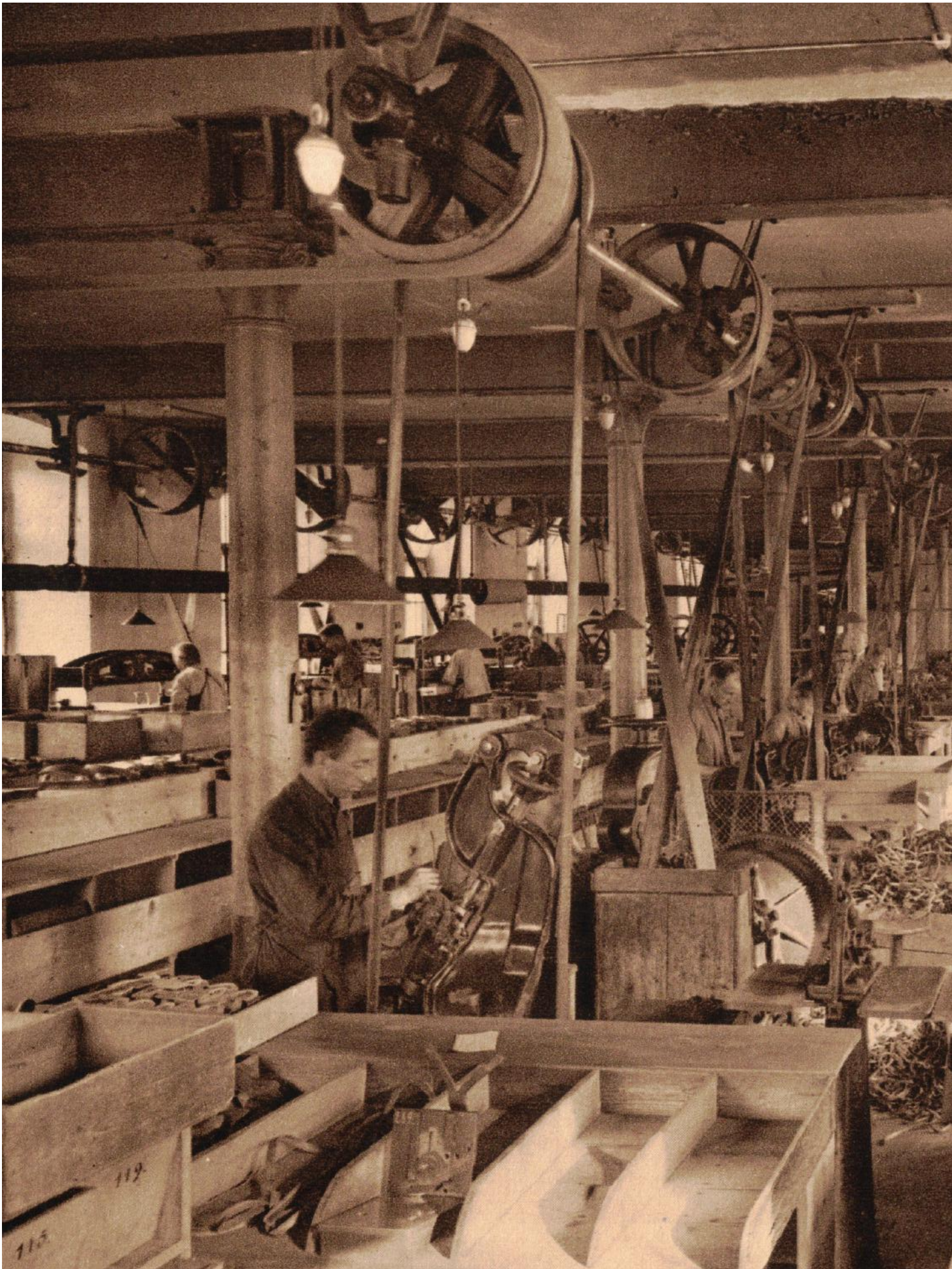
For Krafft, this meant that expertise in tanning and knowledge of how the finished material would ultimately be used became increasingly interconnected.

The same was true of the pickers. Although they too were made of leather, they performed a precisely defined function within a mechanical loom. Their manufacture therefore required a different approach from the production and sale of ordinary leather goods. Material, shape, and workmanship all had to be adapted to the demands of the machine.

Step by step, Fahrnau thus developed a close connection between tanning and technical manufacturing. Traditional craft knowledge did not disappear; it continued to provide the foundation. What was new was that the tanned leather was increasingly transformed within the company's own works into specialized technical products.









From Handcraft to Shoe Factory

The manufacture of leather shoes became part of the Fahrnau operation at an early stage. At the beginning of the 1860s, shoes were still made largely by hand. What initially existed alongside the tannery, however, developed within a few decades into one of Gebrüder Krafft's most important lines of business.

The first major order came in 1866. During the Austro-Prussian War, Krafft later reported that it supplied a large share of the boots required by the Baden Army Corps. The following year, an unusually distant market opened up: the Japanese Army was also supplied with boots made in Fahrnau.

When an order for 60,000 pairs of boots was put out for contract following the entry of Prussian troops into Frankfurt, Albert Krafft traveled there personally. He succeeded in securing a share of this substantial order for the Fahrnau company.

These early large-scale orders show how far Krafft's market had already expanded only a few years after the old tannery resumed operations. The company was no longer producing solely for the regional market. Even at this early stage, footwear made in Fahrnau was reaching customers far beyond the Wiesental.

By the mid-1860s, the product range had expanded. In addition to leather shoes, Krafft was now manufacturing so-called wooden shoes on a larger scale. This term, however, did not refer exclusively to footwear made entirely of wood. A contemporary account specifically describes the wooden shoes produced by Krafft as having wooden soles and leather uppers. The term "wooden shoe" could therefore also refer to footwear that outwardly resembled an ordinary leather shoe.

Shoe production still depended heavily on manual labor. It was not until late 1877 that Krafft began to systematically mechanize its shoe manufacturing. Modern machinery was installed, creating the conditions necessary for production on a much larger scale.

