



## Translation

*(This German/English translation by Mrs. Henrike Wöhler on request of the abovementioned relative Werner Moennich)*

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*Berth Brinkmann*

## **The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wilhelm Scheel, Rostock**

September 14, 1957 marks the hundred<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the day on which the young businessman Wilhelm Scheel, born May 9, 1829 in the small town of Schwaan, south of Rostock, acquired the civil and merchant rights of the city of Rostock against payment of several hundred Thaler. He started an independent wholesale business at Hartestraße/corner Grubenstraße, trading all kinds of food. This was to be the foundation stone for what has developed into a prestigious chemical factory bearing his name, the "Wilhelm Scheel Chemical Factory".

This is a good opportunity to look back; hence, the present short anniversary publication is intended to trace the company's development over the past hundred years. It tells the story of a Rostock merchant, exemplifying how a healthy entrepreneurial mind, aware of its overall economic and social responsibilities, may run a company over a long period of time, adapting to changing economic situations and contributing to the region's economic development.

The company went through good and bad times, times of war and times of peace. The overriding principle of providing the customer with sound advice and service has significantly contributed to overcoming all difficulties and keeping the company healthy and viable.

In 1905, 3 years before his death, the founder wrote a small booklet with the story of his life, a few copies of which have been preserved. It is a historically interesting account of the crucial years in which the young entrepreneur evolved and expanded his business. Even before 1851, when the actual company was founded, Wilhelm Scheel had run a small, independent trade in Hamburg, where he worked as a commercial employee. This trade consisted in the purchase and shipment of pigeons to his former instructor Moritz Rehberg in Rostock. He also procured copper plates for coppersmiths in Rostock and Schwaan.

He headed the first page of his first account book, which sadly did not survive the events of the last war, with the following words:

"I start my small business by entering 30 Prussian Thaler, ie. 75 Hamburg Kurant Mark, as my working capital, together with the wish that by God's will and my own zeal and efforts, my business may prosper."

This eagerness, and the trust placed in the young merchant, allowed for the capital to grow rapidly. Thus, on September 14, 1857 he was able to afford the above-mentioned acquisition of civil and merchant rights. According to his records, he was likewise able to register an initial capital of approximately 1,000 Thalers for his business as grocery wholesaler. The product range already included cart grease imported from Belgium, an article that would later

become of crucial importance for the development of the company.

A bill dated September 19, 1871, has survived to this day. It bears the founder's signature, and specifies "rice" as the object of the business transaction (*c.f. picture*). August 11, 1868 was to become an important date for the young company, when Mecklenburg joined the German tariff union. The subsequent ex post customs clearance of all goods resulted in great losses, despite the mitigating measures the "General Mecklenburg Trade Association" (founded by Josephi, Pelzer, Scheel, Siemerling, Witte and others) induced the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg to take. As a consequence, Wilhelm Scheel resolutely changed his entire business.

Cart grease, a major trade article in his portfolio, was no longer obtained from Brussels, as it could now be purchased at a better price and tax-free from factories in the tariff union. The raw materials used to produce high-quality cart grease, above all colophony (resin) could be imported by water at low cost and duty-free from America, Spain, France and other countries. These reasons prompted Wilhelm Scheel to found a factory for the production of cart grease. The factory was built within 6 months in 1870, on the site at the White Cross on Neubrandenburger Strasse, where the production facilities are located to the present day.

The company Huth & Richter, based in Wörlitz near Halle / Saale, provided disinterested and amicable advice in the construction of these facilities. This led to the closest connections between the Huth and Scheel families that have lasted for generations and are still strong today.

However, when the new factory was ready to start production, it turned out that the whole of Mecklenburg had been supplied with such large stocks of cart grease that there would be no demand for the product for years to come.

Scheel's only chance to hold his ground lay in providing a product of the best and purest quality. Whereas competing products were adulterated up to 50% with gypsum or barite in order to maximise profits, Wilhelm Scheel's company launched a cart grease without any such additives. With great tenacity, Wilhelm Scheel took it upon himself to visit all the relevant customers, at first by train, later in his own carriage. He explained the differences in quality, the floatability of the pure product on water serving as a clear indicator of the distinction. Thus, he succeeded in gaining the trust of the customers and securing a loyal clientele.

