

# ‘MEIN FÜHRER!’

The Victims  
of Forced Sterilization  
in Lower Silesia, 1934-44



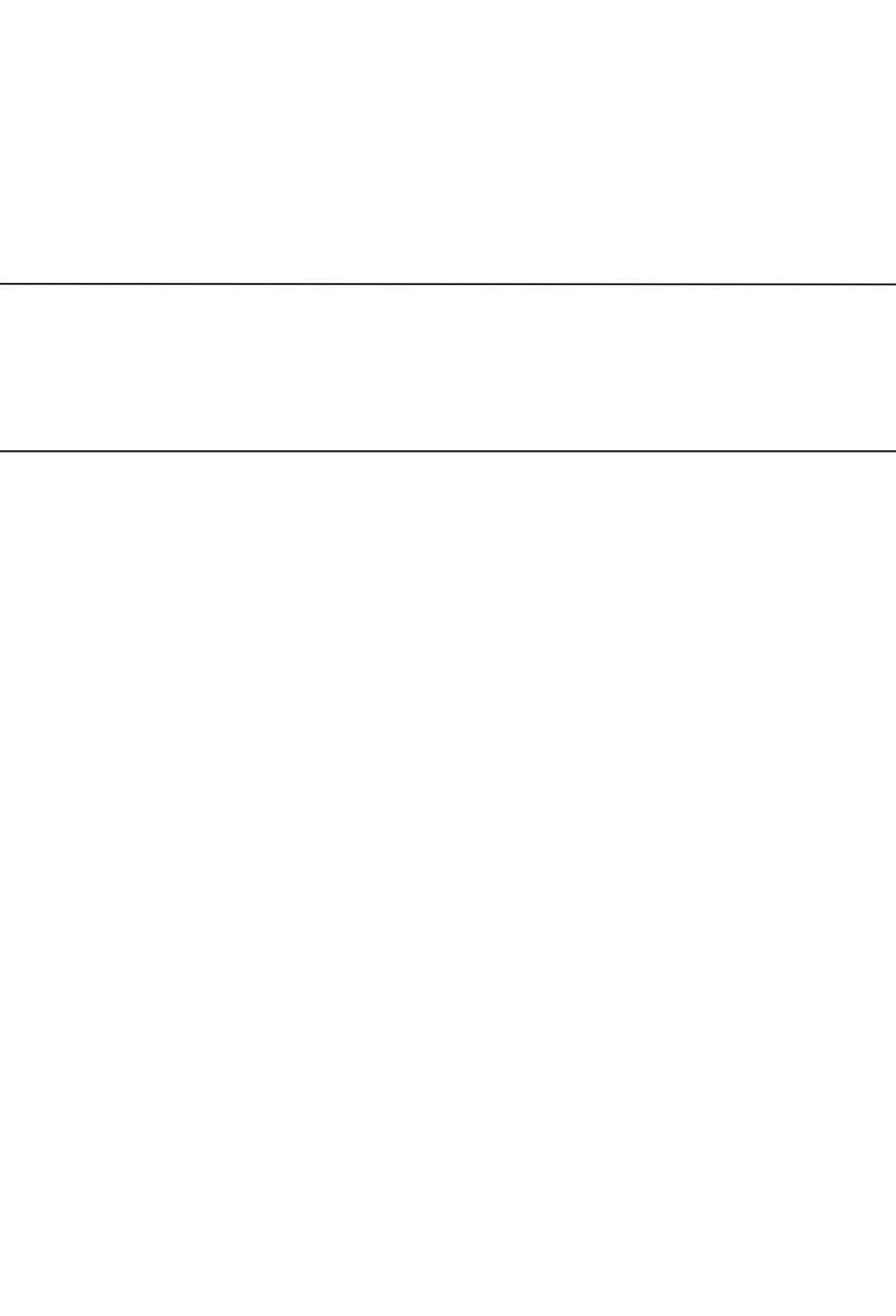
Ośrodek  
Karta

*'Mein Führer!'* is a collection of biographies of victims of forced sterilization from the Lower Silesia region. The underlying criterion behind the choice of the narratives included was the existence of documentation in the form of letters. The last resort in the forced sterilization procedure was to appeal to the Führer. The family and friends of a 'selected' individual – sometimes future victims themselves – addressed letters appealing for reprieve to the Reich Chancellery. These incomplete testimonies thus constitute the only surviving record of the accounts of the persecuted themselves.



**‘MEIN  
FÜHRER!’**





‘**MEIN**

The Victims  
of Forced Sterilization  
in Lower Silesia, 1934–44

**FÜHRER!**’

Selected and compiled by

**Joanna Ostrowska**

Translated from Polish into English by

**Anna Zaranko**



# From the Author

*All my life, I have been well positioned to notice to what an extent normality and abnormality are realities that are not only relative, but also relational, mobile, contextual, the one always imbricated in the other, always partial in some way, and so on. I also cannot help having noticed to what an extent social illegitimacy can cause psychic damage to those whose lives are caught up in it, full of worry and pain, and how it can thus engender a deeply rooted aspiration to gain access to the space of what is legitimate and what is “normal”. (The power of certain institutions resides precisely in this kind of desirability.)<sup>1</sup>*

---

**Didier Eribon**

**F**orced sterilisation is the denial of the right to descendants. In the first decades of the twentieth century, sterilization for eugenicist reasons constituted one of the mechanisms of social policy based on so-called racial hygiene. Doctors, politicians – supporters of so-called negative eugenics – usurped the right to decide who was a “desirable” citizen, and who was not. On 14 July 1933, the government of the Third Reich passed the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases. Until the end of the Second World War, similar laws were in force in over half the states of America, in two provinces of Canada, in Japan, and in the Scandinavian and Baltic states. The Nazi sterilization law was nothing exceptional at that time. This legal “procedure” aroused hardly any civil protest.

In Nazi Germany, the authorities began by calculating the cost to society of maintaining “the genetically sick, asocial elements, and criminals”. Secondly, they pointed to a solution which would limit the costs of social care, to the benefit of “superior” citizens.

The sterilization of individuals diagnosed as mentally ill was intended to “assist” the national-socialist community. In theory, it had nothing to do with punishing a citizen. Individuals selected for sterilization were meant to believe that the Nazi state was helping them to cleanse their “inherited shame”: “Persons affected [by genetic disease]

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Eribon, *Returning to Reims*, trans. M. Lucey (Los Angeles, 2013), p. 73.

should be assured that sterilization does not diminish their personal worth.”<sup>2</sup> The procedure was supposedly voluntary. If anyone resisted the authorities, they were persuaded by force to “sacrifice themselves” for the common good.

The majority of victims of sterilization, male and female, in the region of Lower Silesia were German. From the beginning of 1934, the sterilization of the mentally ill was a means of eliminating “unwanted” citizens from the Nazi state. On the other hand, it was a pretext to seize total control of the Reich’s population policy. With time, it came to be used against other social groups deemed “inferior”. The procedure was carried out on individuals allegedly unable to support themselves or their families independently, or who were accused of “immoral conduct” or asocial behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

Sterilization legislation was in force for a decade (1934–44) throughout the entire country. In Silesia, the new law applied in three administrative provinces (*Regierungsbezirken*): Wrocław, Legnica, and Opole. Apart from the German population, citizens of other states within the Third Reich were also under threat. The heroes and heroines of this book were the inhabitants of Regierungsbezirk Breslau. In 1939, there were around 2 million people<sup>4</sup> living in this region – 620 thousand in Breslau (Wrocław) itself. Towards the end of 1944, over 7,000 of them had been sterilized, though only approximate data are available. Incomplete documentation of the enforcement of the sterilization law in this province has survived in the State Archive in Wrocław, and has provided a point of departure for this publication. Until now, the subject has remained on the margins of Polish historiographical research concerning Nazi eugenics and the premises of Third Reich biopolitics. Key texts on Silesia by Stefan Kasperek appeared in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> The first monograph to appear describes, among other things, the phenomenon of enforced sterilization in this region: *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924–1944* [The ideological foundations of the concept of racial hygiene and its implementation in Silesia, 1924–1944] by Kamila Uzarczyk was published in 2002. For the last decade or so, the author has been gradually filling in gaps in the research and commemorating

---

2 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8422, p. 42.

3 K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924–1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 238.

4 In: S. Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934–1944”, *Przegląd Lekarski* 1 (1979), p. 50.

5 Alongside the work of Stefan Kasperek, it is worth noting that of Franciszek Połomski. S. Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje”, pp. 50–60; idem, “Powikłania zabiegów sterylizacyjnych w latach 1934–1944 na Śląsku Opolskim”, *Przegląd Lekarski* 1 (1974), pp. 82–89; F. Połomski, “Sądy do spraw sterylizacji w III Rzeszy (1933–1945)”, *Studia Śląskie*, vol. XX (1971).

the victims of persecution.<sup>6</sup> Her work provides the background to subsequent chapters of this book.

/

“Mein Führer!” contains ten accounts and a dozen or so biographies – a tiny fragment of the microhistory<sup>7</sup> of enforced sterilization from the area of a single province. The underlying criterion behind the choice of the narratives included was the existence of documentation in the form of letters which have survived in the Wrocław archive. The last resort in the sterilization procedure was to appeal to the Führer. The family and friends of a “selected” individual – sometimes future victims themselves – would address letters appealing for a reprieve to the Reich Chancellery. These incomplete testimonies thus constitute the only surviving record of the accounts of the persecuted themselves. For their authors, the letters were the final stage in the battle for themselves or those close to them. I have copied them in their entirety, arranged them chronologically, and supplied each one with a commentary which provides, as far as possible, a biography of the victim.

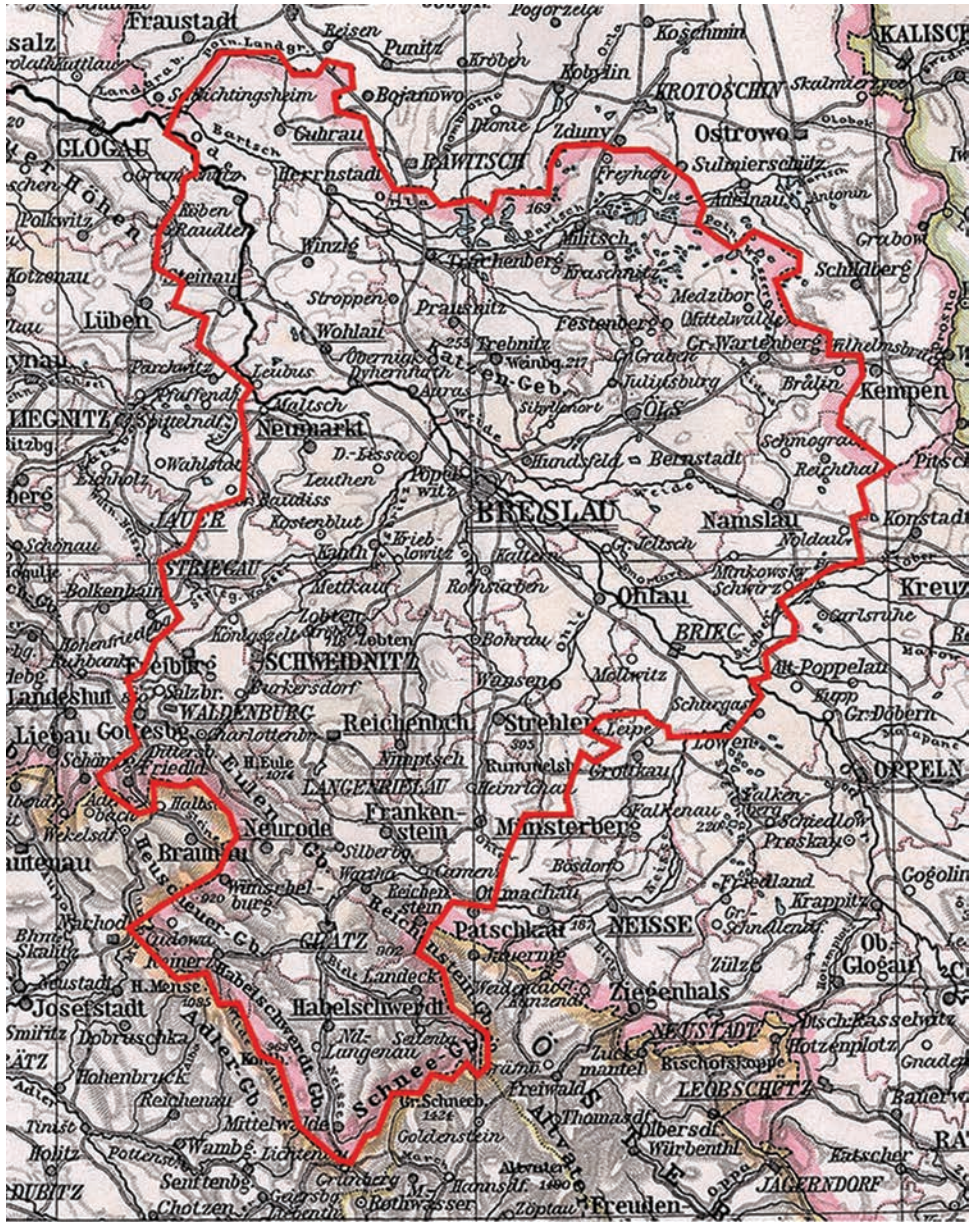
Luise, Maria, Charlotte, Frieda, Elsa, Paula, Erika, Hedwig, Martha, Pauline, Frieda and Max differed in practically every way. They came from different social classes, and different educational backgrounds. They lived in towns, cities, and villages. They were in work or unemployed. Some had children and families. Only a few were married, others were divorced. They were variously diagnosed. Many of them had been exposed to brutality at the hands of the police and health care professionals. Some died after the procedure. All fought for the right to make decisions for their life and health. No one wished to be considered “burdened”.<sup>8</sup> This book is a first step towards retrieving the memory of their suffering.

**Joanna Ostrowska**

- 
- 6 Cf. K. Uzarczyk, “War Against the Unfit: Eugenic Sterilization in German Silesia, 1934–1944: Sine Ira et Studio (Without Anger or Bias)”, *International Journal of Mental Health* 36/1 (2007), pp. 79–88; *Eugenika–biopolityka–państwo. Z historii europejskich ruchów eugenicznych w pierwszej połowie XX w.*, ed. M. Gawin and K. Uzarczyk (Warsaw, 2010); idem, “‘Der Kinderfachabteilung vorzuschlagen’: The selection and elimination of children at the Youth Psychiatric Clinic Loben (1941–1945)”, in: *From Clinic to Concentration Camp: Reassessing Nazi Medical and Racial Research, 1933–1945*, ed. P. Weindling (London – New York, 2017), pp. 183–206.
- 7 The passages reconstructing individual biographies were inspired by Carlo Ginzburg’s concept of the evidential paradigm. See: C. Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm”, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3. (May, 1979), pp. 273–288.
- 8 A reference to G. Aly, *Die Belasteten. „Euthanasie“ 1933–1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt a. Main, 2013).







Wrocław province, 1905



---

**Luise  
Christoph**

---

**1935**





Wilhelm Christoph,  
 Rogau-Rosensau, Bez., Breslau  
 Anlagen: Bittgesuch,  
 3 Abschriften.

Kanzlei des Führers  
 der N.S.D.A.P.  
 Nr. 025480 in - 2. DEZ 1935

Berlin NW.7, Mittelstr. 23.  
 Potsdamer Hof.  
 den 29. November 1935.

*Ant. f. Mollat abhandelt*

Kanzlei des Führers  
 der N.S.D.A.P.  
 N. 000201 in - 3. DEZ 1935

in Führer !