For this new branch of the business, Krafft brought the experienced master shoemaker Fidel Flum from Brüttisellen, Switzerland, to Fahrnau. The company's later historical account particularly praised his skill and reliability. For many years, he remained one of the company's valued employees.

Machinery alone, however, could not guarantee success. Factory-made shoes first had to overcome a deeply

rooted tradition. Many people continued to have their shoes custom-made by a local shoemaker. Shoe stores were still relatively uncommon, and industrially manufactured footwear first had to earn the confidence of customers.

Krafft therefore sought to produce shoes in a variety of shapes and sizes while also competing on price with handcrafted footwear. Gradually, factory-made shoes gained acceptance. This development had consequences for the traditional shoemaking trade. One contemporary account explicitly attributed the decline of local shoemaking in part to the proximity of shoe factories.

Growing demand even led, for a time, to unusual forms of contract production. According to the company's historical account, inmates at the Ensisheim prison in Alsace were temporarily employed in the production of children's shoes.

Krafft also took its own approach to retaining skilled workers. According to the company history, some shoemakers working for Krafft were bound by three-year contracts. In this way, the company sought to retain experienced workers and preserve the skills needed for shoe manufacturing.

These arrangements, however, had another side. Some of the shoemakers employed by Krafft established businesses of their own after their contracts expired. For Krafft, this created new competition. At the same time, former employees carried with them the knowledge and experience they had acquired at the company. In this way, shoe manufacturing in Fahrnau had an influence beyond the boundaries of the Krafft works and also affected the shoemaking trade in the surrounding region.

In nearby Steinen, the Bogenschütz shoe factory, founded in 1873, also produced leather shoes with wooden soles, which were likewise referred to as "wooden shoes."

From Work Boots to a Broad Product Range

During the first decades, Krafft's shoe production focused primarily on heavy-duty footwear for workers and agricultural use. Durability and strength were the main priorities. As the company gained experience and sales increased, however, its product range became much broader.

A small episode from 1891 illustrates how well known the shoes from Fahrnau had become. The magazine *Vom Fels zum Meer* published an illustration of a Black Forest fair. Among the market stalls shown in the scene, footwear from Fahrnau could be seen on display. According to the company's historical account, the illustration had been created without any involvement from Krafft and was only discovered by the company later.

Shoe production continued to develop. Alongside heavy work and agricultural footwear, the company increasingly introduced medium-weight models. The manufacture of leather shoes eventually became one of the main branches of the Fahrnau works.

The surviving Gebrüder Krafft shoe catalog provides a particularly vivid impression of how broad the product range had become. It included heavy work shoes, men's lace-up boots and other men's boots, as well as boots for women, girls, and children, women's low shoes, button boots, and winter footwear. Wooden-soled shoes were also part of the range.

What stands out is not only the variety of models. Many items were offered in several versions. Different types of closures, boot heights, lasts, and soles show just how far production had developed beyond the early hand-made boots.

The catalog therefore reveals something that production figures and statistics alone cannot easily convey: what had begun as a small branch of shoe manufacturing had developed into a large-scale operation offering a widely diversified range of footwear.

The working environment had changed accordingly. Historical photographs of the cutting and stitching departments show large workrooms, long rows of machinery, and numerous employees. The manufacture of a single shoe was now divided among different stages of production and specialized departments.

What had still been made largely by hand at the beginning of the 1860s had developed within just a few decades into mechanized shoe production.

The results of this transformation can still be seen today in the surviving Gebrüder Krafft shoe catalogs.





Art. 129 A, 133 A.



Art. 203 A, 213 A.



Art. 206 A, 211 A, 212 A.



Art. 255 A, 260 A, 263 A, 267 A.



Art. 171D, 173D, 174D.



Art. 172D, 310D, 312D, 317D, 319D.



Art. 308D, 309D.



Art. 329D, 330D.



Art. 339D.

Krafft Transforms Fahrnaeu

The growth of Gebrüder Krafft changed more than just the works. As the factory expanded, Fahrnaeu itself began to change.

Around the middle of the 19th century, the village was still small and largely agricultural. In 1852, Fahrnaeu had a population of 302. A topographical account published in 1859 described its inhabitants as a “quiet, peaceful little community” whose livelihoods came from agriculture, livestock farming, factories, and local trades.

Among the larger businesses already mentioned at the time was the “large tannery and leather business of Gebrüder Krafft.” Fahrnaeu was also home to Nikolaus Singeisen’s mechanized weaving mill with 74 looms.

The village thus stood between two worlds. Agriculture and traditional rural trades continued to shape everyday life, while the first larger businesses were providing an increasing number of jobs.

As the Krafft works expanded and new branches of production were introduced, this balance began to shift. The number of factory workers increased, and the village grew with them. Fahrnaeu had 364 residents in 1864, 768 in 1880, 1,325 in 1890, and finally 1,753 in 1900. In less than four decades, the population had grown to nearly five times its former size.

Krafft was not solely responsible for this development. Other businesses also expanded, and new inns, shops, and commercial enterprises appeared. Nevertheless, Gebrüder Krafft became an important center of economic life in Fahrnaeu.

Factory work did not mean the end of agriculture. Many employees came from Fahrnaeu and the surrounding area. After finishing their work at the factory, some continued to tend their own gardens or small plots of land. Agriculture and industry existed side by side for many years.

The company also became increasingly important to the municipality’s finances. According to the company’s later historical account, Fahrnaeu’s total taxable capital amounted to 1,175,020 marks in 1880 and had risen to 2,572,545 marks by 1900. The same source states that in 1900 Gebrüder Krafft accounted for the largest share of the municipality’s tax revenue.

As the works grew, good transportation links became increasingly important. During the early years, the company’s products still had to be transported overland to

Basel before they could be loaded onto trains. In 1862, the railroad from Basel reached nearby Schopfheim, considerably shortening the distance to the nearest rail connection. An even more important development came in 1875, when the line was extended from Schopfheim through Fahrnaeu to Zell. Fahrnaeu received its own railroad station, and Gebrüder Krafft could now load its goods directly onto trains at its own freight facility.