In his old age, he was able to look back on his successes with justified pride. Of course, he had likewise to cope with setbacks during this time. In 1870, 1872 and 1876 fires broke out, destroying parts of the production facilities. However, these accidents resulted in the risk of fire being countered by subdividing the production buildings into fire-proof units. Thus, no further significant damages occurred. Wilhelm Scheel increasingly focussed his business on cart grease, which he traded under the name of "Finest cart grease". It was awarded medals at a number of exhibitions.

Realizing that specialisation was expedient, Wilhelm reduced the food trade section and included technical lubricants in the company's sales programme. Since about 1890, these lubricants were purchased from the Hamburg-based mineral oil plant „Mineralölwerke Albrecht & Co., which primarily processed crude oils from the Baku areas. Here too, good and friendly business relations have developed over generations. At times, the ties were so close that more than once the suspicion arose that Wilhelm Scheel might really be a subsidiary of the company from Hamburg. This was by no means true, but it testifies to the mutual bond of trust existing between the companies.

In the record of his life, Wilhelm Scheel states his main principles, which he wished to pass on to his successors. These principles should not be omitted in this small overview of his life and achievements:

**1. My motto:**

*"It is a man's will that makes him great or insignificant".*

**2. My principle is to postpone nothing:**

*"Whatever you wish to do, do it right away. Thus, you will always have time and will not belong to those people who never have time, but get very little done!"*

Since 1885, the eldest of his 5 sons, Wilhelm Sibrand Scheel, has actively assisted his father, first as an employee, later as a joint owner. He mainly took over the strenuous business trips. In 1907, the year that marked its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, three generations formed the backbone of the company: Wilhelm's grandson, the current owner Werner Scheel, had started working for the company a year and a half before.

At that time, Wilhelm Scheel had already been awarded the title of *Privy Councillor of Commerce*, an honour which in his opinion showed the appreciation and trust his hometown of Rostock had for him. His native town Schwaan had granted him honorary citizenship. He could justly write in the record of his life that his loyal clientele was his pride and the firm support of his company and that he saw his business as "the bride of his old age".

When he died in 1908, he left his successors a sound company, strong enough to last for another fifty years. From that time on, his son Wilhelm Sibrand Scheel was the sole owner of the Wilhelm Scheel Company. Under his management, the food trade was gradually phased out and the company renamed "Wilhelm Scheel. Industrial oils and greases". However, it was only in 1919 that the last food items disappeared from the sales programme.

The traditional company sign above the entrance to the factory site on Neubrandenburger Strasse "Wilhelm Scheel – manufacturer of cart grease, machine oil and paint " was a small landmark on the road leading into Rostock.

The sound basis of the company enabled W. S. Scheel to run the business successfully in the following years, although WW I put affairs to a severe test. Like his father, he was well-trusted and was awarded the honorary title of *Councillor of Commerce*.

The current owner, Werner Scheel was able to look back on his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of service for the company last year: He had been at his father's side since 1906, first as an employee, since 1919 as joint proprietor. He primarily took over most of the extensive business trips, the accomplishment of which became more expeditious after the war due to the introduction of a motorcycle, and later of a motor vehicle.

When *Councillor of Commerce* W. S. Scheel died in April 1926, Werner Scheel took over the business as sole owner. He had to face the difficult years of inflation and the economic crisis in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In particular, the debt restructuring process introduced with the so-called Osthilfe (*an agricultural aid programme set up by the German and Prussian governments between 1926 and 1937 to assist Prussia's Eastern provinces*) resulted in severe financial losses for the company, since the large estates in that part of the world constituted a significant part of the clientele. These difficulties could only be overcome by a management based on the strictest economy.