Eingeg. 12. DEZ 1935  
 Beantwortet:  Erledigt:

1

Heute, um 13 Uhr bin ich hier in Berlin eingetroffen, um Ihnen ein Bittgesuch meiner Mutter persönlich zu überreichen. Da hierzu heute keine Möglichkeit war, übergebe ich es mit Eilbotenbestellung der Post. Das Bittgesuch und drei beiliegende Abschriften anderer Schreiben in dieser Sache werden Ihnen mein Führer erklären, warum ich persönlich kommen mußte. Da meine Schwester Luise befürchtete, daß sie in der Zeit meiner Abwesenheit von der Polizei abgeholt werden könnte, ist sie mit hier. Jch bin seit 1. März 1930 S.A. Mann und Pg. und habe als Nationalsozialist in brüderlicher Kameradschaft meine Schwester wiederholt versucht davon zu überzeugen, daß sie dieses Opfer unserem Volke schuldig ist. Auch meine Mutter und meine anderen Geschwister haben ~~ihm~~ sie gebeten, sich doch operieren zu lassen. Sie bleibt aber bei ihrer Ablehnung gegen die Maßnahme; ihre Einstellung zu dieser Sache mag vielleicht an ihrer seelischen bedingten Mentalität zu den geschlechtlichen Problemen liegen; denn sie ist seit 1 Jahr bei uns zu Hause und zeigt keinerlei Störungen Ihres geistigen und körperlichen Befindens. Das Wesen Ihrer Krankheit, daß sich zur Zeit seiner Erscheinung in Melancholie und Gemütseregungen äußerte, hat auch niemals irgendwelche Geistesgestörtheit gezeitigt. Es ist nun eine furchtbare Erkenntnis für uns Angehörige befürchten zu müssen, daß sie durch einen zwangsweisen Eingriff vollkommen zusammenbricht. Jch habe diese Befürchtung auch Ärzten gegenüber geäußert, die diese Möglichkeit auch zugaben. Die Sorge bei uns Daheim kann ich nicht schildern. - Da ich wegen meiner Mutter ohne einen Bescheid auf diese letzte Bitte mit meiner Schwester nicht heim kann, bitte ich das Gesuch zu prüfen. Wenn es nicht möglich ist, mir die nachgesuchte persönliche Rücksprache mit Ihnen mein Führer zu gewähren, so bitte ich mir durch die Reichskanzlei eine Antwort zu geben, die ich mir persönlich abholen möchte.

In der Hoffnung

IVA *M. S. IX*

Wilhelm Christoph's letter to Adolf Hitler

In der Hoffnugg, daß das Bittgesuch meiner Mutter  
in Anbetracht der Dringlichkeit mit Vorzug zur Bearbeitung  
gelangen wird verbleibe ich in Treue zu Jhnen mein Führer  
und in Treue zu Deutschland

Ihr ergebener

Wilhelm Gimpel

Wilhelm Christoph  
Rogau-Rosenau, Wrocław district  
Attachments: petition  
3 copies

currently Berlin  
in NW 7, Mittelstr. 23  
Hotel Karlsbader Hof.  
25 November 1935

---

*Mein Führer!*

Today, I arrived in Berlin at 13.00 in order to deliver my mother's appeal to you directly. Since there was no opportunity to do so today, I am sending it by courier. The appeal and the attached three copies of other letters concerning this case will explain to you, *mein Führer*, why I had to come. My sister Luise is here with me as she was afraid that in my absence she might be taken by the police. Since 1 March 1930, I have been a member of the SA [NSDAP Storm Detachment] and a party member, and as a national socialist I have attempted in a spirit of brotherly kindness to convince my sister many times that she should make this sacrifice for our nation. My mother and other family members have also asked her to submit to the operation. She, however, continues to object; her attitude to this question may be a result of psychologically conditioned thinking concerning questions of sex, since she has been living at home for a year and shows no signs of mental or physical disturbance. The essence of her illness, which emerged at the time as melancholy and emotional agitation, never manifested as any kind of mental disorder. We, the members of her family, are terribly afraid that enforcing the procedure will result in a complete breakdown. I have expressed our fears to the doctors who also acknowledge the existence of such a possibility. I cannot describe the anxiety which engulfs us at home.

I ask you to consider this appeal, since for my mother's sake, I cannot return home with my sister without obtaining an answer to this [our] final [now] request. If the personal conversation that I seek with you, *mein Führer*, proves impossible, then please ensure a reply is given to me through the Reich Chancellery which I would like to collect personally.

In the hope that, given the urgency of my mother's appeal, it will be reviewed as a priority, I remain loyal to you, *mein Führer*, and to Germany.

Devotedly,  
*Wilhelm Christoph*





APWr, Rejencja wroclawska, sygn. 8426, pp. 9-10

Luise Christoph

Rogau-Rosenau, den 24. November 1935.  
Bez. Breslau.

Bittgesuch

der Witwe Luise Christoph  
in Rogau-Rosenau, Bez. Breslau  
wohnhaft

um  
Aussetzung einer gerichtlich  
angeordneten Unfruchtbarmachung

ihrer 30 Jahre alten ledigen  
Tochter Luise Christoph.

Durch einen Beschluss des Erbge-  
sundheitsgericht Schweidnitz vom 6.3.  
1935/30.5.1935,  
Akt. Zeichen: 17 Wg. 933/35  
2 XIII 367/35,

ist die Unfruchtbarmachung meiner  
Tochter, der am 21.4.1905 in Rogau-  
Rosenau geborenen unverheirateten  
Verkäuferin Luise Christoph ange-  
ordnet worden, weil sie nach ärztlich-  
en Gutachten an Schizophrenie leiden  
soll.

Ich die Mutter der Luise Christoph  
bitte hiermit, daß diese gerichtlich  
angeordnete Unfruchtbarmachung aufge-  
hoben wird oder daß dieser Eingriff  
ausgesetzt wird. Ich bitte, daß meiner  
Tochter an der Stelle ihrer Unfrucht-  
barmachung andere geeignete gericht-  
liche oder arztärztliche Maßnahmen  
auferlegt werden, um sie von einer un-  
erwünschten Fortpflanzung abzuhalten.

Begründung :

Dezember 1932 erlitt meine Tochter  
einen Nervenzusammenbruch. Es wurde  
Schizophrenie festgestellt. Meine Toch-  
ter, die auf Grund dieses ärztlichen  
Krankheitsbefundes den Bestimmungen  
des Gesetzes zur Verhütung erbkranken  
Nachwuchses unterliegt und unfruchtbar  
gemacht werden soll, war niemals zu  
bewegen, freiwillig diesen Eingriff an  
sich vornehmen zu lassen. Sie betrach-  
tet einen solchen Eingriff als entehr-  
end, sie würde sich wie ein Mensch zwei-  
ter Klasse vorkommen und sich aus der  
menschlichen Gesellschaft ausgestoßen  
fühlen. Niemals könnte sie in ihrem  
Leben durch dieses ihr vermeintlich  
zugefügte Unglück und Unrecht Ruhe  
finden, sie wolle lieber sterben als  
entehrt sein. Meine Tochter ist der  
Ansicht, daß kein Grund zu ihrer Un-  
fruchtbarmachung vorliegt, weil sie

An  
den Führer und Reichskanzler  
des deutschen Volkes  
Herrn Adolf H i t l e r

B e r l i n .

Letter from the mother of Luise Christoph to Adolf Hitler

weil sie fortpflanzungsungefährlich sei, sie sei ledig und eine Ehe wird sie niemals eingehen. Auch ausserehelich würde sie niemals Kinder haben. Sie sei jetzt 30 Jahre alt und habe bisher nachweisbar keinen Geschlechtsverkehr gehabt und würde sich auch in Zukunft eines solchen enthalten. Sie will sich allen erdenklichen Maßnahmen unterwerfen, die dem Staate eine Gewähr für die Verhütung ihrer unerwünschten Fortpflanzung bieten, um nur nicht operiert zu werden.

Am 14.11.1935 wurde durch das Staatliche Gesundheitsamt des Landkreises Breslau auf Grund des gerichtlichen Beschlusses meine Tochter aufgefordert, sich in einer Klinik in Breslau zwecks Durchführung ihrer Unfruchtbarmachung einzufinden.

Meine Tochter die wieder genesen ist und sich in meinem Hause befindet müßte mit Gewalt nach Breslau gebracht und dort ebenfalls mit Gewaltanwendung operiert werden. Durch diese Maßnahme würde aber ihre wiederhergestellte Gesundheit vollständig zerrüttet werden und es müßte schließlich ihre dauernde Verwahrung in einer Anstalt erfolgen.

Ich habe daher am 18.11.1935 das Staatliche Gesundheitsamt in Breslau ersucht, die Unfruchtbarmachung auszusetzen. Die Ortspolizeibehörde meines Wohnortes hatte hiergegen keine Bedenken.

Dieser Antrag auf Aussetzung der Unfruchtbarmachung ist aber am 21.11.1935 durch das Staatliche Gesundheitsamt in Breslau abgelehnt worden. Meine Tochter ist letztmalig aufgefordert worden, sich sofort freiwillig zu stellen andernfalls sie durch die Polizei zwangsweise abgeholt wird.

In meiner großen Sorge um das Leben und um die Gesundheit meines Kindes wende ich mich daher in letzter Stunde an Sie mein Führer.

Ich beauftrage meinen Sohn Wilhelm Ihnen diese Bittschrift zu überreichen, der Ihnen mein Führer noch mündlich Einzelheiten in dieser Angelegenheit unterbreiten wird.

Da die polizeiliche Abholung bereits am 14.11.1935 angedroht wurde, bitte ich das Staatliche Gesundheitsamt des Landkreises Breslau ( Amtsarzt ) in Breslau I , Oderstraße Nr.4/5 zu dem eingangs erwähnten Aktenzeichen sofort benachrichtigen zu wollen , daß vorläufig von einer Unfruchtbarmachung meiner Tochter abzusehen ist.

In Ergebenheit ,

..Löffler, Christophel,....

Luise Christoph

Rogau-Rosenau,  
24 November 1935,  
Wrocław province

Appeal

From the widow Luise Christoph  
of Rogau-Rosenau,  
Wrocław province

Concerning  
the suspension of the court  
sterilization order  
of her 30-year-old unmarried  
daughter Luise Christoph.

---

To the Führer and Reich Chancellor  
of the German nation  
Mr Adolf Hitler  
in Berlin.

The court ruling for the prevention of hereditary affliction in Schweid-  
nitz of 06.03.1935/30.05.1935

File reference: 17 Wg. to 933/35

2 XIII 361/35,

has ordered the sterilization of my daughter, Luise Christoph, an unmarried  
shop assistant, born 21.04.1905 in Rogau-Rosenau, since in the opinion of  
the doctor she suffers from schizophrenia.

I, the mother of Luise Christoph, ask that the court's sterilization order  
should be revoked, or that the operation should be suspended. I request that  
instead of sterilization some other action, medical or legal, should be taken  
with regard to my daughter, aiming to prevent undesirable reproduction.

Substantiation:

In December 1932 my daughter suffered a nervous breakdown. Schizo-  
phrenia was diagnosed. My daughter, who on the basis of a medical state-  
ment is subject to the provisions of the Law on preventing the birth of  
offspring burdened with hereditary illnesses and who is to be sterilized,  
could never be persuaded to submit voluntarily to such an operation. She  
considers this measure to be shameful, she would feel like a second-class  
human being and would feel excluded from human society. The ostensible  
harm and injustice done her would prevent her from ever finding peace in  
her life. She prefers to die, than to be deprived of dignity. My daughter is  
of the opinion that there is no reason to carry out such a sterilization since  
there is no danger of her reproducing, she is single and has no intention of  
ever getting married. Nor will she ever bear children out of wedlock. She is

now 30 years old and till now - which can be proved - has never had sexual relations and intends not to do so in future. She is willing to undertake all possible methods to guarantee to the state that she will not permit unwanted reproduction, as long as she does not have to undergo the operation.

On 14.11.1935, the State Board of Health of the district of Wrocław, according to the ruling of the court, summoned my daughter to attend the clinic in Wrocław to undergo sterilization.

My daughter, who is now recovered and residing in my house, would have to be taken to Wrocław by force and be operated upon there, also by force. Such measures would ruin the health she has regained and lead to the need for permanent institutionalization.

That is why, on 18.11.1935, I submitted a request to the State Board of Health to suspend the sterilization procedure. My local police have no objections to this.

The above-mentioned application to suspend the sterilization was rejected, however, on 21.11.1935 by the State Board of Health in Wrocław. My daughter was summoned a final time immediately to attend [the clinic] voluntarily; otherwise the police would bring her by force.

Greatly alarmed for the life and health of my child, I turn to you, *mein Führer*, at this final hour.

I have entrusted my son Wilhelm with this plea to you, and he will recount the details of this matter to you himself, *mein Führer*.

Since [we are] threatened with the police coming [for my daughter] on 14.11.1935, I ask that, citing the reference above, you would be so kind as to inform immediately the State Board of Health in the Wrocław district (the state doctor), at Wrocław I, Oderstraße 4/5, that the sterilization of my daughter should be temporarily abandoned.

Yours faithfully,  
*Luise Christoph*

“**M**ein Führer! Today, I arrived in Berlin at 13.00 in order to deliver my mother’s appeal to you directly. Since there was no opportunity to do so today, I am sending it by courier. The appeal and the three copies of other letters attached concerning this case will explain to you, *mein Führer*, why I had to come. My sister Luise is here with me as she was afraid that in my absence she might be taken by the police.”<sup>1</sup>

The author of this passage, submitting documents on 25 November 1935 on behalf of his mother, was Wilhelm Christoph. He took these extreme measures to avert the sterilization of his sister.

Wilhelm tried to convince the Chancellor of the Reich to reconsider his decision, in the case of rendering his thirty-year-old sister barren, with political arguments. In his letter, he draws attention to his membership since March 1930 of the SA and of the NSDAP. In his view, the authorities’ decision regarding the operation on his sister Luise was justified: “I have attempted [...] to convince my sister many times that she should make this sacrifice for our nation.” Enforced sterilization was considered a “sacrifice” and a “duty”. It had nothing to do with punishment. If anyone resisted the decision of the Hereditary Health Court (*Erbgesundheitsgericht*), they were taken for the procedure by force. Wilhelm did not dare oppose the authorities and did not question the programme to sterilize “inferior individuals”. He fought only for his sister.

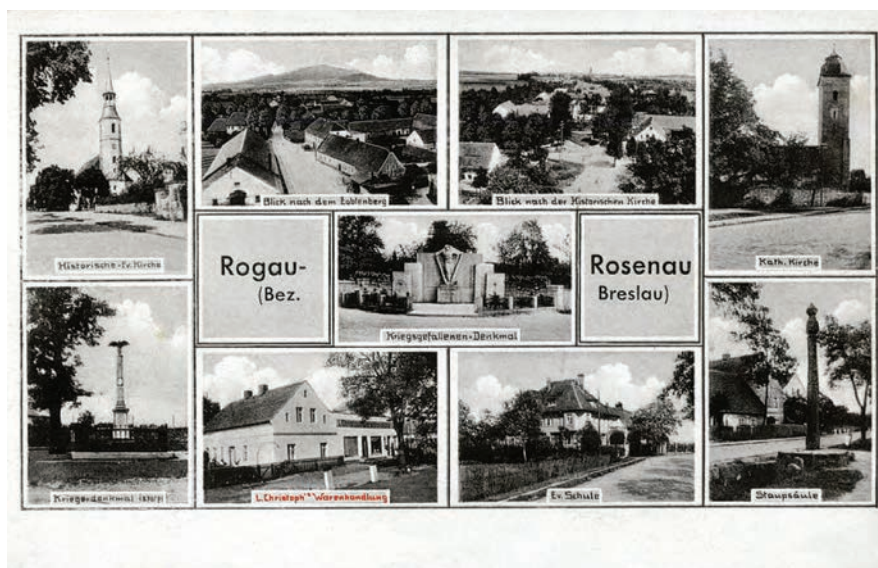
The rest of Luise’s family also attempted to persuade her to submit to the procedure: “She, however, continues to object to this operation.” In his letter to Hitler, Wilhelm wrote that for a year Luise had not displayed any mood swings or shown any signs of melancholy or emotional disturbance. The women close to her feared that sterilization could lead to a complete breakdown. Wilhelm stressed that he needed an answer as quickly as possible: “I ask you to consider this appeal, since for my mother’s sake, I cannot return home with my sister without obtaining an answer to this [our] final [now] request. If the personal conversation that I seek with you, *mein Führer*, proves impossible, then please ensure a reply is given to me through the Reich Chancellery which I would like to collect personally.”

The man was truly desperate. At the very end of his letter he adds: “I remain loyal to you, *mein Führer*, and to Germany.” Unfortunately, in 1935 party membership and devotion to the authorities had no bearing on decisions concerning sterilization. Stefan Kasperek points out that

---

1 All quotations are from Wilhelm Christoph’s letter: APWr, Rejencja wroclawska, sygn. 8426, pp. 7–8.





Pre-war postcard from Rogau-Rosenau

not until 1938 did party cells have some influence over sterilization decisions: “‘proving oneself in life’ and ‘serving society’ were equivalent to ‘proving oneself in the party’. Thanks to this, the quite numerous requests regarding sterilization questions coming from party members and Nazi activists, on their own behalf or that of their families, directed to Hitler and higher authorities [...] could be granted.”<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, we do not know if the letters from the Christoph family were at all successful. The correspondence did not reach the Reich Chancellery until December 1935. No official reply has been preserved. We do not know if Luise Christoph underwent sterilization. From 1 January 1934 until the end of December 1937, 3,159 women were rendered barren in the Wrocław province.<sup>3</sup> Luise Christoph of Rogau-Rosenau (Rogów Sobócki) could have been among them.