With the construction of the rail connection from Schopfheim to Säckingen and the 3,170-meter Fahrnaeu Tunnel, the village even gained a second station in 1888/90. Within only a few decades, Fahrnaeu’s transportation connections had been fundamentally transformed.

Fahrnaeu was changing in other ways as well. Albert Krafft had a post office building constructed and subsequently leased it to the Imperial German Postal Service. Here too, the growth of the company and the expansion of local infrastructure developed side by side.

Population growth was also reflected in the schools. A dedicated schoolhouse had been built in 1861/62, but it too soon became too small. In 1902, a new and larger building was constructed with classrooms equipped to contemporary standards. By the years immediately before World War I, the number of students had risen to around 380.

Between 1876 and 1882, the course of the Wiese River was also systematically regulated. The village expanded, new houses were built, and trade and commerce increased.

Within a few decades, the small Fahrnaeu of the mid-19th century had become an industrial community. Factories, railroads, the post office, and new housing changed not only the appearance of the village but increasingly the everyday lives of its residents. Fahrnaeu was now growing at a pace that created new challenges for the community.

Where were all the people who found work in the factories going to live?

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Housing and Social Welfare

As the number of employees grew, housing became an increasingly important issue. Beginning in 1876, Gebrüder Krafft therefore had housing built for its workers. At the time, these buildings were known locally as Laborantenhäuser. Some of the houses later became the property of their residents. This created new housing close to the works for families whose daily lives were closely connected with the factory.

Even during the difficult inflation years of 1922/23, two larger buildings were added: an apartment building for salaried employees with four units and another residential building for workers. Surviving architectural drawings still document this development. Elevations, sections, and floor plans show multistory residential buildings containing several apartments. Some of this Krafft-built housing has survived to the present day.

According to the company's historical account, in addition to the family residences associated with the factory, the company eventually owned another ten buildings. The growing works had long since come to include more than factory buildings, tanning pits, and machine houses. Housing had also become part of the world surrounding Krafft and its workforce.

Housing alone, however, was not enough.

As early as 1878, a preschool for young children was established in a building constructed by the company. According to the company history, the idea originated with Albert Krafft's mother. Krafft continued to provide rooms and heating for the school and also contributed to a local nursing service.

The family had a longer tradition of charitable involvement. The Flury family, which was related to the Kraffts, had already left money for community purposes. In 1789, 100 guilders were donated toward the construction of a new schoolhouse, and in 1833 the Flury Poor Relief Fund was established with an initial endowment of 300 guilders.

As the factory grew, these welfare efforts took on a new dimension. In 1905, the Albert and Emma Krafft Foundation was established with an endowment of 30,000 marks. Its purpose was to support workers who

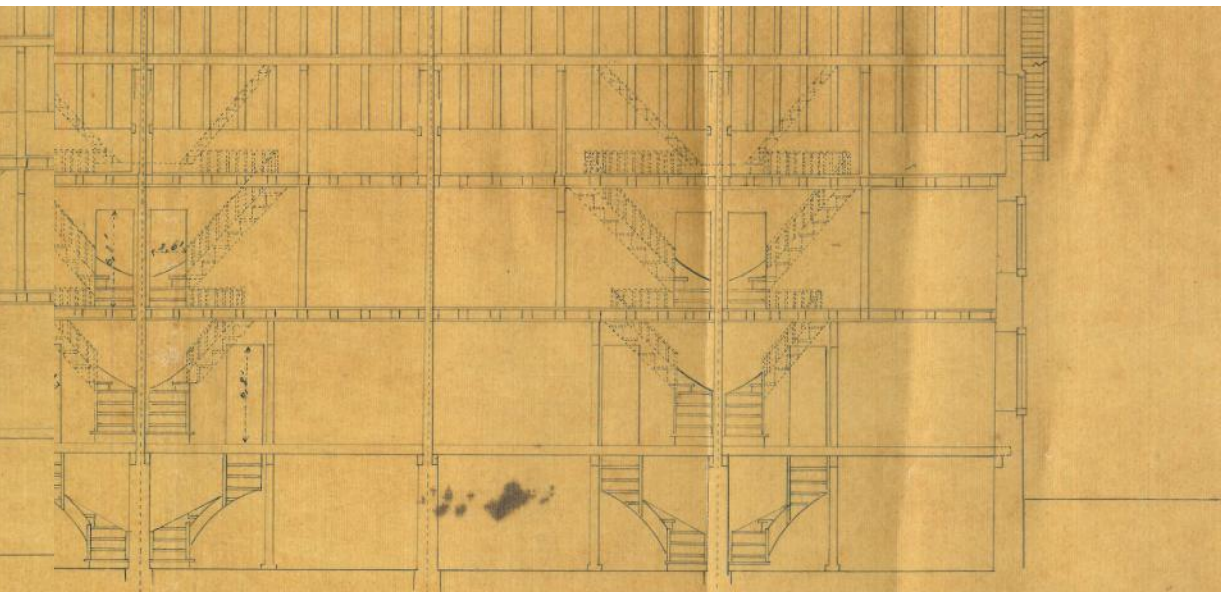
had fallen into financial hardship. Beginning in 1907, salaried employees received vacation time. Two years earlier, a workers' committee had already been established, providing a forum in which workplace matters could be discussed and certain issues considered jointly.

A contemporary example illustrates how important such measures could be. One Krafft worker with six children was reported to earn 80 marks per month. His wife contributed another 8 marks. Of their combined monthly income of 88 marks, 79.30 marks were spent on housing, fuel, and food alone. This left very little for clothing, laundry, and other expenses.

