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Moritz Grossmann

Founder of his Glashütte manufacture and of the German School of Watchmaking

The origins of Glashütte as a small crucible of watchmaking in Saxony date back to the middle of the 19th century and to two outstanding personalities: Ferdinand Adolph Lange and Carl Moritz Grossmann. Lange established his manufactory in 1845. Nine years later, in 1854, he persuaded his long-standing friend and fellow journeyman to move to the Ore Mountains and to establish a mechanical workshop there. It would soon be transformed into a watchmaking enterprise as well.

Carl Moritz Grossmann was born in Dresden on 27 March 1826. His father was a mail sorter at the royal court post office there. While Moritz grew up under modest circumstances, his teachers quickly recognised his eagerness to learn and realised that he had an extraordinary aptitude. Just like Ferdinand Adolph Lange before, he spent – thanks to a scholarship – two years studying at Dresden’s Technische Bildungsanstalt, the precursor of what is now the Technical University. In 1842, Grossmann signed up as a watchmaking apprentice with Gottfried Friedrich Kumme, Sr. Consequent to his fast developing talent, he completed his training much faster than the norm. In his spare time he also studied English, French, and Italian. During this period, he made friends with watchmaker Lange, 11 years his senior. Both were ambitious tinkerers who wanted to know how things worked and whose calling was to craft watches.

During his journeyman years starting in 1847, Moritz Grossmann first worked for chronometer maker Moritz Krille in Hamburg, and then with court clockmaker Josef Bierganz in Munich. Soon thereafter, he was drawn to Swiss watchmaking capital La Chaux-de-Fonds, and later to England, France, Denmark, and Sweden.

His ambition was an ongoing quest for further training and a deeper understanding of his discipline. He finally returned to Dresden in 1854 but decided shortly thereafter to move to Glashütte, 30 kilometers away. There, Moritz Grossmann developed the Glashütte lathe for watchmakers and later concentrated on lever escapements and the optimisation of pivoted detents for chronometers. He crafted precision tools, escapement models, fine pocket watches, and precision pendulum clocks as well as lever chronometers and marine chronometers.

Of course, the varied projects to which Grossmann was committed could not have been pursued without highly qualified staff members. He succeeded in enlisting a team of specialists that included watchmaking geniuses Ludwig Strasser and Carl Maucksch. Thanks to their help, he not only gained time to translate his knowledge into his proprietary timepiece designs but also to pass it on to others. He held lectures, wrote articles for domestic and foreign special-interest magazines, and translated books on horology, such as Claudius Saunier's multi-volume standard anthology entitled "Lehrbuch der Uhrmacherei" (Textbook of Watchmaking). In 1866, Grossmann submitted an essay in London with the title "On the detached lever escapement" and became the very first German contestant to win a competition tendered by the British Horological Institute.

Moritz Grossmann also had a penchant for social issues. He founded the Gymnasts' Voluntary Fire Brigade and the Glashütte Military Society and campaigned for the construction of a railway line to the Müglitz Valley. After his first wife died, he remarried in 1871 and became the father of three children. In 1876, he was appointed a member of the Royal Saxon Landtag. He initiated, conceived, and in 1878 founded the German School of Watchmaking in Glashütte. Even though he was the school's first chairman of the board of trustees, he still found sufficient time to teach mathematics and languages there.

Moritz Grossmann died suddenly of a stroke on 23 January 1885, after having delivered a speech in Leipzig about the introduction of World Time. Tragically, just like his friend Lange, he only lived to the age of 60. After his unexpected death, Grossmann's manufacture in Glashütte was liquidated.