/

The mother of Luise Christoph, also named Luise, lived in Rogau-Rosenau with four children. She was a widow. A surviving postcard of the town from 1930 shows the Christophs’ home, which also included

2 S. Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934-1944”, *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 59.

3 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8429, p. 91.





Wrocław, Gynaecological Clinic

the family shop (L. Cristoph Warenhandlung). In May 1939, Rogau-Rosenau had 1,261 inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> Everyone must have known that the daughter of widow Christoph was to be sterilized.

The letter to the Führer was a last resort in the battle for her child. The mother had appealed against the decision of the lower court in Schweidnitz (Świdnica) and then against the decision of the higher court in Wrocław. The entitlement to appeal was possible “from 1935 for a period of fourteen days. A last resort was the possibility of directing a request to Hitler to reconsider the case”.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to this correspondence, we can also to some extent reconstruct the story of the sentenced woman. Her case is exceptional. Usually, the partial sterilization records lack detailed personal information. The “patients” had only a name and surname. Their localities and case numbers were recorded. Nothing more.

---

4 Rogów Sobocki, <https://gov.genealogy.net/item/show/ROGNAUJO80JW> [accessed 1 March 2019].

5 K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924-1944* (Toruń, 2003), pp. 250-51.



Wrocław, All Saints Municipal Hospital, operating theatre

Luise was born on 21 April 1905. She was 30 years old when the appeal was lodged. She was unmarried and worked behind the counter of the family shop. Three years earlier, she had suffered a nervous breakdown and was diagnosed schizophrenic. In 1935, 94 sterilization applications in cases of schizophrenia were submitted to the Wrocław province administration. Most were lodged by state-appointed doctors.<sup>6</sup> Luise's case was no doubt one of these.

In her letter of the end of November 1935, the mother noted that her daughter had never wanted to submit to the procedure: "She considers this measure to be shameful, she would feel like a second-class human being and would feel excluded from society. She would never regain peace and would prefer to die than to undergo such a humiliation."<sup>7</sup> This account concerning the woman herself – a future victim of enforced sterilization – is invaluable. In the majority of the biographies included here, the voices of the persecuted are not in evidence. They do not appeal against the decision. The authorities do not include their opinions in the correspondence. And finally, family members tend to

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 246–47.

<sup>7</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8426, p. 9.



Wrocław, Augusta Hospital, 1930s

overlook the views of their relatives – tried by the sterilization [hereditary health] courts. They write, for the most part, “on their behalf”.

Apparently Luise had no intention of getting married. She did not want to have children. She had never experienced intimate relations with a man. She was willing to agree to anything, as long as sterilization could be avoided. She decided against remaining in an asylum which would have equated to avoiding surgery. Besides, very few agreed to such incarceration.<sup>8</sup>

The sterilization court in Schweidnitz had sentenced Luise at the beginning of March 1935. The family appealed the decision. In mid-November, the Wrocław Board of Health summoned the woman to report to one of the local hospitals. These could have included: The Women’s Health Clinic, the Provincial School of Midwifery, All Saints Municipal Hospital, the Herrnprotsch Municipal Asylum or the Augusta Hospital. By the end of 1937, 1,211 women had been sterilized in these institutions.<sup>9</sup>

According to her mother, the young woman was in a good psychological state. Enforced hospitalization followed by surgery could provoke another breakdown. The family sent a further letter requesting suspension of the procedure on 18 November. The reply from the

<sup>8</sup> Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 263.

<sup>9</sup> Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje”, p. 54; Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 260.

Wrocław National Board of Health (signed by Dr Münzber) came three days later. It was probably this document that prompted Wilhelm to take Luise to Berlin and petition Hitler personally. The document concluded: "Furthermore, I must inform you that should you fail to comply with the latest summons, I have instructed the local police authorities to accompany you forcibly [to the medical institution]."<sup>10</sup>

Four days later, a desperate Wilhelm attempted to meet with the Reich Chancellor, wishing at all costs to save his sister. Even though he supported such kinds of "sacrifice" and believed that the Reich had the right to demand such devotion, he was convinced that an exception should be made in the case of Luise.

---

<sup>10</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8426, p. 11.





---

**Maria  
Schlagner**

---

**1936**





FRIEDRICHSGRUND, den 25. April 1936

Kanzlei des Führers der N.S.D.A.P.	
M. 007584	Ing. 12 MAI 1936
Adlig:	

Herrn

FÜHRER &amp; REICHSKANZLER

Berlin.

Gnadengesuch der led. Maria Schlagner, Friedrichsgrund, Kreis Habelschwerdt, Grfsch. Glatz, Schlesien; betrifft Aussetzung der angeordneten Unfruchtbarmachung, bzw. Aufhebung des Beschlusses des Erbgesundheitsgerichtes Glatz.

Begründung:

Unterzeichnete bittet hiermit den hochverehrten Herrn Führer und Reichskanzler des Deutschen Reiches meinem gestellten Ersuchen nach besten Kräften beizutreten. Ich soll auf Anordnung des Erbgesundheitsgerichtes, Glatz, unfruchtbar gemacht werden, trotzdem ich mich was die einzelnen Behörden, auch Aerzte nicht bestreiten wollen, geistig und körperlich völlig normal bin und auch stets normal war.

Ich habe vor Jahren einen Jugendstreich ausgeführt, mehr aus jugendlichem Leichtsinne als aus der eventuell anzunehmenden verbrecherischen Neigung, die mir zum Vorwurf gemacht werden könnte.

Mein Vater hatte im Unverstand und aus Fahrlässigkeit durch Prozessführung eine erhebliche Schuldenlast auf das meinen Eltern gehörige Anwesen (eine kleine Kolonistenstelle) geladen und es bestand die Möglichkeit, dass durch diese Maßnahme der Besitz im Wege der Zwangsversteigerung verloren gegangen wäre. Wir Kinder haben nun der bedrängten Lage, besonders unserer Mutter zuliebe, helfen wollen, bzw. auch geholfen, indem wir aus unserem Arbeitsverdienst, Abzahlungen auf die entstandenen Schulden leisteten und so die Zwangsversteigerung abgewandt haben.

Ich selbst habe auch mein Lohn soweit ich dazu in der Lage war, meiner Mutter zur Verfügung gestellt.

IVA *1936*

Maria Schlagner's letter to Adolf Hitler

Ich war vor Jahren wiederum auf dem Wege meiner Mutter einen Geldbe-  
trag zu überbringen, als mir unterwegs, ich war in einem Lokal anläs-  
slich des dort stattfindenden Tanzvergnügens eingekehrt, das Geld, was  
ich bei mir führte, gestohlen wurde. In meiner Not habe ich daraufhin  
um ebenfalls in Besitz von Geld zu kommen, ein Damen-Fahrrad entwendet  
und verkauft, <sup>das Geld meiner Mutter ausgehändigt.</sup> Der Diebstahl wurde  
jedoch entdeckt und ich war dieserhalb in eine sehr missliche Lage ge-  
raten. Mein Vater riet mir ich solle mich als geistig unzurechnungs-  
fähig hinstellen um der Bestrafung aus dem Wege zu gehen. Er selbst  
hatte einmal in einer Angelegenheit mit Erfolg den §. 51 zugebilligt  
erhalten und so dachte auch ich mir nichts Schlimmes und habe sein  
schlechten Rat befolgt. Die Verhältnisse haben sich indes in meiner  
Sache sehr bitter gerächt, ich kam unter Pflegschaft und wurde auch  
eine Zeit hindurch in einer Provinzial-Heil und Pflegeanstalt unter-  
gebracht. Ich <sup>habe</sup> seit längerer Zeit mit besonderem Interesse und unter  
Aufbietung des Möglichstn dagegen gearbeitet, damit ich nicht meiner  
körperlichen Vollkraft als normaler Person beraubt werde, bin jedoch  
stets damit abgewiesen worden. Ich bitte deshalb den hochverehrten  
Herrn F ü h r e r und Kanzler des Deutschen Reiches sich meiner Ange-  
legenheit noch einmal eingehend anzunehmen, denn mit dem gegen mich  
festgestellten gerichtlichen Beschluss ist ein erheblicher Irrtum  
begangen, bzw. würde begangen werden, zudem ich zwar nicht ohne Schuld  
stehe, aber der doch nicht ausreichend sein kann, einen normalen Men-  
schen, den Stempel der Minderwertigkeit aufzudrücken.

Ich habe im Verlauf der Sache bereits eine diesbezügliche Beschwer-  
de an den Herrn Minister der Justiz gehen lassen die an den Herrn  
Oberlandesgerichtspräsidenten, Breslau, zurückgeleitet worden ist und  
dieserhalb für meine Angelegenheit nichts zu erreichen war.

Ich ersuche deshalb höflichst wie dringend, dass Sie hochverehrter  
Herr Führer, als höchster und erster Leiter des Reiches im Gnadenwege  
der Unfruchtbarmachung meinerseits entgegenreten.

Aktenzeichen der Sache: 4.XIII. S. 164/35 Glatz - 17. Wg. 1177/35







FRIEDRICHSGRUND, 25 April 1936  
To  
The Führer and Chancellor of the Reich  
Berlin.

---

Request for the reprieve of Maria Schlagner, spinster [of] Friedrichsgrund, district of Habelschwerdt, county of Glatz, Schlesien; concerning suspension of the sterilization order with respect to waiving the Hereditary Health Court's in Glatz resolution.

Substantiation:

The undersigned appeals to the highly esteemed Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich to make every effort to grant my petition. I am to undergo sterilization according to the order of Hereditary Health Court in Glatz, despite the fact that I am, and always have been, completely normal in mind and body, which is not disputed by any authority or doctor.

Many years ago, I committed a certain youthful prank more out of thoughtlessness rather than any criminal tendency that could have been attributed to me.

My father, as a result of poor judgement and neglect following a [legal] case, encumbered the property belonging to my parents (a small holiday camp) with a considerable debt and consequently it emerged that, as a result, this property could be lost in an auction. We children wished to help in this difficult situation, particularly for the sake of my mother, by paying the remaining debts from our own salaries and thus avoid the auction.

I myself shared my salary with my mother as far as I was able. A few years ago, I was [actually] on my way to my mother's again to hand her a sum of money, when along the way I entered certain premises where dances were held. The money, which I had on my person, was stolen. In desperation, wishing to acquire funds, I stole a woman's bicycle, which I sold and gave the proceeds to my mother. The theft was discovered and I therefore found myself in a very distressing position. My father advised me to declare myself insane in order to avoid punishment. He had once managed to get [mitigating circumstances according to] paragraph 51 in a certain case, so without any malicious intention, I took his poor advice. Meanwhile, these circumstances backfired very painfully in my case, since I was taken into custody and for a certain time held in a regional institution for treatment. I have been making great efforts for some time to do everything possible to avoid being deprived of my full physical capabilities as a normal human being, but all my attempts have been rejected. Therefore, I beg the highly esteemed Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich to examine my case again, since to issue a court order against me and allow its perpetration

would be to commit a great mistake. Though I am not without guilt, it is surely not enough to brand a normal human being as defective.

I have already lodged an appeal with the Minister of Justice which was referred back to the Chairman of the Higher Regional Court in Wrocław and so nothing could be achieved in my case.

Hence I urgently beg to request that you, most highly esteemed Führer, as the highest and first leader of the Reich, should graciously deign to prevent my sterilization.

Case file reference: 4.XIII S. 164/35 Glatz - 17. Wg. 1177/35 Higher Regional Court Breslau.

I hereby request that my plea for a reprieve be granted and a just decision implemented, so that I can have recourse to the rights due to me. I have petitioned many times that I should be submitted to medical examination, but this request has been continually rejected.

I ask for information in this case.

Heil Hitler!

With the greatest devotion,

*Maria Schlagner*  
Friedrichsgrund,  
District of Habelschwerdt.



[hand-written letter]

---

I, Maria Schlagner, turn to the most highly esteemed Führer and Chancellor of the Reich with my humble request. I do not suffer from any hereditary condition and was only feigning. I did not feign at all during my entire stay in the institution. I behaved perfectly calmly. I deliberated over it constantly, and would most willingly have explained the whole business, [particularly] when I heard that I would be subject to a guardianship order. But I was afraid that, were I tell everything, [then] what would happen to my father since I had reported on him earlier and I thought that now, the court would want to question me on everything and so I did not want to admit anything. I was after all very young at the time.

I would also like to note that, during my stay in the institute, my guardian Rudolf Klenner did not take care of me and [nor] did he have to at all. My guardian also told the court that he had not known me earlier and that he had accepted the letter of the Hereditary Health Court and for this reason recognized the decision as just. He would be pleased - in his words - if the guardianship were to be annulled and [he said that] since leaving the institution, I have been completely normal. I ask you once again, highly esteemed Führer, to accede to my request.

Heil Hitler!  
With the greatest devotion,  
*Maria Schlagner*



Friedrichsgrund, Kreis Habelschwerdt, that is, Piaskowice in the district of Bystrzyca Kłodzka. This is Maria Schlagner's home town. Today, no trace of it remains. No one remembers the old name. Its residents were tagged onto two neighbouring localities.

Maria does not give her precise address in the correspondence. The area's directory of addresses from 1937 includes a Wilhelm Schlagner who lived at Friedrichsgrund 39. He was a farmer and probably the father of Maria.<sup>1</sup>

Maria Schlagner was unmarried. We do not know her date of birth. We do not know how old she was when the lower sterilization court in Glatz (Kłodzko) decided that she should submit to sterilization because of suspected mental illness. Most probably, it was a question of congenital mental deficiency.

Her story begins with a "youthful prank", which she mentions in her letter. Her irresponsible father, deep in debt, had squandered the family fortune, and her mother was trying to maintain the farm. Maria and her siblings helped their parents, but she does not say where she worked. A few years earlier, someone had stolen her money during a dance. In order to cover the loss, she stole a bicycle which she intended to sell. When she was caught, she pretended – on her father's advice – to be "insane". This was in order to argue paragraph 51 of the Penal Code: "There is no crime if the perpetrator, in committing the act, was in a state of impaired awareness or suffering mental disorder which would exclude an act of free will."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, in her case, she was put under the care of a guardian and lodged in an institution. We do not know which one.<sup>3</sup> "I have been making great efforts for some time to do everything possible to avoid being deprived of my full physical capabilities as a normal human being [...]. Though I am not without guilt, it is surely not enough to brand a normal human being defective."<sup>4</sup>

---

1 *Die Grafschaft Glatz – Einwohnerbuch 1937*, p. 394, in: <http://www.adressbuecher.geology.net/addressbook/entry/547483171e6272f5d236cfae> [accessed 2 March 2019].

2 Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich vom 15. Mai 1871, [www.lexetius.com/leges/StGB/Inhalt;jsessionid=node0j6sao3c1fxedamr6qvm8v95a1243.node0?0](http://www.lexetius.com/leges/StGB/Inhalt;jsessionid=node0j6sao3c1fxedamr6qvm8v95a1243.node0?0) [accessed 10 November 2019].

3 It could have been the "Maria Hilf" hospital in Habelschwerdt or Erholungsheim Altweitztritz (in Stara Bystrzyca): "Siechenhaus (Herz Jesu-Stift) für Altersschwache, Krüppel und Blinde. Eröffnet 4. April 1898. Eigentümer: Kranken-, Armen- und Arbeitsanstalt Maria-Hilf in Habelschwerdt. 28 Betten". In: *Krankenhaus-Lexikon für das Deutsche Reich; die Anstaltsfürsorge für Kranke und Gebrechliche und die hygienischen Einrichtungen der Städte im Deutschen Reich am Anfang des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, nach amtlichen Quellen*, [https://archive.org/stream/krankenhauslexik00gutt/krankenhauslexik00gutt\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/krankenhauslexik00gutt/krankenhauslexik00gutt_djvu.txt) [accessed 14 May 2019].

4 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8426, p. 96.