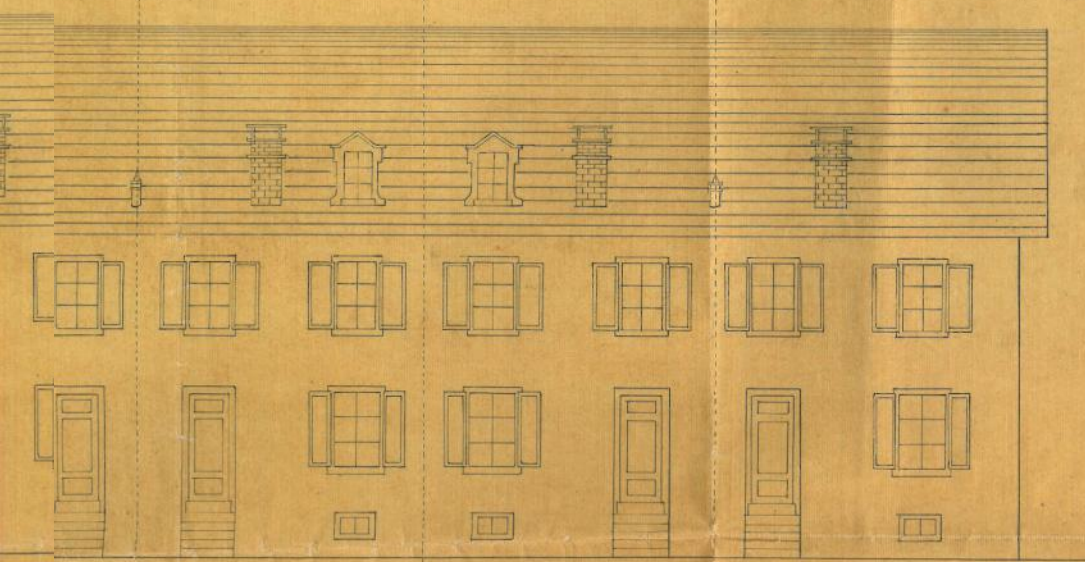
Company welfare became particularly visible during the years of inflation. According to the company's historical account, employees received food and footwear. In 1923/24, Krafft established a soup kitchen that distributed between 800 and 1,000 liters of soup each day at cost.

The company history naturally presents the image of a business that felt a strong sense of responsibility toward its employees. It tells us far less about wages, workplace conflicts, or how the workers themselves experienced their working and living conditions. Nevertheless, the surviving evidence of these programs shows how closely the factory and the village had become interconnected. Work, housing, and social welfare were increasingly intertwined.

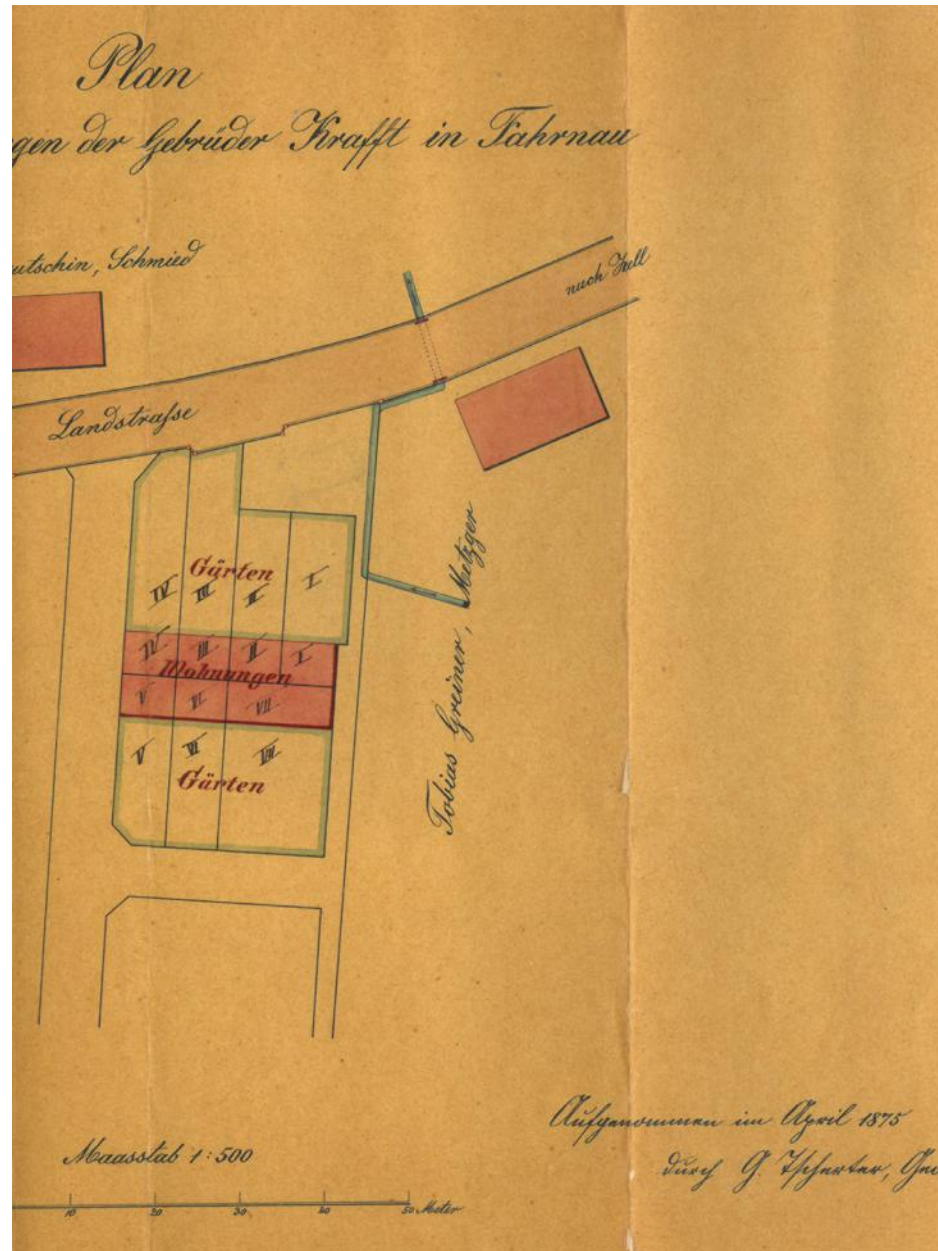




der Vorderen Ansicht.