Whereas his father and grandfather had confined their activities to the purely commercial side of the company's business, the current owner also took an interest in the chemical basics of the manufacturing processes and attended lectures with recognized experts in this field in Berlin. *A comparison of the laboratories in 1920 and today can be found in the margin.*

The main commercial items in these years were technical oils, greases and so-called resin oil paints. The latter, as well as cart grease and machine grease, were the company's own products; in the case of the various lubricating oils and other technical lubricants, the company acted as wholesale distributor. The factory was, and still is, situated on Neubrandenburger Strasse near the White Cross. The main warehouse, the office and the dispatch department were located at Große Mönchenstraße 29, a listed building of some architectural interest (*cf. picture*). The main sales areas included the entire state of Mecklenburg, Western Pomerania with the island of Rügen and the northern parts of the province of Brandenburg.

In 1932, the company celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. By that time, the owner's eldest son was already apprenticed as a merchant in the mineral oil wholesale at well-known companies in Flensburg and Hamburg. Young Wilhelm-Sibrand completed his technical training at university. He studied in Munich, Braunschweig and finally Stuttgart, where he passed the examination as a graduate engineer. He was granted study leave during WWII, and obtained a doctorate in chemistry in 1941.

The company suffered severe damage during WWII. In April 1942, heavy air raids reduced large parts of the city of Rostock to ruins. The entire complex on Grosse Mönchenstrasse was destroyed. Although it was not hit by explosive or incendiary bombs, it did not escape the ensuing conflagrations. Many valuable, commercially and historically interesting documents were lost, including the founder's first account books. It took much tenacity and energy to repair the damages in the turmoils of the still raging war. The entire company was concentrated on the site on Neubrandenburger Strasse. Scheel even managed to build – and move into – a new residential and office building in 1943. But here, once again, a bomb attack in February 1944 caused serious damage. The main production building for cart grease, which also served as dispatch department, burnt down along with the house of the foreman. The newly finished residence of the family and various buildings of the factory complex were likewise damaged.

The damages were patched up and a makeshift home was built in lieu of the foreman's house, which now serves as common and changing room for the staff.

In the last days of the war, on May 1, 1945, further considerable damage occurred due to a burning and exploding ammunition train. After 1945 followed an extremely difficult period of reconstruction, marked by shortages of virtually everything. The most important raw materials could not be obtained at all or only in poor quality. In consequence of the land reform, the clientele, which had largely consisted of the managers and owners of the large estates, underwent a radical change. Nevertheless, the company remained closely linked to the agricultural sector. Owing to this connection, the winter months tend to be less busy and are a good time for repairs and operational improvements. The transformation of the entire economic structure in the Soviet Occupation Zone and later the German Democratic Republic shifted the focus of business activities more and more from wholesale to the production of technical greases.

Here, Dr.-Ing. Wilhelm-Sibrand Scheel, who returned from Soviet captivity in December 1947 and took over the role of technical plant manager, had a rich field of activity. During the

war, he had complemented his degree in chemistry by a special training as a mineral oil chemist at the Technical University of Munich with Professor A. W. Schmidt and Schmidt's first assistant at the time, the present professor Dr.-Ing. G. Spengler. A subsequent job in the engineering corps of the Air Force had broadened his know-how even further. In addition to his operational activities in the company, he now teaches at both the Naval Engineering and the Economics Faculty of the University of Rostock.

Having overcome the most important raw material shortages, the production of the three main articles – vehicle grease, special machine grease and red grease – could be improved to top quality. Trials on various testing machines have confirmed this quality assessment.

In addition, a number of new products have been included in the production programme, including the vacuum sealants "Ramsayfett" and the cement "Picein". The ether- and fuel-resistant sealing grease "Schliffschmiere D" should also be mentioned. These articles have significantly contributed to making the German Democratic Republic independent of imports. Thus, the company's sales area expanded to the entire GDR. Customers include the majority of pharmaceutical companies, as well as the glass and tube industry and numerous research laboratories.

Since 1949, these products by the Wilhelm Scheel Chemical Factory have also become interesting export items. This led to previously unprecedented connections with Albania, Bulgaria, China, CSR, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, USSR and Hungary.