Postcard of Friedrichsgrund, where Maria Schlagner came from

On 25 April 1936, Maria wrote two appeals for clemency. She addressed one to Adolf Hitler, and the second to his half-sister Angela Raubal. She also attached a document directed to the higher Hereditary Health Court in Wrocław which constituted an appeal body. The content of the letter is as follows:

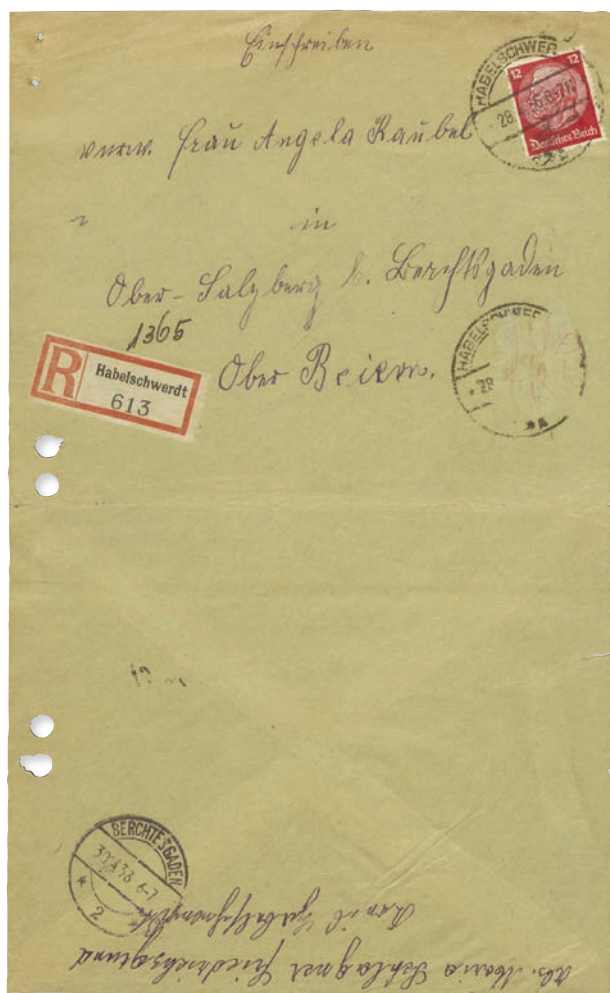
“Dear Madam,

I am attaching an appeal for a reprieve addressed to your brother, the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich, and ask you to deliver it to him. I also ask, that you, dear Mrs Raubal, should read the appeal and if possible express your personal support for it.

I await the granting of my request and thank you in advance.”<sup>5</sup>

Two small postage stamps can be seen on the envelope which has been preserved. The letter was posted in Habelschwerdt on 28 April and reached Berchtesgaden two days later. At the end of the type-written letter, Maria added a few sentences written by hand. Once again, she appealed for clemency. She admitted that she had feigned mental illness. She mentions her fear of punishment and its consequences:

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 101.



The envelope containing Maria Schlagner's letter to Angela Raubal, half-sister of Adolf Hitler

"I was after all very young at the time."<sup>6</sup> Her last resort was supposed to be her guardian, Rudolf Klenner, who, though convinced that she was completely well, nevertheless acted in accordance with the decision of the sterilization court. The overwhelming number of cases were decided by the lower court. A patient could appeal within fourteen days or ultimately beg the Führer for a reprieve. Maria Schlagner tried both approaches.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 98



Photo: Süddeutsche Zeitung / Forum

Angela Raubal with her half-brother, Adolf Hitler

Unfortunately, the letter to Adolf Hitler's half-sister, Angela Raubal, was wrongly addressed. At the beginning of 1936, Angela had married Martin Hammitzsch and had settled in Dresden. Less than two years previously, she had had a disagreement with Eva Braun and been thrown out of her brother's house in Berchtesgaden: "The first big quarrel actually occurred a year earlier appeared at the Nuremberg rally [...]. Raubal, Magda Goebbels and other prominent Nazi wives were not at all happy about Braun taking a seat on the VIP stand for the first time. They found that the young woman behaved 'very conspicuously', although most probably the mere presence of the Führer's girlfriend was an eyesore to them. The women badmouthed her and after the rally Raubal promptly told Hitler about the incidents on the stand. But instead of dropping Braun, Hitler flew into a rage, forbade anyone to meddle in his private affairs and ordered Raubal to quit Obersalzberg immediately."<sup>7</sup>

Maria Schlagner was thus petitioning someone who no longer had any influence with the Führer.

It is difficult to ascertain for sure if Maria was sterilized or not. In her letter to Hitler, she mentions that she is to be rendered barren

---

<sup>7</sup> V. Ullrich, *Hitler: Volume I: Ascent 1889–1939* (London 2016), p. 613.





Krankenhaus „Maria Hilf“, Habelschwerdt

The “Maria Hilf” hospital in Habelschwerdt, where Maria Schlugner might have been admitted to

on the strength of the sentence of the Hereditary Health Court in Kłodzko (*Erbgesundheitsgericht Glatz*). “The arbitration panels included two doctors who served for a year and a judge who acted as chairman. The team of doctors comprised a state doctor and a so-called approved doctor [...], whose appointment had to be confirmed by the NSDAP. Approved doctors had to be specialists in the area of genetics. [...] Participation in the work of the courts was not compulsory and apparently refusal did not risk the death penalty. The example of Dr Waldemar Kolbe bears witness to this; head of the psychiatric ward at the Care and Treatment Centre in Skiba near Kłodzko, he was passed over for court appointments, since according to the county doctor, ‘his cooperation with the work of the court would not have been without inner reservations.’”<sup>8</sup>

Maria was fighting for more than the right to life and health. She was also rebelling against the decision of the court because she considered it illogical and unjust. She had made a mistake with irreversible consequences. She could not accept this. Her statement clearly illustrates how both male and female citizens of the Reich feared charges of being “excluded” or “burdened”. In April 1936, however, people were still completely unaware that in the not too distant future,

<sup>8</sup> Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, pp. 248–49.



the T4 programme would begin which aimed to “eliminate so-called shells of human beings” (*leere Menschenhülsen*).<sup>9</sup> From the outset, the Nazi authorities tried to control society. Forced sterilization was to be a duty towards the community, foreshadowing the extermination of the “excluded”.

The final document in Maria’s case is a confirmation of receipt of the request for reprieve to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, dated 19 May 1936.<sup>10</sup>

---

9 K. Binding, A. E. Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens. Ihr Maß und ihre Form* (Leipzig, 1920), p. 55.

10 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8426, p. 103.





---

**Charlotte  
Mende**

---

**1937**



Breslau, den 15. November 1937.

An den

Herrn Regierungspräsident  
über das Gesundheitsamt Breslau-Stadt.

Ich Pauline Mende, Ww. des Schuhmachermeisters Traugott Mende Waterloostr. 22, 71 Jahre alt, bittet höflichst den Herrn Regierungspräsident, die Entlassung meiner Tochter Charlotte Mende geb. am 18.10.01 zu Breslau herbeizuführen, die seit dem 6.11.1937 sich im Krankenhaus Nord Einbaumstr., wegen dem Verdacht erbkrank zu sein befindet und dort gegen ihren und meinen Willen festgehalten wird.

Meine Tochter ist seit dem 24. September 1934 als Stenotypistin bei der Deutschen Arbeitsfront Herbert Welkischstr. tätig. Sie war immer ehrlich, fleissig und pünktlich (auch in früheren Stellungen) und hat infolge Ueberarbeitung einen Nervenzusammenbruch erlitten. Sie ist Mitglied der N.S.Frauenschaft, N.S.V.-Zellensachbearbeiterin für "Mutter und Kind", Mitglied des Kolonialbundes, in ihrer Abteilung KassiererIn. Sie besuchte die Schulungsabende und Parteiversammlungen und nahm sich nie viel Zeit zum Essen. Sie ist am 6.11. mit der Hoffnung in das Krankenhaus Nord gegangen, um in Erholung geschickt zu werden, musste aber leider feststellen, dass sie sich in einer geschlossenen Anstalt befindet. Sie ist im Besitz ihres vollen Verstandes, sie ist weder "dauernder pflegebedürftig noch gemeingefährlich" und soll hier bis zur Entscheidung des Erbgerichts (zwei bis drei Monate) verbleiben. Da sie grosse Bangigkeit und Sehnsucht nach Zuhause hat, ist zu befürchten, dass sich ihr Zustand verschlimmert.

Meine Tochter liess sich von Herrn Dr. A.Regulski von Januar bis Februar 1937 ein Zahngemiss (Obergebiss) arbeiten, welches wie vereinbart Rm.420.- später aber Rm.540.- kostete, die Reichsversicherung

Letter of Pauline Mende, mother of Charlotte Mende,  
to the president of the Wrocław province

und Krankenkasse zahlte nicht den erhofften Zuschuss, hierüber ärgerte sie sich sehr und weinte viel.

Das Gebiss besteht aus einer 4-gliedrigen Goldbrücke  
3 vorhandene Stifzähne entfernt  
8-gliedrige Goldbrücke

Präparation der vorhandenen Zahnstümpfe  
zur Aufnahme der Brücke (12 Sitzungen).

Sie hat bei der Behandlung Zahnbetäubungsspritzen erhalten.

Die Zahlung erfolgte in Bar. Januar 1937 Rm. 200.- Februar Rm. 200.- nach Fertigstellung der eigentlichen Rechnung im März 1937 die letzten Rm. 140.- Das zur Anfertigung eines solchen Gebisses viele Besuche notwendig sind, ist denkbar. Sie liess sich Ende September noch einen Zahn plombieren. Wenn Herr Dr. R. angibt, dass meine Tochter ihn unnötig besuchte, kann schlecht stimmen, da sie sich im Dienst und privater Weise nie viel mit Herrn abgibt noch vielweniger nachläuft.

Ich will erwähnen, dass in meiner- sowie meines verstorbenen Mannes Familie keine Erbkrankheiten zu verzeichnen sind. Ich war mit meinem Mann dem Schuhmachermeister Traugott Mende 37½ Jahr gut verheiratet, er war ruhig, strebsam, kein Trinker oder Raucher, er ist nie mit dem Gesetz in Konflikt gekommen. Er war ca. 20 Jahre Armen- und Waisenfleger und starb 1927 mit 62 Jahren. Der Ehe entsprossen vier Kinder, welche alle geistig und körperlich gesund sind und die Volksschule bis in die erste Klasse besuchten.

Mein ältester Sohn Max Mende geb. am 11. XI. 1890 zu Breslau, lernte Kaufmann im Spezialgeschäft der Teppich, Möbelstoff und Gardinenbranche. Er lernte englisch und französisch. Nach der Lehrzeit war er als Verkäufer in Spezialgeschäften in Köln, Bonn, Chemnitz München und Hamburg tätig, und brachte es bis zum Einkäufer. Er fiel in der Septemberoffensive 1915 bei Ypern als Jäger (9. Ratzeburg).



Mein zweiter Sohn Karl Mende ist 1893 geboren, wurde Elektromonteur, wurde frühzeitig Obermonteur in einem grösseren Elektrizitätswerk, ist jetzt 10½ Jahr im städt. Dienst (4½ Jahr beim städt. E.W. und über 6 Jahre bei der städt. Sparkasse). Er hat am 5.8.1936 die Elektromeisterprüfung (grosser Befähigungsnachweis) mit gut bestanden. Er legte am 27.3.37 die staatliche Kesselwärterprüfung ab. Er ist seit 1927 Wohlfahrtspfleger, seit 1.1.34 stellvertr. Bezirksvorsteher, seit März 1933 Mitglied der N.S.D.A.P. und seit 1.1.37 Blockleiter. Er ist nüchtern und zuverlässig, kein Trinker oder Raucher. Das dritte Kind ist die obenangeführte Charlotte Mende, sie besuchte die Handelsschule und war als Buchhalterin tätig. Das vierte Kind ist die Tochter Gertrud Mende 1907 geboren, sie ist seit ihrem 14. Lebensjahr im Haushalt tätig, körperlich und geistig gesund.

Nach Schilderung meiner Familienverhältnisse liegt bestimmt keine Erbkrankheit vor, sondern Ueberarbeitung. Ich habe meine Kinder alle gut erzogen und führen einen anständigen Lebenswandel. Ich bitte daher nochmals Herrn Regierungspräsident höflichst den letzten Wunsch einer 71 jährigen Mutter zu gewähren und die baldige Entlassung meiner Tochter Charlotte zu veranlassen.

Heil Hitler!

*From Pauline Mende*

Breslau 10  
Waterloostr. 22

Wir waren immer national gesinnt.

Beiliegend Zeugnissabschriften meiner Tochter.  
Meine Tochter würde sich bei Entlassung aus der Anstalt weiter in ärztliche Behandlung begeben und ehrenwörtlich erklären, keine Nachkommen zu haben.



Breslau, 15 November 1937

To

The president of the province

care of the Health Department, city of Wrocław.

---

I, Pauline Mende, widow of master cobbler Traugott Mende [of] Waterloostr. 22, 77 years of age, kindly ask for the release of my daughter, Charlotte Mende, b. 18.01.[19]01 in Breslau, who has been at the Nord Hospital at Einbaumstr. from 06.11.1937 on account of a suspected hereditary disease and is being confined there against her will and mine.

Since 24 September 1934, my daughter has been working as a shorthand typist at the German Labour Front at Herbert Welkischstr. She has always been honest, hard-working and punctual (as also in her previous employment) and had a nervous breakdown through overwork. She is a member of the National Socialist Women's League, a clerk for the "Mother and child" cell of the National Socialist People's Welfare, a member of the Reich Colonial League and a cashier in her branch. She attended party evening classes and meetings and never took much time for meals. On 6.11.[1937] she went to the Nord Hospital in the hope that she would be sent to recuperate, but unfortunately realized that she was actually in a closed institution. She is completely of sound mind, she is neither a person "requiring constant care" nor "a danger to the community", but she is bound to stay there until the decision of the Hereditary Health Court (in two to three months). Her acute anxiety and home sickness raise the fear that her condition will deteriorate.

From January to February 1937, my daughter had upper dentures fitted by Dr A. Regulski which, by agreement, was to cost 420 RM - later, however, the cost turned out to be 540 RM, the Reich insurance office and health insurance did not pay out the additional sum expected, [my daughter] was very upset and very tearful.

The dental treatment includes a 4-part gold bridge

3 existent pin teeth

An 8-part gold bridge.

The preparation of the existent tooth pins to fit the bridge (12 visits).

She received anaesthetic in the course of the treatment. Payment was to be in cash. 200 RM in January 1937; 200 RM in February; and on settling the final bill in March 1937 - the final 140 RM. As you can imagine, such dental treatment requires many visits. Towards the end of September, she also asked for a filling. If Dr R. claims that my daughter visited him unnecessarily, it is very difficult to agree with him, since she does not encounter gentlemen particularly, either privately or professionally, and even less does she pursue them.

I would like to mention that there is no record of hereditary illness in either my family or that of my late husband. I was married to my husband, master cobbler Traugott Mende, for over 37 years, he was quiet and hard-working, he did not drink or smoke, and never came into conflict with the law. For 20 years he cared for the poor and orphaned. He died in 1927 at the age of 62. There are four children of the marriage, all well in mind and body, and all attended state school to the first class.

My eldest son, Max Mende, b. 11.11.1890 in Wrocław, worked in a shop specialising in carpets, upholstery and curtains. He studied English and French. After his apprenticeship, he worked in specialist shops in Cologne, Bonn, Chemnitz, Munich and Hamburg and rose to the position of buyer. He died at Ypres as a jäger [Prussian marksman] during the September offensive in 1915 (9. [battalion] Ratzeburg).

My second son, Karl Mende, was born in 1893, he became an electrician, before that he was the senior fitter in a bigger energy company, he has been with the city services for 10 years (four and a half years at the energy works and over six years at the Municipal Savings Bank). On 5.08.1936 he passed his electrician's diploma with a good result (a master's diploma). On 27.03.37 he took the state examination for boiler maintenance. From 1927 he has been a caretaker for social services, deputy chief of the region from 01.01.34, a member of the NSDAP since March 1933, and district president from 01.01.37. He is sensible, dependable, and does not drink or smoke. My third child is the above-mentioned Charlotte Mende [who] attended the school of commerce and worked as an accountant. My fourth child is my daughter Gertrud Mende, born in 1907, who has worked in households since the age of 14, she is in good health physically and mentally.

On the basis of the family history presented here, it is surely impossible to confirm any hereditary illness, but rather overwork. All my children have been well brought up and lead honest lives. Therefore, once again I kindly ask that this last wish of a 71-year-old mother should be granted and lead to the quick discharge of my daughter Charlotte.

Heil Hitler!  
*Mrs Pauline Mende*  
Breslau 10  
Waterloostr. 22

We have always held nationalist views.

Copies of my daughter's references are attached.

After release from the institution, my daughter will submit to further treatment and declares that she will not bear children.

The story of the Mende family is the account of a struggle between relatives and doctors where at stake was the return of a sister and daughter. In the second half of 1937, Pauline Mende tried to extract her daughter from a closed institution. The woman had been detained against her will. It was not even a matter of sterilization.

At the time of lodging her appeal with the Wrocław province administration and the city health department, Pauline Mende was 71. She was the widow of a master cobbler and the mother of two boys and two girls. The city of Wrocław directory of 1935<sup>1</sup> gives the following information: Waterloostrasse 22 (today ul. Franklina D. Roosevelta). A sidenote adds that the apartment was “on a landing”.