Samstag den 17. April 1870
 Albert Knauff





The Bregenz Branch

By the 1870s, leather goods and footwear from Fahrnau had also established a market in Austria. When the trade agreement with Austria expired in 1881 and higher import duties made sales more difficult, Albert Krafft took an unusual step: rather than abandon the Austrian market, the company decided to manufacture its products there directly.

In 1881, Gebrüder Krafft established a branch in Bregenz. At first, the company rented a rear building near the Kaiserjäger barracks. There, under the direction of Ernst Hollenweger, who had previously worked at the Fahrnau operation, production of leather belts and loom pickers began.

The Bregenz operation expanded considerably as early as 1883. Krafft acquired a former silk-spinning mill on the lakeshore between Bregenz and Lochau, together with the surrounding property, and relocated its leather production there. In addition to its existing products, the company now began manufacturing wooden shoes. Several wooden-shoe makers from Fahrnau moved to Bregenz for this purpose.

As in Fahrnau, water power played an important role at the new location. Krafft acquired the nearby Klausmühle, together with meadows and woodland, and had a high-pressure water system with a reservoir constructed on the Pfänder mountain. Over time, a larger factory complex developed. According to the company's historical account, the workforce eventually grew to around 200 employees.

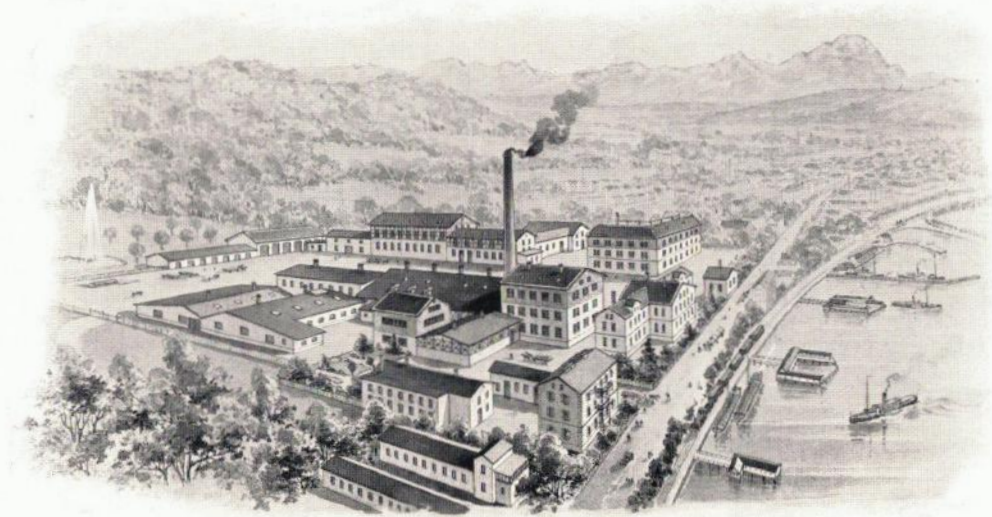
Management of the Bregenz works later passed to Ernst Krafft, one of Albert Krafft's older brothers. Ernst had previously operated the Hotel Krafft in Basel. In 1880, he sold the hotel and moved to Fahrnau. The following year, he joined the family business as a partner. After becoming familiar with the company's operations, he moved to Bregenz in 1883 and took over management of the branch.

His time in Austria was brief. Ernst Krafft died in 1888, after which Ernst Hollenweger once again assumed management. Albert Krafft Jr. later settled in Bregenz.

Production continued to expand as well. In 1886, the Bregenz branch began manufacturing leather shoes. During World War I, the works produced military footwear on a larger scale and was equipped accordingly.

The war also marked the beginning of the end of the shared history of the two operations. In 1917, Albert Krafft Jr. took over the Bregenz works on his own account. Difficulties in obtaining raw materials became increasingly severe, and in the summer of 1918 the factory complex was sold.

After nearly four decades, the shared history of the Fahrnau and Bregenz works had come to an end.



Zweiggeschäft Bregenz (Österreich).

GEBRÜDER KRAFFT, FAHRNAU (Baden)
Gerbereien und Schuhfabriken.

Between Growth and Crisis

As management passed to the next generation, a new chapter began for Gebrüder Krafft. Albert Krafft had shaped the company for decades. By the time his three sons assumed responsibility, the operation in Fahrnau was no longer a small tannery but an extensive industrial complex with several branches of production and a large workforce.

Yet around the turn of the century, it became increasingly clear how vulnerable an industrial operation of this size could be.

In August 1899, a major fire broke out at the factory. The wooden-shoe and leather warehouses were destroyed. During the rebuilding process, Krafft did more than simply replace the lost buildings. A new factory building was constructed on the site and equipped with modern machinery for shoe production. The disaster thus became another step in the modernization of the works.

It would not be the last fire.

In 1906 and again in 1911, Gebrüder Krafft was struck by major fires. The company's historical account attributes them to short circuits in electrical wiring and overheated power-transmission equipment. Once again, parts of the factory complex were destroyed.

The 1906 fire, in particular, is documented in greater detail in a contemporary newspaper report. The damage was estimated at around half a million marks. The newspaper also reported that approximately 400 workers were temporarily left without employment as a result of the fire.

This reveals a dimension that receives little attention in the later company history. A factory fire affected more than buildings, machinery, and inventories. For hundreds of families, it could threaten their livelihood from one day to the next.

The company responded with emergency measures. Temporary workspaces were set up, and parts of production were moved to the Bregenz branch for a time. According to the company's historical account, these measures allowed manufacturing to continue despite the damage. The older factory spaces, some of which had developed in a piecemeal and increasingly inefficient manner, were subsequently replaced by new buildings designed more specifically for the needs of modern industrial production.