In 1949, when the burgeoning shipyard industry on the Mecklenburg Baltic Sea coast was ready to launch its first ships, a difficulty arose: no traditional soft soap could be obtained for the preparation of the slideways. For this purpose, the Wilhelm Scheel factory cooperated with the Neptun Shipyard in Rostock to develop a launching grease, which has proved a success in all launches ever since. All launches on the territory of the German Democratic Republic are carried out according to this procedure, for which now, with sufficient empirical knowledge, a patent application has been filed. Its particular advantage is that it enables a sufficiently precise calculation of the ships' sliding speeds, and that the figures calculated could be fully confirmed by the actual measurements.

In order to prevent the sweep lines in trawl fishery from corroding, a special soaking agent was developed, which protects both the metal and the textile fibre parts of wire ropes. During fishing trips to the Barents Sea with an extraordinarily high strain on the ropes, the product was found to vastly prolong the lifespan of the precious sweep lines. It has also become well established for the preparation and preservation of all types of wire, hemp or mixed ropes.

The milking fat "SCHERO", an important product for the agricultural sector, was significantly improved. Its germicidal effect and other qualities were examined in detail by the Institute for Dairy Industry in Dresden and compared to similar products from the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany. It has been proved to be as good as the best reference products and superior to most.

Since 1945, the company has developed into a versatile chemical factory. It has become an important partner for numerous large industrial companies and research centres. The company now advises on technical questions and develops special preparations for a wide variety of uses on quite a considerable scope. Hence, its new name "Wilhelm Scheel Chemical Factory" is fully justified.

This review would not be complete without mentioning a number of loyal long-term employees.

Wilhelm Sachse joined the company as an apprentice in 1870 and remained until his retirement in 1926, first as an employee and later as an authorised representative.

Foreman *Gehrhahn* was in charge of the manufacturing processes in the factory at the White Cross from the beginning until he had to leave in 1912 due to his advanced age.

He was succeeded by *Heinrich Luckmann*, who had been with the company ever since January 1, 1894. *Luckmann* was foreman until January 1, 1934.

His successor, *August Schröder*, had been with the company since 1919 before he was assigned the management at the White Cross. He remained foreman until his death in 1947.

Another employee of long standing was *E. A. Bartel*. He joined the company shortly before 1914 as an apprentice, stayed on as an employee and later rose to become an authorised representative. He left when he was mobilized for the Wehrmacht during WWII, which he did not survive.

The current foreman *Walter Schippmann*, who took over the position in 1954, has been with the company since 1938. His predecessor *Hermann Ruwoldt* left the company at his own request after 27 years of service.

We can confidently state that the sound and responsible entrepreneurial spirit of its owner and the loyalty of its staff have enabled the *Wilhelm Scheel KG Chemical Factory Rostock* to become a respected and recognized player in the new national economy of the GDR. The company has been able to make significant contributions during the national reconstruction after 1945.

The company still follows the basic principle established by the founder, i.e. to be honest and fair with the customers, to advise them to the best of one's knowledge and not to put the company's commercial interests before the customer's best interest. This principle is the basis for the universal trust placed in the *Wilhelm Scheel Chemical Factory*.

Both employer and employees are justly proud of this trust, but are also alive to the obligation to continue to prove themselves and the company worthy of it. Each and every one of them is willing to strive to continue, and if possible increase, the company's contribution to the national economy

## **Account of the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilhelm Scheel Chemical Factory Rostock by Karla Scheel**

*The following account of the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilhelm Scheel Chemical Factory Rostock was written by Karla Scheel. She is the younger sister of Werner Scheel, who was, at the time, the company's sole proprietor. In 1957, Karla lived in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, just like her elder sister Elisabeth Betche, née Scheel.*

Werner Moennich (great-grandson of Wilhelm Scheel)

## **The company's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 14, 1957**

Due to a special intervention by the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, my sister Elisabeth Betcher, née Scheel, and I, both citizens of West Berlin, were granted special permission to enter the GDR. We were very happy to be able to take part in the family celebrations. Thus, all three siblings, ie. all family members of our generation were present. I gladly continue the tradition of our mother, who left accounts of all special events in our family.