Charlotte Mende was detained on 6 November 1937 at Krankenhaus Nord (City Hospital for the Mentally Ill at Einbaumstrasse 25, today ul. Józefa I. Kraszewskiego). Her mother claimed that the young woman had suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of overwork. Charlotte was born on 18 October 1901. At the time of her detention she was 36 years old. She had worked as an accountant, shop assistant and shorthand typist. She was involved in a number of nationalist socialist organizations: “she never took much time for meals”.<sup>2</sup> The woman’s nightmare began with the dentist, Dr A. Regulski. She had ordered a set of upper dentures from him, which cost around 540 RM. The dentist claimed that at a certain point, the woman began to pursue him: “If Dr [...] claims that my daughter visited him unnecessarily, it is very difficult to agree with him, since she does not encounter gentlemen particularly, either privately or professionally, and even less does she pursue them.”<sup>3</sup> It was a question merely of a bridge (twelve visits) and one filling.

The mother’s petition then lists the biographies of her other children. Pauline tried to demonstrate that her family was not in any way afflicted by hereditary disease. Her eldest son was 47. The youngest daughter was 30. Her first-born had died on the Western front during the First World War: “All my children have been well brought up and lead honest lives. Therefore, once again I kindly ask that this last wish of a [...] mother should be granted [...]”<sup>4</sup> Finally, her mother promises that Charlotte will never bear children, and also reaffirms her national socialist views.

---

1 *Breslauer Adreßbuch*, August Scherl Deutsche Adressbuch-Gesellschaft, Breslau 1935: <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/5337/edition/4904/content?ref=desc> [accessed 10 March 2019].

2 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8430, p. 43.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 45.



Carlowitz,	<b>Mende</b> , Hermann, Soz. Rentner, XXI Riflasweg 13 c	<b>Mende</b> , Otto, Schmied, I Löschstr. 28 II.
Str. 27 III.	— Hildegard, Bw., I Berderstr. 29 Erdg.	— Otto, Arb., I Schulgasse 8 a. III.
I Zobten-	— Hubert, Dr. phil., Studienrat, XIII Loth- ringer Str. 4 III.	— Paul, Arb., I Gellhornstr. 43.
, II Lehms-	— Ida, Schneiderin, X Bismarckstr. 35 III.	— Paul, Auto Schlosser, XXI Rehdigerstr. 81.
hstr. 76 I.	— Johanna, Behörd. Angest., II Raschob- straße 2 a I.	— Paul, Betr. Leit., XIII Viktoriastr. Nr. 107 Erdg. <b>T</b> 35231.
32 Erdg.	— Josef, Büro-Dien., I Nikolaistadtgraben Nr. 12 H. Untg.	— Paul, Bürodien., XVII Frankfurter Straße 112 I.
str. 53 Sh.	— Josef, Benstion., II Bohrauer Str. 12	— Paul, Kärner, II Gottschallstr. 28 IV.
er Str. 25.	— Joseph, Kleinrentn., XXI Rühlbergweg 40	— Paul, Kistenm., I Schweitzerstr. 22.
Neudorf=	— Julius, Fleischerstr., I Alsenstr. 8.	— Paul, Küster, I Fischergasse 12 c Erdg.
rei 32 II.	— Julius, Hausmstr., XVI Vogelweide 185.	— Paul, Poßschaffn., XXI Tannenbergr. 6.
rifdirekt.	— Julius, Sattlermstr., I Leuthestr. 33.	— Paul, Rbhn. Arb., II Hubenstr. 47.
Neudorf=	— Karl, Arbtr., I Brigittental 26 V.	— Pauline, Bw., V Siebenhufener Str. 73.
c. 80.	— Karl, Arbtr., Pelmstr. 50.52 H. II.	— Pauline, Bw., XXI Viktoriastr. 35.
33 IV.	— Karl, Arbtr., X Weinstr. 32 III.	— <b>Pauline, Bw., X Waterloostr. 22 Zwg.</b>
andstr. 8.	— Karl, Buchh., XIII Augustastr. 133.	— Pauline, geb. Zimpel, Zugführerw., X Rosenthaler Str. 26 II.
12 III.	— Karl, Def. Maler, I Alsenstr. 89.	— Richard, Arbtr., Klein Tschansch, Oppelner Str. 28.
str. 7 I.	— Karl, Elektr. Mont., II Gartenstr. 94 II.	— Richard, Arb., I Klosterstr. 77 H. II.
Sulstr. 19	— Karl, Güterhobarb., Pöpelwitzstr. 33 IV.	— Richard, Bürovorst., X Kreuzburger Straße 29.
steher, X	— Karl, Hilfsaufseh., I Kl. Grobchengasse Nr. 17.18 I.	— Richard, Schlosser, Kl. Tschansch, Oppelner Str. 28.
pischstr. 8.	— Karl, Hilfschaffner, XXI Gräbischener Straße 162.	— Richard, Verfich. Insp., XVII Klodniß- straße 51 II.
, Schöm-	— Karl, Lebensmhdlg., X Kreuzburger Straße 25. <b>T</b> 43463	— Robert, Hausbes., XIII Sedanstr. 22. <b>E</b>
tliebstr..	— Karl, Reichsb. Benf., XXI Dpitzstr. 46.	— Robert, Rbhn. Insp. i. R. XIII Neu- dorfstr. 102
graben 12.	— Karl, Rohrleg., XXI Augustastr. 12 H. II.	— Robert, Schneider, X Matthiasstr. 59 H.
I.	— Karl, Werkmstr., XXIII Kantstr. 8 IV.	— Rudolf, Glaser, I Weintraubengasse 6.
eiderw.,	— Karoline, Bw., I Brodauer Str. 6.	— Selma, Bw., I Klosterstr. 80
henberger	— Karoline, geb. Tschierske, Bw., I Fried- rich-Karl-Str. 52 II.	— Sophie, Bw., XVI Bischofswalde, Sterntalerweg 26
	— Katharina, Kontoristin, II Bohrauer Straße 19	— Walter, Arb., I Tschajenstr. 20 Sh.
	— Klara, Schneiderin, X Rospothstr. 38.	

City of Wrocław directory, 1935

Charlotte's mother adds a list of testimonials to her letter from her daughter's employers from 1924. Grundman: "I hereby declare that Miss Charlotte Mende was employed as an office worker from 7 April to 31 July in the cafe 'Zur goldenen Krone' and from 1 August to 31 October in the cafe 'Vaterland'. Miss Mende always carried out the tasks assigned her punctually and meticulously, I can therefore supply her with only the very best of references."<sup>5</sup>

There were a dozen or so similar references, not only from former employers, but also from the NSDAP and Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt – National Socialist People's Welfare. All write that

5 Ibid., p. 48.



Wrocław, 1920s–30s. Cafe “Vaterland”  
on the corner of ul. Świdnicka and Podwale

Charlotte was trustworthy, responsible and very hardworking: “I was immensely pleased with her work; her honesty, integrity, reliability and loyalty to the firm deserve to be particularly noted. I wish Miss Mende all the best for the future.”<sup>6</sup>

The doctor in charge of the City Hospital for the Mentally Ill at Einbaumstrasse 25 in Wrocław was of a completely different opinion. On 10 November, that is four days after Charlotte had been admitted to the psychiatric ward, according to Dr Georg Kasperek,<sup>7</sup> citing Dr Anders who had referred Charlotte to the hospital: “Miss M. suffers from paranoia and persecution complex, she feels herself observed and hypnotized. On the other hand, she demonstrates emotions of a sexual-erotic nature which emerge in relation to the dentist treating her who lately has been barely able to keep her away. [...] In October, Miss M. sought treatment from Dr Stannek who was supposed to send her to the dentist to ask if he wished to marry her. The dentist referred the patient to Dr Anders.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> *Die Anstalten für Geistesranke, Nervenranke, Schwachsinnige, Epileptische, Trunksüchtige usw. in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz einschließlich der psychiatrischen und neurologischen wissenschaftlichen Institute*, ed. H. Laehr and G. Ilberg (Berlin, 1937, 2015), pp. 19–20.

<sup>8</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8430, p. 51.





Photo: Polska-org.pl

Wrocław, ul. Oławska, 1930. Cafe "Zur goldenen Krone", interior

Dr Kasperek suspected schizophrenia. He reported Charlotte to the police as he considered her a danger to others. Meanwhile the woman – in accordance with the diagnosis – fell under the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases. She could be detained and sterilized. The family hired a lawyer who took up her defence. Nearly three weeks later, the health department addressed the statements from both sides: "In the case of Mende Charlotte, currently in the Nord Hospital, in accordance with the information provided by the director of the Nord Hospital, in my humble opinion there are at present no grounds of a medical nature to prevent the discharge of M. Ch., suffering from schizophrenia. I have therefore given my permission for discharge [from hospital] on condition that M. Ch. signs an agreement that she will terminate any future pregnancy."<sup>9</sup>

The woman was released probably thanks only to the determined intervention of her family and her own unimpeachable reputation. Her subsequent fate is unknown. According to the entry in the city of Wrocław directory of 1943, her mother Pauline was still living at Waterloostrasse.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Breslauer Adreßbuch*, August Scherl Deutsche Adressbuch-Gesellschaft, Breslau 1943: <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/98198/edition/92530/content?&ref=desc> [accessed 10 March 2019].

# Itzhaus Franz Maase Nachf., Ruf 298 20

# Menzel

ann. Rentner, XXVI Hundsb.  
41.  
Sattler, Neufl., Weichsel-  
Schmied, X Weinstr. 37.  
eiderin, I Clausenwischstr. 25 IV.  
hgaltrin., X Lehndamm 5.  
drin., X Bismarckstr. 35.  
ngefl., II Nachodstr. 2 a I.  
Flugzeugmont., I Brodauer  
IV.  
Dien., I Nikolaistadtgraben  
Intg.  
stellenleit., XVII Promniß-  
ntner, I Schuhbrücke 28. 29  
r., I Brigittental 26 V.  
r., II Lehmgrabenstr. 7.  
r., XVII Bopelwischstr. 33 IV.  
XXIX Trachenberger Str. 91.  
Insp., XXIII Zobtenstr. 25.  
h., XIII Augustastr. 133.  
senleg., Goldsch., Schöm-  
10.  
terhodarb., XXI Gräbshener  
2.  
ort., X Weinstr. 32 III.  
ion., I Grofshengasse 17. 18.  
ter, XXI Augustastr. 12 H. II.  
ner, XXI Opitzstr. 46.  
nstr., I Königgräber Str. 8 I.  
csmstr., XXI Kronstädter  
III.  
Frau, I Brodauer Str. 6.  
Stenotypistin, II Bohrauer  
u., I Klosterstr. 138.  
neiderin, X Kospotjstr. 38  
erkmstr., XXI Englerstr. 19.  
t., XXI Kronstädter Str. 47.  
dient, X Delsnerstr. 21 III.  
twachtmstr. d. S. P., XXIII  
Str. 187 a I.  
ftwführ., XVIII Carmer-  
Erdg. T. 833 89.

**Wende, Paul**, Kärner, II Gottschalkstr.  
Nr. 28 IV.  
— Paul, Kraftwführ., I Einundfünfziger-  
straße 44. I.  
— Paul, Küster, I Fischergasse 12c Erdg.  
T. 271 16.  
— Paul, Schlosser, XXI Rehdigerstr. 8 I.  
— Paul, Stellmach., II Hubenstr. 47.  
— Paul, VerschAgent., V Friedrichstr. 27.  
— Paul, fr. Werkzeugdreher, II Hubenstr. 49.  
— Pauline, Bw., V Siebenhufener Str. 73.  
— **Pauline, Bw., X Waterloostr. 22 Zwg.**  
— Richard, Arbtr., I Malergasse 2.  
— Richard, Arbtr., MOHlew., Doppelner  
Straße 28.  
— Richard, Beamt., X Kreuzburger Str. 29  
— Richard, Kraftwführ., XVIII Straße  
der NS. 181. 183.  
— Richard, Schlosser, MOHlew., Doppelner  
Straße 30.  
— Richard, Versch. Insp., XVII Mod-  
nißstr. 51 II.  
— Robert, Abhn. Insp. i. R., XIII Neu-  
dorferstr. 102.  
— Robert, Zwischenmstr., I An den Ka-  
sernen 5 I.  
— Rudolf, MaschSchloss., X Matthiasstr.  
Nr. 126 IV.  
— Rudolf, Landwart, I Fiedlerstr. 4 H.  
— Sophie, Bw., XVI Zwergeweg 10.  
— Theodor, Buchhaltgskleit., XIII Sa-  
dowastr. 64 III.  
— Walter, Maurer, GrMaßwi., Böll-  
linger Str. 45.  
— Walter, Monteur, XXIII Hubenstr. 54.  
— Walter, Schneider, Neufl., Weichselstr.  
Nr. 17.  
— Werner, ObWachtmstr. d. S. P., I Karuth-  
straße 17.  
— Wilhelm, Gärtnerei, Lilienthal, Lilien-  
thaler Str. 25.  
— Wilhelm, Packer, II Ernststr. 10 H. I.  
— Wilhelm, Werkmstr., V Reichstr. 12 II.  
— Willi, Arb., Goldschmieden, Erd-  
mannsdorfer Str. 30.

**Menge, Paul**, Schlossermf  
Straße 30.  
— Waldemar, Angefl., II 2  
— Walter, Kalkulator, 2  
bergstr. 5.  
— Walter, Zwischenmstr.  
straße 8.  
**Mengel, Ernst**, Bfm., XVI  
— Günter, Werbeleit.,  
weg 27.  
— **Oscar Mengel, Kl**  
XIII Brandenburger Str.  
**Menger, Erwin**, Arbtr.,  
— Gertrud, Abtrin., I Ar  
— Max, Rentner, I Slog  
— Reinhold, Schlosser,  
Straße 22.  
**Ment, Emil**, Kulturbau  
Nr. 3. T. 460 38.  
**Mente, Rudolf**, Privatit  
**Menn**  
— \*Erich Menn, Leberg  
Straße der SA. 32. T.  
Gutenbergstr. 28.  
**Mennchen** f. a. Män  
u. Mädchen.  
— Alfred, Dreher, XXI  
— Richard, Kernmach., XX  
**Mennetzinski, Erwin**,  
XXVI An der Kloster  
— Maria, Bw., XXVI  
mauer 1.  
**Menner, Richard**, Rechn  
Nr. 43.  
**Mennicke**  

**\*C. Mennicke**  
G. m. b.  
Ingenieur-Büro, Tie  
leitgsanlg. Taunentzie

  
— Karl, Abhn. Assjt., X  
**Mennig** f. a. Männig.  
— Luise, Bw., X Schie  
**Mennigte, Alfons**, Bafl

City of Wrocław directory, 1943

During the Second World War, the Krankenhaus Nord Hospital where Charlotte was detained was one of the extermination centres for the children's euthanasia programme. Similar centres were to be found in Loben (Lubliniec) in Upper Silesia: "A medical report advising round-the-clock supervision in actual fact constituted a death sentence. From the records available, it emerges that children transferred to the permanent care ward died not much later. [...] The causes of



Photo: Michał Zygmunt

Wrocław, Adrian Demianowski Psychiatric Hospital,  
before the war: Krankenhaus Nord

death reported indicate that the children – like the patients in other institutions – were given luminal in doses exceeding the norm by many times, which impaired heart function and caused complications in the case of respiratory conditions.”<sup>11</sup> In the Loben hospital, 297 children were murdered in the course of similar “treatment”.<sup>12</sup>

---

11 Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, pp. 287, 289.

12 Uzarczyk, “‘Der Kinderfachabteilung vorzuschlagen’: The selection and elimination of children at the Youth Psychiatric Clinic Loben (1941–1945)”, in: *From Clinic to Concentration Camp: Reassessing Nazi Medical and Racial Research, 1933–1945*, ed. P. Weindling (London – New York, 2017), pp. 183–206.





---

**Frieda Gurtner  
Else Pyrek  
Paul Potopantke**

---

**1938**





# Der Oberbürgermeister der Hauptstadt Breslau

Dienststelle: Gesundheitsamt  
Königsstr. 4

Breslau  
29. JAN 1938 Vm.

M<sup>2</sup>

Anruf: Sammelnummer 22601

Lebensstelle: 2775

G.A.Erb I/20660/37

An den

Herrn Regierungspräsidenten,

Breslau.

Postfach 2700 Stadt. Bank Breslau  
Kontokonto Reichsbank Hauptstelle Breslau

Schriftwechsel ist nur mit der oben genannten  
fachbearbeitenden Dienststelle zu führen.