Growth nevertheless continued. By 1914, Gebrüder Krafft employed a total of 493 people, including 365 men and 128 women. In Fahrnau alone, 39 women worked in shoe production. Additional women in Schopfheim performed tasks such as sewing shoe uppers, binding slippers, and stitching toe pieces. These figures illustrate the economic importance the company had acquired far beyond the factory grounds themselves.

The Wiese River, whose water had provided power for the tannery since its early years, could also become a threat. A flood not mentioned in the company history is documented by another contemporary source. Such additional evidence broadens the picture of a company whose history consisted of more than growth and technological progress.

Fire, flooding, and mechanical failures were among the risks faced by a works that had grown steadily larger over the decades.

But its greatest test was still to come from beyond Fahrnau.

War, Shortages, and a New Era

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, conditions changed fundamentally. According to the company's historical account, nearly half of the entire Gebrüder Krafft workforce was called up for military service. The company had to continue operating with significantly fewer workers.

At first, demand for shoes and leather goods remained high. Krafft received substantial orders for shoes and boots from military authorities, including the Naval Clothing Office in Wilhelmshaven and various army suppliers.

As the war continued, however, obtaining the necessary raw materials became increasingly difficult. Hides and tanning materials were still relatively freely available at first. Later, the company became subject to the war-time system of government-controlled production and distribution. Inventories, processing, and sales were increasingly regulated by the state.

This was particularly serious because many raw materials had been imported from overseas before the war. These supplies became increasingly scarce. Hides, tanning bark, and fats available within Germany were registered and allocated to manufacturers according to their production capacity and, in some cases, for specifically designated purposes.

Production also had to adapt to the new conditions. For an extended period, the shoe factory was occupied with the production of military footwear. For civilian customers, shoes with wooden soles were increasingly manufactured. Toward the end of the war, substitute materials even had to be used for shoe uppers.

Eventually, Krafft also took on work that had little connection with its traditional leather and footwear production. The works became involved in the manufacture of artillery shells and acquired specialized machinery for this purpose. This provided continued employment for at least part of the workforce.

The end of the war did not bring a return to normal conditions.

At first, there was enormous demand for shoes throughout Germany, while supplies remained limited. Then came inflation. It became increasingly difficult to manufacture, trade, and calculate prices until goods could ultimately be sold only in exchange for stable foreign currencies.

In the following years, another problem emerged: declining demand. Like many other factories, Gebrüder Krafft was forced to reduce operations temporarily.

These economic difficulties had a direct effect on employment. For a company that had come to play such a major role in the working life of Fahrnau, declining production meant more than lower sales. Reduced working hours and temporary shutdowns affected numerous families whose incomes depended directly on the works.

At the same time, Krafft had to rebuild markets that had lost much of their former importance during the years of wartime controls and military production. The return to peacetime manufacturing therefore did not simply mean a return to the conditions that had existed before 1914. Raw material supplies, prices, and demand had changed, as had customers' expectations.

Inflation added further uncertainty. Money lost value at an ever-increasing rate, while raw materials and operating supplies still had to be purchased and wages paid. For a company with several branches of production and a large workforce, economic planning became extraordinarily difficult.

The broad range of activities at the Fahrnau works proved to be an advantage during this period. Krafft had long since ceased to depend on a single product. Leather, technical leather goods, and footwear represented different areas of production. This allowed the company, at least to some extent, to respond to changes in the market by shifting production between them.

Krafft also adapted its shoe production more closely to the changing needs of the population. Alongside its traditional heavy work and agricultural footwear, the company now produced larger quantities of hiking and sports boots, as well as low shoes and strap shoes in black and colored leathers.

For Gebrüder Krafft, a new era had begun.

A Working Life at Krafft

Many employees remained with the company for decades. The 1929 anniversary publication lists ten men and women with more than 50 years of service, another 45 with between 40 and 50 years, and 78 who had worked for the company for 25 to 40 years. Their names and years of service are recorded individually across several pages.

Some of these people had already been working for Krafft when large parts of the later factory complex did not yet exist.

Among them were tanners, shoemakers, carpenters, saddlers, belt makers, cutting-machine operators, factory workers, and employees in shipping and administration. Some names appear with 50 years of service or more.

In their own way, these figures tell the story of the company.

Factory buildings could be expanded, machines replaced, and production methods changed. But the knowledge of a tanner, shoemaker, or machine operator was acquired over years and decades. Through the people who worked there, this knowledge remained within the company and was passed on to the next generation.

The 1929 anniversary publication presents this long record of service with pride. Here too, however, it is the company speaking about itself. These pages alone cannot tell us how employees actually experienced their working lives, what conflicts arose, or why some workers spent their entire careers at Krafft.

But the lists of employees give them back something that can easily be lost in company histories:

their names.

By 1929, behind the 75-year history of Gebrüder Krafft stood not only the members of one entrepreneurial family. There were also generations of people from Fahrnau and the surrounding area who had worked in the tanneries, workshops, factory floors, warehouses, and offices.

Many of them spent a large part of their lives at Krafft. They witnessed the expansion of the works, the arrival of new machinery and production methods, years of prosperity as well as more difficult times.

Their names in the anniversary publication therefore

represent more than a record of years of service. They remind us that the history of a company is always also the history of the people who worked there.

75 Years of Krafft

The large view of the works from 1929 shows what had grown from the tannery reopened in 1854: an extensive industrial complex with numerous buildings and production facilities, dominated by a smokestack visible from afar.

The range of products also bore little resemblance to that of the company's early years. The anniversary publication lists work and occupational footwear, sports and hiking boots, modern street shoes, and wooden-soled footwear, as well as numerous types of leather, industrial drive belts, and other technical products.

A tannery had become an industrial enterprise.

But the 1929 anniversary publication naturally ends at this point. It looks back on what had been achieved and forward to a future its authors could not yet have known.

The story of Gebrüder Krafft in Fahrnau was not over in 1929.