Amongst the first well-wishers, the two 3- and 5-year-old granddaughters presented a series of pictures from our childhood, taken by Margarete Brauer (a city-famous photographer in Rostock). The festivities began on September 13 with a company party at the neighbouring restaurant "White Cross" for 27 people. Permission for music and dance had been granted. Since the proprietor of the "White Cross", *Toni Stange*, had had to grant her assistants a holiday that could not be postponed, the feast had to be cooked at the Scheel's house and brought to the inn. It consisted of meat broth, roast pork with red cabbage and blancmange. *Mrs. Martens* and the female employees waited on us. The atmosphere was cheerful and the party continued until half past one in the morning, with a few indefatigable guests not retiring until half past three.

The next morning my brother's bedroom was quickly cleared out. Long tables were laid in that room as well as in the drawing room, and soon the first of the 60-odd local well-wishers appeared.

The rooms, the hall and the office soon filled with flower offerings; the baskets, bowls and bouquets of flowers made the atmosphere very festive. Numerous greetings came from other parts of the world, such as

Hamburg: from the former supplier of mineral oil Mineralölwerke Albrecht & Co.,  
Düsseldorf: from the former apprentice *H. Lüders* at that time bank director,  
Freital/Dresden: from *R. Wehner*,  
Garding / Holstein: from *Walter Scheel's* the widow (Scheel had died in Canada in 1956),  
Berlin: *Mrs. Wäsche*, formerly Julius Scheel's bride (*Julius was Werner Scheel's son who was killed in action WWII*) and her husband and parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hoppe, sent 10 bottles of sparkling wine as a contribution to the festivities.

Sibrand (Prof. Dr. Ing. Sibrand Scheel, Werner Scheel's eldest son) had assembled a beautiful album with photocopies of old pictures of the factory, the bombed out buildings and new pictures showing the current factory site.

We two sisters from Berlin had presented a compilation of pictures for the office, showing the 4 generations of the company owners; also an account of the previous anniversaries written by our mother.

Among the personal well-wishers, special mention should be made of:  
the Mayor of Rostock, *Wilhelm Sollisch*  
the district director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Klaus Jürgen Ebelt*  
the director of the Bank of Commerce and Industry, *Richter*.

The entire Rostock rowing club appeared, armed with oars, and insisted on cheering their sports doyen with a hearty "hipp, hipp, hurray".

The visits went on until about half past two; at times, all the available seating areas were occupied. The names of the visitors, flowers gifts, cables and letters were recorded in a special book.

At 7 o'clock in the evening, the closer family members who had signed the guest list gathered for dinner: meat broth, pâté with chicken ragout, roast veal with various vegetables, lemon mousse with whipped cream.

The atmosphere was particularly cheerful and various anecdotes from former times in the office or at the Pentecost market, and letters from former apprentices contributed to the amusement. We gladly commemorated our old grandfather, the founder of the company, and our parents with their siblings, and drank a silent toast in memory of the deceased family members:

**Rolf Betche** (*Elisabeth Betche's second son, killed in action WWII on September 15, 1939 near Warsaw, aged 20*),

**Wilhelm Betche** (*Elisabeth Betche's husband, died 18 May 1941 in Rostock, aged 61*),

**Werner Betche** (*Elisabeth Betche's first son, killed in action WWII on March 12, 1942 near Kamenka, aged 27*),

**Erich Scheel** (*cousin of Werner Scheel and his sisters, killed in action WWII on December 18, 1942 in the east, aged 30*)

**Julius Scheel** (*Werner Scheel's second son, killed in action WWII on April 20, 1944 at Narwa, aged 28*),

**Vera Scheel** (*Werner Scheel's wife, died on December 3, 1950 in Rostock, aged 63*).

*Karla Scheel*