Eingangsvormerk:

Ihr Zeichen

Ihre Nachricht vom

Mein Zeichen

Tag

G.A.Erb I/20660/37

25. Jan. 1938.

Betrifft

Die Schweizer Staatsangehörige Frieda G u r t n e r,  
geb. 3.11.1907 in Schwiebedawe Kreis Militsch, wohnhaft  
Auenstrasse 12 bei Gattert, Hausangestellte, leidet an  
erblicher Blindheit (Schichtstar). Ich beabsichtige,  
Antrag auf Unfruchtbarmachung beim hiesigen Erbgesund-  
heitsgericht zu stellen und bitte um Einverständniser-  
klärung.

I. A.

Med. Rat Dr. hab. R. M. Mayer,  
stellv. Amtsarzt.

207/6

Letter of medical officer R.M. Mayer to the president of the Wrocław province



**The Mayor, Capital City of Wrocław**

**Department:** Department of Health

Königstr. 4

**Telephone:** switchboard 22601

**Division:** 2775

**Postal checking account 2700**

**Wrocław Municipal Bank**

**Savings Account**

**Head Office Wrocław Reich Bank**

**Correspondence to be conducted  
only via the above  
department dealing with the case**

To  
The president  
of the Wrocław  
province  
in Wrocław.

**Receipt endorsement:**

---

<b>Applicant's ref.</b>	<b>Applicant's correspondence from</b>	<b>My reference</b>	<b>Date</b>
		G.A.Erb I/20660/37	25 January 1938

### **Concerning**

Swiss citizen Frieda Gurtner, b. 03.11.1907 in Schwiebedawe, district of Militsch, currently of Auenstrasse 12, as the Gattert family's home help, suffers from congenital blindness (lamellar cataracts). I intend to submit an application to the local Hereditary Health Court requesting permission for sterilization.

auth. of  
*R. M. Mayer*  
Medical adviser Dr. Hab. R.M. Mayer  
Deputy government physician





# Der Oberbürgermeister der Hauptstadt Breslau

G.A.Erb.I 20660

Breslau  
22 JUN 1940 Vm.

An den  
Herrn Regierungspräsidenten

Breslau, J. 24.6.40  
J. F. A.  
Pa.

**Gesundheitsamt**  
Königsstraße 4

Bankkonto:  
Städtische Bank zu Breslau  
Konto G 4200

hier

Ihre Zeichen:	Ihre Nachsicht:	Mein Zeichen:	Tag:
M. (d) 7 B 4		G.A.Erb.I 20660	19.6.40
			Telefon: 22601, Nebenstelle: 2944

In der Erbgesundheitsache Frieda Gurtner ist das Verfahren fortgesetzt worden. Das Erbgesundheitsobergericht hat in der Sitzung vom 22.5.40 den Antrag abgelehnt.

(17 Wg. 235/38). Die Probandin hat inzwischen durch 53 XIII 143/38 Eheschliessung mit dem Wehrmattsangehörigen Artur Preuß die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit erlangt.

Im Auftrage  
*Nachtrab*  
Med. Rat. Dr- Nachtrab.  
Amtsarzt i.V.

Schriftwechsel ist nur mit der sachbearbeitenden Dienststelle zu führen.

Letter of medical officer Nachtrab to the president of the Wrocław province





The Mayor, Capital City of Wrocław  
Department of Health

Königstraße 4  
Bank account:  
Wrocław Municipal Bank  
Account G 4200

G.A. Erb. I 20660  
To  
The president of Wrocław province  
in situ.

---

<b>Applicant's ref:</b>	<b>Applicant's:</b>	<b>My ref:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
7. B. 4	<b>correspondence</b>	G.A.Erb I 20660	19.06.1940

**Telephone: 22601, Division: 2944**

Concerning the prevention of hereditary affliction with regard to Frieda Gurtner, proceedings were continued. The session of 22.05.40 of the Higher Hereditary Health Court rejected the application. (17 Wg. 235/38 // 53 XIII 143/38). In the meantime, the individual examined gained German citizenship through marriage to Artur Preuß, a soldier of the Wehrmacht.

On the authority of  
/-/  
Medical officer Dr Nachtrab.  
On behalf of the govt physician



The Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases applied to German citizens. Foreigners in Lower Silesia were subject to a new law enacted just under a year later. On 9 May 1934, “Wilhelm Frick [Reich Minister of Interior] informed the authorities of particular provinces that – in accordance with the legal principle of territoriality – the law [...] applied also to foreigners with permanent residence within Reich territory. The letter stressed that such individuals could in any case avoid sterilization by promptly leaving the territory of the country.”<sup>1</sup> The penalty for defying the law was to be the withdrawal of the right of residency, followed by deportation from the Reich. In the case of foreigners, the Minister for Foreign Affairs was also involved.

It is clear from the records preserved that only two people left the territory of the Reich in order to avoid forced sterilization. The list of foreigners who voluntarily submitted to the procedure in 1934–38 in the Wrocław province<sup>2</sup> contains 58 names: 35 came from Czechoslovakia, seven from Poland, seven people declared themselves stateless, five were from Switzerland, two from the Free City of Gdańsk, one woman had American citizenship, and one woman was from Russia. Two people on the list were blind and were sterilized for that reason.

/

Frieda Gurtner was a Swiss citizen. She was born on 3 November 1907 in the town of Schwiebedawe (Świebodów), in the district of Militsch (Milicz). The first document concerning her case is dated 25 January 1938.<sup>3</sup> Frieda probably lived in Wrocław on Auenstrasse 12 (now ul. Bujwida Odon) with the Gattert family,<sup>4</sup> where she was the domestic help. She was classified as suffering from congenital blindness, or, more precisely, lamellar cataracts – her vision was partially impaired.

The proposal to sterilize Frieda was submitted by medical adviser Dr R. M. Mayer who recommended the procedure in accordance with the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases in January 1938. Three months later, the lower Hereditary Health Court in Wrocław accepted Dr Mayer’s application.<sup>5</sup> The judgement was not yet legally binding.

---

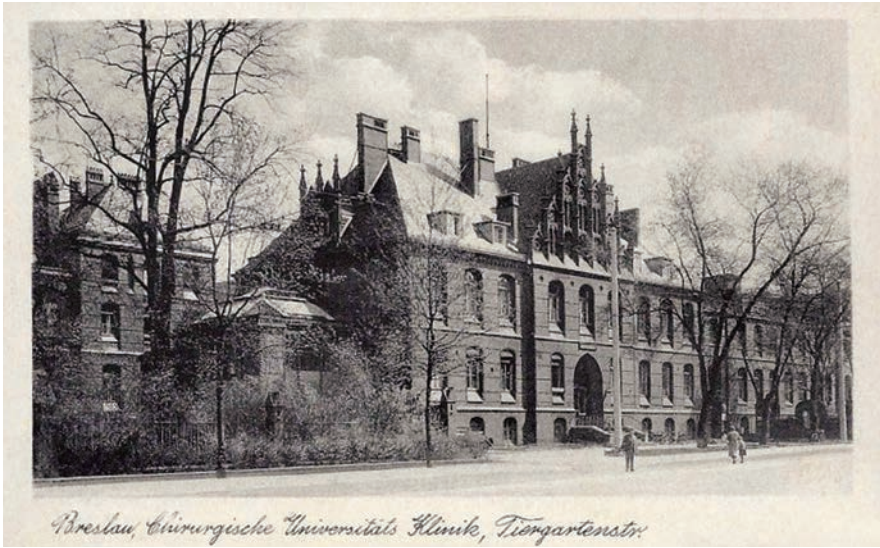
1 K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924-1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 271.

2 See *ibid.*, pp. 272-73.

3 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8431, p. 181.

4 Unfortunately, neither directory of addresses for the city of Wrocław (1935 and 1943) lists details for the Gattert family.

5 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8431, p. 184.



University Ophthalmology Clinic in Wrocław

Frieda Gurtner undoubtedly appealed against the court's judgement and the case automatically went to the higher court. The proceedings continued for many months from autumn 1938. In January 1939, a decision had not yet been reached.<sup>6</sup> Four months later, the case was still ongoing.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, no copy has survived of the woman's appeal, which would certainly have insisted that her case be re-examined, therefore we do not know the circumstances of its dismissal. No doubt, Frieda was to be re-examined at the University Ophthalmological Clinic in Wrocław.<sup>8</sup> The examination did not take place – the reasons are unknown. The case dragged on so long that the court requested that the clinic carry out the procedure as quickly as possible.

The final letter from the health department of 19 June 1940 – two and half years after the case began – reported that the sterilization application had been rejected. Frieda Gurtner had won. In the course of the proceedings, she had become a German citizen and had married a soldier of the Wehrmacht, Artur Preuss. This marriage had saved her from forced sterilization. Five years earlier, in the Wrocław province, 22 individuals had been recommended for sterilization on grounds of congenital blindness.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> S. Kasperek, "Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934-1944", *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 51.

/

Diabetes, and the “badly deformed bodies”<sup>10</sup> to which it gave rise, was another reason for sterilization, in the case of foreigners as well as citizens of the Reich. On 25 May 1936, the local health department in Reichenbach (Dzierżoniów) requested that the authorities in Wrocław approve a sterilization application in the case of a Pole (i.e. a foreigner).

Else Pyrek was born on 27 May 1922. She was the illegitimate child of Józefa Pyrek of the village Endersdorf (Jędrzejowice). In 1943, there were 130 people living in the village.<sup>11</sup> Józefa’s name appears on the list of inhabitants.

We do not know what happened to the girl. Her story is limited to a single document – the recommendation for sterilization when she was fourteen. We also know that Else’s half-brother, Józef, had been sterilized earlier for reasons of congenital mental deficiency.

/

In the Wrocław province, most recommendations were submitted by official doctors.<sup>12</sup> At the beginning of October 1936, another local doctor applied to the authorities in Wrocław requesting approval for a new recommendation.<sup>13</sup> This time, it concerned the child of a Russian prisoner of war who had remained in Germany after the First World War. Diemarfe Potopantke had married a German woman, Anna Bochnig.<sup>14</sup> He had never been granted German citizenship. On 15 December 1923, the couple had a son, Paul. The family probably lived in the village of Karowahne, later Karben (Karwiany), not far from Wrocław.

According to the local doctor, the thirteen-year-old boy suffered from congenital mental deficiency. On 22 January 1937, the sterilization court in Wrocław decided that the procedure should go ahead. In February, the judgement was not yet binding.<sup>15</sup> Three months later, it transpired that both Paul and his father, Diemarfe, were stateless. A carer was therefore sought via the local health services who could

---

10 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8440, p. 268.

11 Kreis Reichenbach, Eulengebirge, Schlesien, <https://www.kreis-reichenbach.de/endersdorf/> [accessed 2 June 2019].

12 Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 246.

13 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8441, p. 73.

14 Anna Bochnig’s date of birth was probably 28 January 1891 in Wrocław. Her mother’s name was Pauline (nee Staesch). APWr, Księga urodzeń Wrocław III 1892 t. 01 (Geburts-Neben-Register), <http://www.archeion.net/atom/index.php/bochnig-anna> [accessed 13 June 2019].

15 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8441, p. 76.



supply a declaration agreeing to the procedure and explain the process. There is no mention of the boy's mother. It is possible that she was not raising Paul. During the first visit, the health care worker did not find Diemarfe at home. The author of the letter – a Wrocław doctor – reported that the visit would be rescheduled.<sup>16</sup>

Towards the end of June 1937, this same doctor reported that Paul Potopantke had been sterilized at the beginning of the month at the University Surgical Clinic in Wrocław.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, the operation was without complications. The scars healed within seven days. The patient was discharged on 8 June.

Paul was one of the stateless persons on the list of foreigners mentioned above who “agreed” to the procedure. Their decision was meant to be voluntary. That same year, 317 men were sterilized at the university clinic.<sup>18</sup>

/

Only in Upper Silesia was there any resistance to the law. The objectors were Poles and Jews.<sup>19</sup> The Polish minority protested against the law's implementation, citing the Geneva Convention: “In the complaints directed to the President of the province and German Minorities Office in Opole with regard to the ruling to sterilize members of the Polish minority, it was claimed that ‘since the surgical procedure intended to sterilize the individual undoubtedly causes severe harm to the body, with the result of depriving a particular individual of one of the chief aims of life, that is, the preservation of the species, therefore the implementation of such a procedure with regard to members of the Polish minority constitutes in every case a violation of the above provisions’ [art. 66, p. 1 and art. 73 Geneva Convention – J.O.]”.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the protests, the sterilization of Polish citizens in Upper Silesia was suspended until 1937. After that date, however, there were no further restrictions.

---

16 Ibid., p. 78.

17 Ibid., p. 80.

18 Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje”, p. 54.

19 Kamila Uzarczyk notes that only the Union of Jewish Religious Communities for Upper Silesia (Verband der Synagogen-Gemeinden der Provinz Oberschlesien) protested on religious grounds, among other things. K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 281, n. 148.

20 Ibid., p. 274.





---

**Max  
Leuschner**

---

**1938**



14 APR 1938 Vm

Reichs- und Preussisches  
Ministerium des Innern  
14. APR. 1938 Nm.

Prieslau, d. 4. 38.

IVb/1666/38

Wrosl. Herrn Minister der Innern, 1079 Nr. 1

Auf den mit vom 6. 4. 38 zu gesandten  
Beschlusse vom Oberverwaltungsamt Prieslau  
lege ich hierdurch Einspruch ein!

Bitte Herrn Minister der Innern die  
Sache einer Prüfung vor zu nehmen,  
da eine Erbkrankheit wie in meinem  
Fall vorliegen kann  
sprünge!

Habe 4 gesunde Kinder wovon sich  
schon ein Sohn in der Lehre befindet,  
mirt ich schon seit 1928 meine Arbeit  
im Hochbau nachgehe ein Mensch  
der so krank ist als das. Urteil  
bewitet kann nicht arbeiten der müf-  
vom Staate ernütet werden, da dieser  
nicht der Fall ist bitte ich höflich endlich  
die Sache mal genau prüfen zu wollen.  
wegen der Militärzeit schrieb mir kürz  
du ich schon früher beim Grenzschutz war  
mirt ich mich nie krank fühle, mirt  
ein Träger der Staates bin kann ich  
niemals mit so ein Urteil zufrieden  
sein. Wie dchten befinden sich im Erbgesund

Heil Hitler

Max Leuschner Prieslau, Rejencja  
II 2171/38 Stadt Prieslau





Re: 856/37  
XIII 637/37 Wrocław

Wrocław, 12.04.1938

---

To the Minister of the Interior!

I hereby lodge an appeal with respect to the resolution sent to me by the Higher Hereditary Health Court in Wrocław on 06.04.38!

I ask that you, the Minister of the Interior, should enquire into this matter! Since in my case there can be no question of hereditary disease!

Substantiation!

I have 4 healthy children, of which one son is already an apprentice and I have been working in construction since 1928. A person who is as ill as the ruling claims cannot work and must be supported by the state, but as this is not so in my case, would you be so kind as to look into this matter carefully, even the military doctor stated in writing that I am fit for military service, as I have already been a Border Guard and was never ill and I also support the state - I will never be satisfied with such a ruling. The records are to be found in the Higher Hereditary Health Court.

Heil Hitler

Max Leuschner Wrocław [...]

II b 2171/38 conurbation



In 1938, 27.3 per cent of cases considered by the Wrocław higher Hereditary Health Court involved patients with schizophrenia.<sup>1</sup> Max Leuschner was one of these. It is difficult to say on what basis the diagnosis of schizophrenia was made. There is no medical report or court ruling among the surviving documents. The court's decisions were influenced by statistical data and the frequency with which a specific disease manifested within individual families. One could appeal against the ruling of the higher court by undermining the thesis of inherited disease. In most cases, this type of appeal was ignored. The judges decided the fate of "patients" according to their own discretion.<sup>2</sup>

Max Leuschner's letter to the Nazi authorities was sent on 13 April 1938. It consisted of a two-paragraph appeal against the health department and the higher sterilization court in Wrocław. The sender of the appeal was fully aware that this was a final form of resistance in the face of sterilization. He addressed the letter to the Reich Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick.<sup>3</sup> His case was reviewed very quickly. The reply from Berlin came on 2 June 1938. The whole process took fifty days.

We do not know Max Leuschner's age. He lived in Wrocław, in the Rosenthal (Różanka) district which had been absorbed into the city towards the end of the 1920s. We do not know the name of his street, or the number of his house. Max wrote that he worked as a builder. He says he was first employed in 1928. He does not mention a wife, but he had four children. All were healthy. Most likely, he was trying to prove that he did not constitute a threat to society. As an upstanding citizen of the Reich, he cared for his offspring.