Oesterlin, Wilhelm	60 Jahre	Bäumle, Gustav	45 Jahre
Hottinger, Rupert,	58 „	Heuberger, Georg Joh. Jakob	45 „
Baumgartner, Josef	52 „	Probst, Wilhelm	45 „
Linsin, Bartlin	52 „	Probst, Joh. Friedrich	45 „
Leber, Eduard	52 „	Bauer, Joh. Jakob	44 „
Groß, Karl	51 „	Grether, Jakob	44 „
Hauser, Joh. Friedrich	51 „	Gebhardt, Gustav	44 „
Lang, Karl August	51 „	Kiefer, Wilhelm	44 „
Pfeifle, Joh. Fridolin	51 „	Kaiser, Rudolf	44 „
Wellinger, Fidel	50 „	Lüttner, Martin	44 „
Ernst, Johann Hermann	47 „	Lenz, Jakob Friedrich	44 „
Grether, August Wilhelm	47 „	Ludwig, Seraphim	44 „
Heitzmann, Friedrich	47 „	Mahler, Karl Friedrich	44 „
Maier, Josef	47 „	Härle, Jakob	43 „
Oesterlin, Ernst Friedrich	47 „	Maier, Ferdinand	43 „
Pfeifle, Adolf	47 „	Schmidt, Eduard	43 „
Dietsche, Lorenz	46 „	Metzel, Emma, Frau	43 „
Kiefer, Xaver	46 „	Rüde, Marie, Frau	43 „
Kiefer, Fritz	46 „	Blum, Karl Ernst	42 „
Lacher, Johann Jakob	46 „	Lacher, Joh. Jakob	41 „
Weißer, Wilhelm	46 „	Ringwald, Salomon	41 „
Wagner, Lisette, Frau	46 „	Rogg, Gotthard	41 „

After 1929 – Crisis, Change, and the End

When Gebrüder Krafft celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1929, the company could look back on an extraordinary development. The tannery reopened in 1854 had grown into an extensive industrial complex producing leather, footwear, and industrial belts.

Yet behind the anniversary celebrations, a more difficult economic period was already emerging. Conditions in the leather and footwear industries had changed fundamentally since World War I.

Before the war, exports had been of crucial importance to the industry's larger manufacturers. Latin America and South Africa were among the major markets. During the war, however, domestic production expanded in these regions. Competition also increased in European markets. Following the German inflation, Britain increased its exports to continental Europe, while high French tariffs made it considerably more difficult to maintain the formerly important market in Alsace.

Gebrüder Krafft faced additional difficulties. A contemporary study describes poor levels of employment at the company in 1929 and attributes this in part to the continuing agricultural crisis. For a manufacturer of work and agricultural footwear, the limited purchasing power of the farming population had a direct impact.

At the same time, the footwear market itself was changing. The study describes rapidly changing fashions and increasing pressure on prices. Retailers placed orders on shorter notice, while lower-priced goods and, in some cases, reduced expectations of quality intensified competition. Krafft responded in part by establishing its own retail stores.

The effects can even be seen in the employment figures. Between 1929 and 1933, Krafft's workforce declined by 96 employees, or 25.3 percent. Between 1933 and 1934, however, employment increased again by 44 workers, or 11.5 percent.

Another observation in the contemporary study is particularly noteworthy: specialization in products for the textile industry apparently helped offset some of the decline in the shoe division. The technical manufacturing branch that Krafft had developed over many decades thus appears to have provided a degree of stability.

How Gebrüder Krafft developed during the second half of the 1930s and through World War II cannot yet be

continuously reconstructed from the sources currently available.

What is certain, however, is that the company's history continued. Gebrüder Krafft was still operating in Fahrnau in 1954. That year, Todtnau local historian Wilhelm Dietsche contacted the company with an inquiry concerning the Nessler family. Helmut Krafft replied personally. In response to Dietsche's request, old employee records were searched for the name Nessler, and former workers were also consulted as part of the investigation.

One hundred years after the old tannery had been reopened, Gebrüder Krafft thus appears once again in the historical record as an active company.

The Krafft family's connection with Fahrnau, however, continued far beyond the life of the company. In 2002, Karin Benner, the last heir of the Krafft family, established the Anneliese Benner-Krafft Foundation. Its purpose was to preserve the memory of the Krafft family and its social commitment in Schopfheim-Fahrnau, while continuing that tradition through cultural and social initiatives. Karin Benner died on February 10, 2024.

The legacy of the Krafft family therefore extends into the present day.

Questions and Further Research

Much of the history of Gebrüder Krafft can now be reconstructed. At the same time, many questions remain unanswered. Some concern the period that the 1929 anniversary publication could naturally no longer cover, while others arise from clues found in the surviving sources.

What Happened After 1929?

How did Gebrüder Krafft develop during the Great Depression and throughout the 1930s?

What effects did the economic and political changes of the period have on production, employment, and sales?

What role did the company play during World War II? What was produced in Fahrna, how did the workforce change, and how did the company develop during the first postwar years?

When, and under what circumstances, did the history of Gebrüder Krafft as an independent company finally come to an end?

Where Are the Company Records?

Correspondence from 1954 shows that Gebrüder Krafft still had access at that time to old employee records. In response to an inquiry from local historian Wilhelm Dietsche, these records were searched for the name Nessler, and former workers were also consulted.

Where are these employee records today?

Have other company records survived, such as payroll and personnel records, business correspondence, production records, photographs, architectural plans, catalogs, or documents from company management?

And might a private collection of Krafft family papers still survive somewhere?

Who Worked at Krafft?

The 1929 anniversary publication names numerous longtime employees. Yet we still know far less about what their everyday working lives were actually like.

Have factory regulations, payroll records, employment books, or personnel files survived? Do families in Fahrna still possess photographs, letters, employment certificates, personal recollections, or other documents relating to former Krafft employees?

Such sources could add the perspectives of the men and women who worked at Krafft to a historical record that has so far been preserved largely from the company's point of view.

What Traces Still Remain?