Max Leuschner chose a straightforward and logical line of defence: he supported the state which wished to harm him. He rebelled against a "questionable decision": "A person who is as ill as the ruling claims cannot work and must be supported by the state, but as this is not so in my case, would you be so kind as to look into this matter carefully."<sup>4</sup>

Over two weeks later, the health department at Königstrasse 4 (now ul. Leszczyńskiego 4) forwarded the letter to the Wrocław province which was to clarify the matter. The reply was laconic, but specific: "there can be no doubt that he [Max Leuschner] suffers from schizophrenia, or suffered from this disease in 1928/1929. [...] The fact that Leuschner is now working normally – so far – and has healthy children

---

1 K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924-1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 252.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

3 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8429, pp. 135–36.

4 *Ibid.*



Saal- und Gartenrestaurant zur Gröschelbrücke



Siedlung Rosental

Gruß aus Breslau, Siedlung Rosental



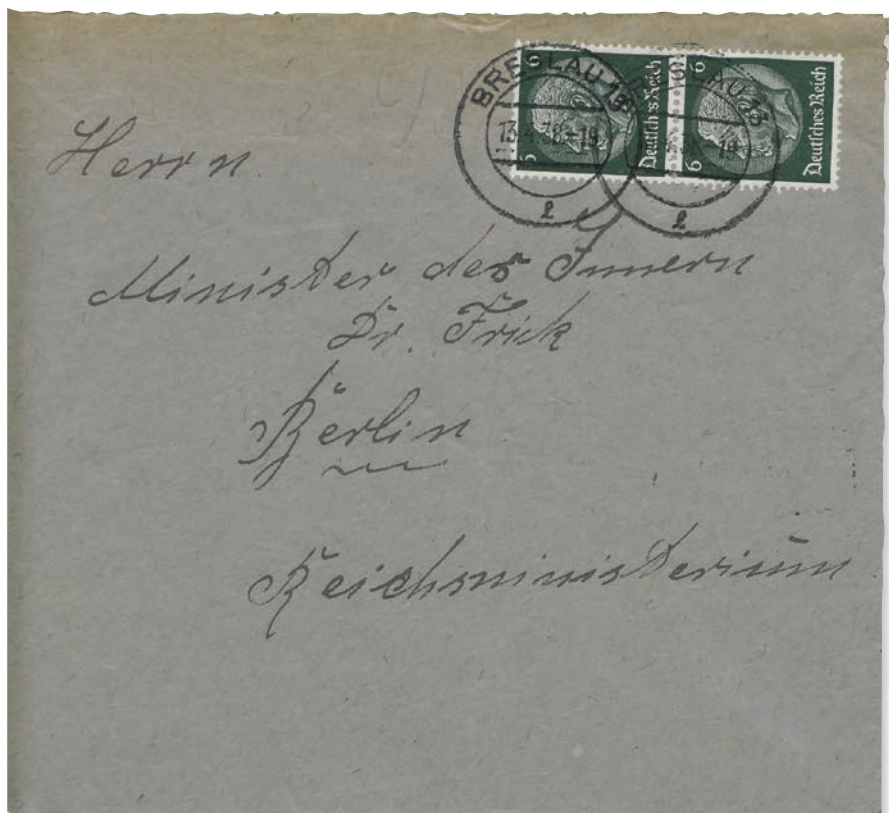
Siedlung Rosental

Wrocław, Różanka district, where Max Leuschner used to live in the 1930s

does not in any way rule out schizophrenia.”<sup>5</sup> It was stated furthermore that Max’s case had been deferred until Whitsuntide, that is until 5 June.<sup>6</sup> A decision was awaited from Berlin. The reply came on 23 May. Dr Herbert Linden replied on behalf of Minister Frick: “Max Leuschner undoubtedly suffers from schizophrenia, therefore the sterilization ruling is correct and must be carried out. Please [...] inform the patient with hereditary disease on my behalf that the letter of 12 April 1938 has

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 142.



In this envelope, Max Leuschner sent his letter to the Reich Minister of the Interior

been turned down. The procedure should go forward.”<sup>7</sup> Max Leuschner was to undergo sterilization immediately.

The Wrocław authorities replied at the beginning of June. Their response is an excellent example of an attempt to persuade a patient, or a putative patient, that sterilization is neither bad nor dangerous. Quite the opposite: “The decision to sterilize [...] has been correctly issued and must be carried out. It is in your own interests to abide voluntarily by further directives from the City Health Office in Wrocław in order not to incur the use of force. Sterilization is not in any way a punishment or a disgrace, but a necessary measure taken in the interests of the nation’s health.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 144.





Photo: Polska-org.pl

Wrocław, Augusta Hospital, 1930s

/

It is not known what happened to Max Leuschner. In all likelihood, he was sterilized in one of the five Wrocław hospitals which carried out such surgery on men: The University Surgical Clinic, All Saints Municipal Hospital, the Wenzel-Hancke Municipal Hospital, Herrnprotsch Municipal Asylum and the Augusta Hospital.<sup>9</sup> A doctor performing

---

<sup>9</sup> S. Kasperek, "Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934-1944", *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 54; Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 260.



sterilizations would receive 50 RM for a woman and 25 RM for operating on a man.

Not quite six months later, Dr Herbert Linden became involved in Aktion T4 – a euthanasia programme, but in actual fact an extermination programme of patients in psychiatric hospitals and also those suffering from schizophrenia. Dr Linden was head of the Euthanasia Committee: “until the end of the war, he impeccably and discreetly oversaw cooperation between the state health department and the hidden activities of the Chancellery of the Führer and new special organizations. Section IV 3a in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, which he headed within the Reich Ministry of the Interior, was concerned with ‘population policies (fundamental questions), criminal biology, solicitude for hereditary and racial purity, the psychiatric hospital system’”.<sup>10</sup>

On 19 November 1940, around 150 people were taken from a Catholic care home in Ursberg. One of the religious sisters described that day: “Johann Hass said ‘I don’t like this!’ Jakob Speiser tries to calm down: ‘I’m not stupid, I’m handy with everything, I can clean, do housework, so I’ll be fine anywhere!’ Despite this consolation, he cries bitterly when saying goodbye in the admissions office. The day before departure, Dominikus Harnauer, hands raised, begs Mother Superior on the stairs: ‘Mother, for the love of God, please let me stay here! I can’t leave! Please let me die here!’ [...] When the patients had numbers written between their shoulder-blades – as ordered when the transfer was announced [...] – Anton Kramer said: ‘Yes, now we have been marked for slaughter!’”<sup>11</sup>

Johann, Jakob, Dominikus, and Anton were gassed at the Hartheim centre<sup>12</sup> in Upper Austria, 4 June 1941. What happened to Max? We do not know.

---

**10** G. Aly, *Die Belasteten. „Euthanasie“ 1933–1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt a. Main, 2013), p. 44.

**11** *Ibid.*, pp. 87–88.

**12** Hartheim was one of six extermination centres which were part of *Aktion T4* (the adult “euthanasia” programme) which began in the second half of 1939. The first to be murdered were patients in psychiatric hospitals who were incapable of working or who had been institutionalized for longer than five years. In each of the centres, the ill were gassed using carbon monoxide. According to estimates, over 30 thousand people were murdered in Hartheim in the years 1940–44. T. Nasierowski, *Zagłada osób z zaburzeniami psychicznymi w okupowanej Polsce. Początek ludobójstwa*, (Warsaw, 2008), pp. 54–59.



---

**Erika  
Regel**

---

**1939**



RK. 760. 274/34 \* 5. MRZ 1939

Breslau den 4. März 1939.

V  
Mein Führer!

Kein Verzeß gefällig

Im größter Sorge um die Gesundheit meiner 26 jährigen Tochter Erika Regel bitte ich Sie, mein Führer, inständig um Hilfe. Vor 2 Jahren wurde meine Tochter wegen leichten Schwachsinnns sterilisiert und klagt seit dieser Zeit bis heute noch über heftige Unterleibschmerzen und grobe Regelstörungen. Gesundheitsamt und Öffentliche Fürsorge der Stadt Breslau lehnen jedoch trotz wiederholter Anträge und Bitten meinerseits jede ärztliche Behandlung ab. Ich selbst bin Wohlfahrtsrentnerin mit monatlich 34-M Rente. Von diesem Geld kann ich unmöglich noch Arzt und Medikamente bezahlen.

Martha Halm  
13/3

:/:

Mein Führer, ich bitte Sie nun recht  
höflichst, bei einem der Breslauer Ämter  
dahin zu wirken, daß meiner Tochter kostenlose  
ärztliche Hilfe zuteil wird.

Ich danke meinem Führer  
im voraus recht herzlich!

Mit Deutschem Gruß

Martha Grolm.

Breslau,

Weißgerbergasse 5.

Breslau,  
4 March 1939

---

*Mein Führer,*

In great anxiety for the health of my 26-year-old daughter, Erika Regel, I beg you for help, *mein Führer*. Two years ago, as a result of a minor mental disorder, my daughter was subjected to sterilization, and from that time she has complained of acute abdominal pain and severe menstrual problems. Despite my repeated petitions and requests, however, the Department of Health and Social Welfare of the city of Wrocław refuses to consider granting her any kind of medical help. I myself receive a pension from social welfare of 34 RM a month. I am not in a position to pay for a doctor or for medicine on this amount of money.

I beg you most sincerely, *mein Führer*, to exert influence on one of the departments in Wrocław so that my daughter can receive free medical attention.

With sincerest thanks in advance, *mein Führer!*

With German greetings  
*Martha Halm*  
Breslau,  
Weißgerbergasse 5.







Wrocław, Zaulek Koci, 1930s

The city of Wrocław directory of 1935<sup>1</sup> lists the address of Martha Halm. There was a fifty-four-year-old woman – a servant by occupation – living at Kaetzelohe 40 (ul. Zaulek Koci).

On 12 June, she moved with her son and daughter to 5 Weissgerbergasse (now ul. Białoskórnicza). This is the address she gave for correspondence in March 1939, when writing to Adolf Hitler.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Breslauer Adreßbuch*, August Scherl Deutsche Adressbuch-Gesellschaft, Breslau 1935: <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/5337/edition/4904/content?ref=desc> [accessed 10 March 2019].



Photo: Joanna Ostrowska

Wrocław, Białoskórnicza 5. In this house Erika Regel lived with her mother and brother

Her daughter, Erika Regel, lived with her. Who was the young woman's father? We do not know. Martha went by the surname Halm, but she was a member of the Regel family. Her son Walter and Erika used their mother's maiden name. Walter was a year younger than Erika. The whole trio professed to be Catholic. It is difficult to ascertain anything more about this case. The private lives of both women remain a mystery.

On 4 March 1939, Martha certainly sent a letter to the Führer requesting special consideration. It was not, however, a question of suspending the sterilization ruling with regard to her beloved daughter, who had already undergone the procedure in 1937 on the basis of "a minor mental disorder". In accordance with the Law to Prevent Hereditary Sick Progeny, this was the first medical condition on the list qualifying for surgery. The sterilization would not have been carried out had the patient volunteered to be institutionalized for life.

For Martha, the most important thing was Erika's health, which demanded immediate medical assistance. Horrendous post-operative pains

had become part of daily life. Unfortunately, this family – recognised as “hereditarily burdened” – did not qualify for free medical services.

We learn from Martha’s letter that 26-year-old Erika had acute abdominal pain and severe menstrual problems. Medical and social care services refused Martha and Erika any help. A further argument in the appeal to the Führer was the family’s social status. In 1939, Martha was already on a pension. She received 34 RM monthly. She was not in a position to pay for her daughter’s treatment. It was a hopeless situation, particularly since Martha had been asking for help for fifteen months. She had written to various departments in Wrocław, and finally to the Reich Chancellery: “In questions of mental underdevelopment, a not insignificant role is played by economic arguments and the ability to earn an independent living, which suggests that in practice, social indicators also influenced a sterilization verdict, although there was nothing in the legislation to indicate this.”<sup>2</sup>

The Reich Ministry of the Interior responded to Martha Halm’s claim a couple of weeks later – on 21 March 1939. The president of the Wrocław province was asked to ascertain the reasons for the injury to the health of patient Erika Regel: “in order to establish if her health was damaged as a result of the sterilization. The medical findings should be attached to your statement.”<sup>3</sup>

Four days later, the Wrocław Health Office submitted the relevant report concerning the case of Erika Regel which was then forwarded to Berlin. Thanks to this document, we know that Erika was born on 2 December 1912 and lived with her mother at Weissgerbergasse 5. The sterilization procedure was carried out in April 1937 at All Saints Municipal Hospital in Wrocław. The girl remained at the hospital for eleven days following surgery. She was discharged on 29 April, since: “The scars, according to information from the doctor carrying out the surgery [...] were healing without complications.”<sup>4</sup>

A few months later – in mid-December 1937 – the patient’s mother began to complain about the state of her daughter’s health. At the beginning of January 1939, social welfare referred Erika for examination: “No change of condition was observed. Her [Erika’s] claims put forward in the course of further examination were completely implausible and accorded with already established imbecility (“her blood was taken”, “since then, she has been constantly agitated”, “she can no longer sit,

---

2 K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924-1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 251.

3 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8430, p. 307.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 310.



All Saints Municipal Hospital in Wrocław where Erika Regel was subjected to sterilization procedure

only stand or lie down”).<sup>5</sup> The rapporteur took serious account of the woman’s terror of any kind of medical examination. The trauma was the result of the surgery. The distressing “symptoms”, according to him, confirmed the diagnosis of mental deficiency.

Three months later, Erika was examined by Professor Geller, who had probably carried out the sterilization procedure. The doctor was employed by the Wrocław hospital in 1934–44 as a gynaecologist authorised, among other things, to perform sterilizations via irradiation. From the moment the law was in force until the end of December 1937, 248 men and 345 women – including Erika Regel – were sterilized at All Saints Municipal Hospital. The woman’s state was described by Professor Geller thus: “She and her mother have reported that from the time of the operation, Regel has been experiencing pain during her monthly period and, occasionally, between menstrual periods. The period itself is less heavy than previously. A gynaecological examination

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

revealed: *Hymen defloratus*, narrow vagina, relative small uterus, acutely anteverted, adnexa and parametrium unchanged. The condition of health is therefore found to be completely as normal after sterilization, with normal progress and recovery. There are no grounds to conclude that the pains experienced occasionally, and during menstruation, are the result of the operation undertaken for purposes of sterilization.”<sup>6</sup>

From the second half of 1934, cases began to emerge of badly carried-out operations which had ended in complications or in death. Stefan Kasperek draws attention to changes in the behaviour of doctors and health care institutions towards sterilization after the intensification of the programme in 1935–37: “Individuals reporting discomfort following surgery were to be evaluated by official doctors. For obvious reasons, these experts minimized the after-effects of surgery. Before July 1935 and after 1941, documentation in the case of fatalities was not required.”<sup>7</sup>

It was no wonder that Erika’s case was not treated seriously. As Kasperek maintains, from the beginning of 1938, one’s attitude to the Nazi authorities was also relevant when it came to suspending sterilization: “a considerable number of the petitions concerning sterilization questions from party members or Nazi activists directed to higher authorities or to Hitler on their own behalf or that of their families – usually dismissed till then – were [now] likely to be considered. This was of some significance in reassuring at least that section of society. It was also an opportunity to reward service to the Nazi cause.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, neither Martha Halm, nor Erika Regel were among that group of deserving citizens who could count on help. Martha concludes her letter: “With sincerest thanks in advance, *mein Führer!*” This addition did not influence the official decision in any way.

The report was sent to Berlin in mid-May 1939. Martha Halm received a reply on 12 June: “The assumption that your daughter, Erika Regel, suffered harm to her health as a result of the above-mentioned operation cannot be considered justified. [...] the operation was followed by complete recovery and there are no grounds for accepting your assumption that the pains [...] are a result of the operation [...]. Treatment for your daughter in accordance with the provisions of the law preventing hereditarily diseased offspring of 14 July 1933 is thereby also not justified.”<sup>9</sup>

---

6 Ibid., pp. 310–11.

7 S. Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934–1944”, *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 59.

8 Ibid.

9 APWr, Rejencja wroclawska, sygn. 8430, p. 316.





Photo: Neo [EZN], Fotopolska.eu

Wrocław, the building at Ołbińska 16

In the surviving records, Erika Regel is practically anonymous. We know nothing about her life. The most detailed information on this young woman is the account of her behaviour during medical examination in January 1939. Erika does not take the floor in these documents. According to an entry in the city of Wrocław directory of 1943, her mother, Martha Halm, a pensioner, lived at Elbing 16 (ul. Ołbińska).<sup>10</sup> The directory contains an entry confirming that Martha and Erika moved to this address on 18 July 1939.<sup>11</sup> We do not know what happened to the women after the war.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Breslauer Adreßbuch*, August Scherl Deutsche Adressbuch-Gesellschaft, Breslau 1943: <https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/98198/edition/92530/content?&ref=desc> [accessed 10 March 2019].