Individual aspects of the company's history also require further investigation. These include the development of its various branches of production, changes to the factory grounds, and connections with other companies and locations.

There is also the question of which buildings, technical installations, or other traces of the former works still survive today and what their original functions were.

The Research Is Not Finished

This booklet is therefore not intended to be the final word.

It summarizes the current state of the research while also showing where gaps remain. New documents, photographs, and personal recollections may add to the picture, correct previous assumptions, and reveal connections that have so far remained hidden.

Perhaps some of these traces still survive today in archives, private collections, or family papers.

Image Captions

Page 1

View of the Gebrüder Krafft works in Fahrnau.
Historic trademark for footwear made in Fahrnau.

Page 4

Coat of arms of Fahrnau.

Pages 6–7

View of the works during the early years after the company's founding. The illustration probably dates from the period when Albert Krafft was in charge.

Page 9

Albert Krafft, longtime head of Gebrüder Krafft.

Pages 10–11

Partial view of the tanning-pit building at the leather works.

Pages 12–13

Partial view of the water-powered workshop at the leather works.

Pages 16–17

Stitching room of the shoe factory.

Pages 18–19

Cutting room of the shoe factory.

Page 21

Historic shoe models from the Gebrüder Krafft product range.

Page 22

Men's shoes from the historic Gebrüder Krafft sales catalog.

Page 23

Women's shoes from the historic Gebrüder Krafft sales catalog.

Pages 26–27

Architectural drawings of a Krafft residential building in Fahrnau.

Page 28

Site plan of the Krafft residential buildings and gardens in Fahrnau.

Page 29

Former Krafft residential building in Fahrnau, as it appears today. Photograph: Armin Wolfarth, 2026.

Page 31

Historic view of the Gebrüder Krafft works in Bregenz.

Page 34

Long-serving Gebrüder Krafft employees honored during the company's 75th anniversary year in 1929.

Page 40

Historic advertisement for Gebrüder Krafft, Fahrnau.

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Gebrüder Krafft: 75 Jahre Gebr. Krafft Fahrnau 1854–1929. Anniversary publication, 1929.

Theodor Humpert: Das Wiesental. Eine heimatliche Wirtschaftskunde. 1920.

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Contemporary newspaper reports, archival materials, and other historical records were also consulted.

Image Credits

Historical Images

Unless otherwise indicated: 75 Jahre Gebr. Krafft Fahrnau 1854–1929. Anniversary publication, 1929.

Historical Price Lists and Company Records

Anneliese Benner-Krafft-Stiftung

Historical Architectural Plans

Stadtarchiv Schopfheim

Coat of Arms of Fahrnau, Page 4

Wikimedia Commons, file “Wappen Fahrnau.png,” public domain. PNG adaptation: Enslin, 2008.

Contemporary Photographs

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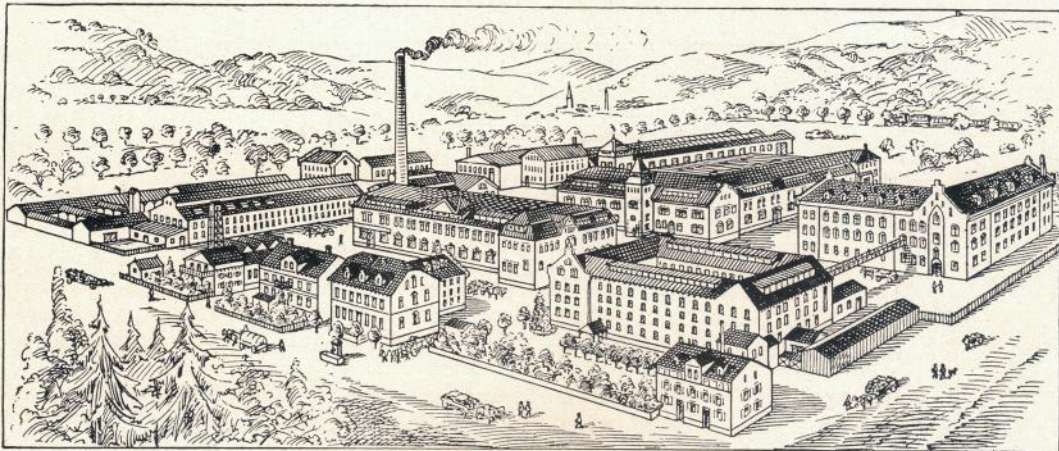
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My heartfelt thanks to all of you.



Gesamtsicht des Werkes in Fahrnau (Baden)

Gebrüder Krafft, Fahrnau (Baden)

Leder- und Lederwarenfabriken

Gegründet 1854

Drahtnachrichten:
Krafft, Fahrnau



Schutzmarke

Fernsprecher:
Amt Schopfheim Nr. 3

Wir erzeugen:

- in **Abt. I Gerberei:** Sämtliche Leder für Schuhfabrikation, Treibriemen und technische Lederwaren;
- in **Abt. II Schuhfabrik:** Schweres und mittelschweres Schuhwerk, Straßenschuhwerk, Lederschuhe mit Hohlsohlen;
- in **Abt. III Technische Lederwaren:** Kernledertreibriemen, Schlagriemen, Näh- und Bänderriemen, Webervögel (Pickers), techn. Lederwaren für Industriebedarf.

Unsere Erzeugnisse, die wir schon seit vielen Jahrzehnten auf den Markt bringen, genießen den Ruf, zu den besten ihrer Art zu zählen. In den Jahren 1900 und 1907 sind unsere durch Feuer zerstörten Abteilungen in größerem Rahmen wieder erbaut und mit den neuesten maschinellen Einrichtungen versehen worden. Sämtliches zur Verarbeitung gelangende Ledermaterial wird in unserer eigenen Gerberei nach altbewährten Systemen hergestellt.

Diese Grundlagen ermöglichen uns, bei stets großen Ledervorräten auch den weitgehendsten Anforderungen an die Leistungsfähigkeit unserer Betriebe in rascher und vollkommener Weise zu genügen.