<sup>11</sup> APWr, Wrocław City Registry 1935–1939, Weissgerbergasse 5, sygn. 1091, p. 16.







---

**Hedwig  
Wenzel**

---

**1940**



Schönwalde, den 24.8.40.

Ferdinand T i e t z  
 Helfer in Steuersachen  
 S c h ö n w a l d e  
 Krs.Frankenstein

Laut Beschluss des Erbgesundheitsobergerichtes Breslau vom 13.2.40 --17.Wg.280/39  
 4.XIII.45/39 - soll meine Tochter Hedwig Wenzel geb.Tietz aus Kaiserswalde Krs. Habelschwerdt unfruchtbar gemacht werden.

Sie wurde am Freitag den 5.7.40. auf der Dorfstrasse in Kaiserswalde verhaftet und in ein Krankenhaus in Neurode gebracht, von wo sie am 6.7.40. morgens fortging und zu mir kam.

Ich bemerke hierzu, dass sich die antierenden Polizeiorgane um ihr 2 3/4 Jahre altes Kind überhaupt nicht kümmerten und weder Sorge trugen für dessen Unterbringung noch Verpflegung, wenn nicht eine gewisse Frau Schlagner das Kind aufgenommen hätte, würde es auf der Strasse ohne jede Verpflegung umher geirrt sein. Tags darauf kam zufällig meine Tochter Maria nach Kaiserswalde um meine Tochter Hedwig Wenzel geb. Tietz zu besuchen, wobei sie erfuhr, dass meine Tochter von der Strasse verhaftet und mit dem Kraftwagen nach Neurode in ein Krankenhaus gebracht worden sei. Sie nahm darauf das Kind zu sich und brachte es nach Schönwalde Krs. Frankenstein/Schl. in meine Wohnung.

Nach Rücksprache mit dem Vorsitzenden des Erbgesundheitsgerichtes Glatz, Herrn Amtsgerichtsrat Schlegel, wurde die Vollstreckung aus dem Beschluss des Erbgesundheitsgerichtes Glatz vom 27.7.39 - 4.XIII.45/39 - und des Erbgesundheitsobergerichtes Breslau vom 13.2.40 - 17.Wg.280/39 -

13709 A

*17.8.35/39  
 17.8.1927/100*

bis zur Entscheidung durch unsern Führer ausgesetzt.

Als Vormund und Vater bitte ich unseren Führer die Sache zu prüfen und den Beschluss aufzuheben.

Nach diesseitiger Auffassung beruht der Beschluss auf einem Fehltrteil.

- 1.) Meine Tochter hat ein gesundes Kind geboren, das  $2 \frac{3}{4}$  Jahre alt ist. Hiervon ist in dem Urteil überhaupt nichts erwähnt. Ich nehme hierzu Bezug auf das Schreiben des zuständigen Bürgermeisters in Kaiserswalde an dem Kreisarzt Herrn Dr. Willinsky in Frankenstein, dessen Abschrift beiliegt.
- 2.) Es trifft nicht zu, dass meine Tochter nur fähig ist zu einer Kolonnenarbeit. Pflanzarbeiten und sonstige landwirtschaftliche Arbeiten müssen gelernt sein. Sie verrichtet all diese Arbeiten selbstständig. Die Bescheinigung seitens des Kaufmann Dörner, sowie der Amtsverwaltung des zuständigen Bürgermeisters liegt bei.
- 3.) Was das Eheleben Hedwigs anbelangt, so verweise ich wieder auf das Schreiben des Bürgermeisters Wenzel in Kaiserswalde, in dem es heisst: "dass diese Sache nur ein Racheakt ist und dass von dieser Frau in keiner Weise etwas Nachteiliges zu sagen ist. Das Kind, welches diese hat, ist kerngesund und sehr verständig." Der Bürgermeister betont ausdrücklich, dass diese zwar im Lesen, Schreiben und Rechnen wohl nicht so weit wie ihr Mann war, aber was diese brauchte, kann sie jederzeit lesen, schreiben und rechnen.
- 4.) Der Einwand, des Schul- und Lebenswissen stehe unter dem Durchschnitt der ortsansässigen Bevölkerung, kann nicht durch greifen. Der zuständige Bürgermeister bestätigt selbst, dass meine Tochter soviel vom Lesen, Schreiben und Rechnen versteht als sie im Leben benötigt. Die Lebensmittelkarten sind seit

... seit Kriegsausbruch eingeführt. Sie war zur Erhaltung ihres Lebens und das ihres Kindes nur auf die Karten angewiesen. Wenn sie die Fähigkeiten nicht besitzen würde, die jeweiligen Mengen auf die Karten zu kennen und dementsprechend sich einzurichten, hätte sie und ihr Kind, wenn nicht zu Grunde, <sup>gehen</sup> zu- mindest sehr vernachlässigt sein müssen, was nicht der Fall ist. Ein Versagen im Geldverkehr der täglichen Einkäufe kann schon deshalb nicht der Fall sein, weil sie sich den Lebensunterhalt durch weniger gut bezahlte Arbeiten in der Landwirtschaft und Forstwirtschaft verdienen muss. Sie ist also gezwungen, ihr Geld genau einzuteilen. Dass sie dieses getan haben muss, sieht man daraus, dass sie nirgends Schulden hat. Sie hat auch während ihr Mann arbeitslos war, diesen durch ihrer Hände Arbeit miternährt. (s. beiliegende Bescheinigung) Sie muss auch ferner für ihren und des Kindes Lebensunterhalt sorgen, da der Vater des Kindes sich z. Zt. im Konzentrationslager befindet.

5.) Der Mangel an Schulkenntnissen ist noch lange kein Grund für Unfruchtbarmachung. Wäre dies der Fall, müssten viele Kinder, wenn sie erwachsen sind, unfruchtbar gemacht werden, eben weil sie in der Volksschule mehrmals das Klassenziel nicht erreicht haben.

6.) Wie in der Ehescheidungssache ausdrücklich festgestellt wurde, wollte der Ehemann die Ehe fortsetzen. Wenn das Erbgesundheitsobergericht die Ursache dafür zu einem guten Teil in der äusseren Erscheinung meiner Tochter finden will, so muss man sich fragen, welche Auffassung über eine Ehe des werktätigen Volkes dem Erbgesundheitsobergericht vorgeschwebt hat. Dank der nationalsozialistischen Kulturarbeit, die gerade zur Hebung der Lebensauffassung des werktätigen Volkes in Wort,



Schrift und Bild geleistet wird, ist jedem Volksgenossen bewusst, was die Ehe bedeutet. Dass sie nicht auch nicht teilweise auf der äusseren Erscheinung beruht, besonders nicht nach 11-jährigem Bestand. Die Tatsache, dass der Ehemann die Ehe trotz der Vorgänge in der 11-jährigen Ehe (s. Vorbringen des Ehemannes in der Ehescheidungssache) fortsetzen will, ist ~~der~~ treffendste Beweis für die unrichtige Auffassung und Fehlurteil des Erbgesundheitsobergerichts.

7.) Die Tatsache, dass meine Tochter 11 Jahre lang den Haushalt mit ihrem Manne führte, widerlegt die Auffassung, dass meine Tochter beim Einkauf als Hausfrau versagt. Sie hat bis zuletzt einen eigenen Haushalt geführt, wie der zuständige Bürgermeister bestätigt. Beiliegende Bescheinigung des Bürgermeisters und der Amtsverwaltung ergeben, dass sie vom Tage der Geburt ihr Kind sorgfältig betreut hat.

8.) Im Ehescheidungsurteil wird ausdrücklich hingewiesen, dass...  
"das Verschulden auf Grund ihres Geisteszustandes zwar als etwas vermindert aber nicht als aufgehoben werden kann.

Beweis: Urteil des Oberlandesgerichts Breslau - 8 U 1372/38-  
2 R 48/37 LG

Glatz, das in Abschrift beiliegt. Wenn das Oberlandesgericht nach eingehender Prüfung zu dieser Feststellung kommt und damit, dass für sie in wirtschaftlicher und ethischer Hinsicht tief einschneidende Urteil einer Mitschuld an der "errüttung der Ehe fñhlt, so wird damit die Ansicht des Erbgesundheitsobergerichts Breslau widerlegt.

9.) Das Gutachten des Herrn Med. Rat. Dr. Willimsky bei den Ehescheidungsakten Wenzel/Wenzel. 8 U 1372/38-O.L.G. Breslau vom 3.2.39, das in Abschrift beiliegt, sagt ausdrücklich... hier-nach besteht bei Frau Wenzel ein angeborener (was bestritten wird, Anmerkung des Antragstellers) Schwachsinn leichteren

leichteren Grades, jedenfalls ist derselbe ~~NIXXX~~ nicht solch einer Art, dass er sie unfähig machen, sich im Leben einigermaßen zu Recht zu finden und abgesehen von ~~Rbb~~biologischen Bedenken auch eine Ehe einzugehen.

Die weiteren Ausführungen zu den vom Sachverständigen an meine Tochter gestellten Fragen finden ihre treffenden Widerlegungen durch beil. Zeugnisse und Bescheinigungen.

- 10.) Mit von ausschlaggebender Entscheidung dürften weiter die Tatsache sein, dass alle andere~~n~~ aus meiner Ehe hervorgegangenen lebenden Kinder tüchtige brauchbare Menschen geworden sind. Von meinen 9 Kindern sind 8 am Leben, eines ist im Alter von 5 Jahren an Lungenentzündung gestorben, ein Sohn Ferdinand Tietz, Jnspr. und Amtsvorsteher in Hummel-Radeck Krs. Lüben/Schl. Hermann Tietz, Stabsfeldwebel b.d. Fliegern z.4t. im Felde, Karl Tietz, Drogist (Staatsprüfung mit gut abgelegt) z.2t. Jnf. Regt. im Felde, Wilhelm Tietz Obergefr. bei der Waffemeisterei Glatz als Waffengehilfe tätig (Beim Reichsberufswettkampf 1939 ersten Preis erhalten).
- Maria Tietz, Hausschneiderin in Schönwalde Krs. Frankestein, Hildegard Sauer geb. Tietz Gattin des Feldwebels Sauer, Truppenübungsplatz Stranz b. Neuhammer a. Quais.
- Ursula Wosnetza geb. Tietz, Gattin des Feldwebel Wosnetza b. Kommando des Truppenübungsplatzes Neuhammer a. Quais.
- Bemerkt wird, dass Herr Med. Rat. Dr. Willimsky nach Untersuchung meiner Tochter Hildegard Sauer geb. Tietz die Ehefähigkeitsbescheinigung ausstellte.
- Es berührt doch eigentümlich, dass ausgerechnet mein drittes Kind Hedwig Wenzel geb. Tietz mit angeborenen Schwachsinn

behaftet sein soll, während die anderen sieben Kinder vollständig erbgesund und begabt sind.

Es geht hier um die Ehre der ganzen Familie, der meiner Schwiegeröhne und der Zukunft meiner Enkelkinder.

Ich selbst war ebenfalls Frontkämpfer und bitte daher aus all diesen Gründen um eingehende Prüfung der ganzen Sachlage und Entscheidung. Ich bin gerne bereit, meine Tochter Hedwig durch einen Facharzt einer nochmaligen Untersuchung zu unterziehen.

Heil Hitler!

Heinrich Lindt  
Befehl in Hausache  
als Vater.

8 Anlagen

Schönwalde, 24.08.1940

Ferdinand Tietz  
Tax assistant  
Schönwalde  
Frankenstein District

---

In accordance with the order of the Hereditary Health Court in Wrocław, 13.02.1940 - 17. Wg. 280/39 // 4.XIII.45/39 - my daughter Hedwig Wenzel, nee Tietz, of Kaiserswalde, Habelschwerdt county, is to be sterilized.

She was arrested on Friday, 05.07.40, at Dorfstrasse in Kaiserswalde and taken to the hospital in Neurode, which she left on 06.07.40 and came to me.

I will add, furthermore, that the incumbent police authorities had not the slightest concern for her 2¾ year-old child, did not trouble themselves about his welfare or sustenance [and] if a certain Mrs Schlagner had not taken the child in, he would have been wandering the street with no food. A day later my daughter Maria happened to be in Kaiserswalde, wishing to visit my daughter Hedwig Wenzel, nee Tietz, and learnt that my daughter had been arrested in the street and taken by car to the hospital in Neurode. Given this situation, she took the child and brought it to Schönwalde, district of Frankenstein/Silesia, to my home.

Following a discussion with the chairman of the Hereditary Health Court in Glatz, Regional Court counsel Schlegel, the ruling of the Hereditary Health Court in Glatz of 27.07.39 - 4.XIII.45/39 - and the Higher Hereditary Health Court in Wrocław of 13.02.40 - 17. Wg. 280/39 - was suspended, pending a decision from our Führer.

As a guardian and a father, I ask our Führer to examine the matter and to revoke the order.

In my opinion, the order is based on a faulty evaluation.

- 1) My daughter has given birth to a healthy child, now 2¾ years old. The sentence does not mention this at all. I hereby refer to the letter from the acting mayor in Kaiserswalde to the district doctor Dr Willimsky [of] Frankenstein, whose reply is attached.
- 2) It is not true that my daughter is able to complete only simple tasks under supervision. Planting and other agricultural work has to be learnt. She can carry out all these tasks independently. I attach an attestation issued by the merchant Dörner and the administrative office of the acting mayor.
- 3) As far as Hedwig's married life is concerned, I would like to draw attention to the letter of Mayor Wenzel in Kaiserswalde, which says that "this matter is exclusively an act of revenge, nothing negative can be said in any way of this woman. Her child is clever and fit as a fiddle."



The Mayor clearly emphasises that, to be sure, in reading, writing, and arithmetic [she] is not quite as fluent as her husband, but can always manage to read, write and calculate as far as she needs.

- 4) The allegation that her educational and practical abilities are lower than those of the local population does not correspond to the truth. The acting mayor himself confirms that my daughter reads, writes, and calculates insofar as she needs to practically. Ration cards were introduced at the start of the war. In providing for herself and her child, [she] was completely dependent on these cards. If she hadn't been capable of recognising the amounts [given] on the cards and how to use them appropriately, she and her child would not have survived, or would at least have been very neglected, which is not what happened. She cannot be accused of being incapable of using money for daily shopping, at least for the reason that she must earn a living, taking on lower paid work in agriculture or forestry. She is therefore obliged to manage her money assiduously. That she did [indeed] do so is testified by the fact that she has no debts. When her husband was unemployed, she supported him through the work of her own hands (see the attached testimonial). Furthermore, she has to support herself and her child since her husband is currently in a concentration camp.
- 5) A lack of education is by no means a reason for sterilization. If that were so, then many children, when they grow up, will have to be sterilized precisely for the reason that in elementary school they frequently failed to progress to the next class.
- 6) As has been clearly stated in the divorce case, her husband did not wish to end the marriage. If the Higher Hereditary Health Court wishes to seek the reasons [for the divorce] largely in my daughter's outward appearance, then the question should be asked what sort of vision of marriage between working people is held by the Higher Hereditary Health Court. Thanks to national-socialist cultural activities conducted with the aim of raising the consciousness of working folk through the spoken and written word and through images, every member of the national community knows what marriage is. That it is not even partly dependent on external looks, particularly after 11 years of marriage, constitutes the most convincing evidence that the verdict of the Higher Court for the prevention of hereditary disease is invalid and erroneous.
- 7) The fact that my daughter managed the household with her husband for 11 years contradicts the opinion that as a housekeeper my daughter was unable to cope with the shopping. She was, after all, running her own home, which the acting mayor also attests. The attached testimonial from the mayor's office reveals that she cared conscientiously for her child from the moment of birth.

- 8) The divorce decree clearly states that [her] “guilt due to her mental state can be reduced, but not discounted”.

Evidence: The ruling of the Higher Regional Court in Wrocław – 8 U 1372 2 R 48/3 in Glatz, a copy of which is attached. If, after thorough examination, the Higher Regional Court has reached such a conclusion and declared that from the economic and ethical point of view she bears co-responsibility for the breakdown of the marriage, then it automatically refutes the view of the Wrocław Higher Hereditary Health Court.

- 9) The statement of the medical adviser Dr Willimsky, included among the divorce papers Wenzel/Wenzel, 8 U 1372/38-O.L.G. [Higher Regional Court] Wrocław O3.02.39, which can be found in the attachment, clearly states... insofar as Mrs Wenzel suffers from a minor congenital (which is questionable; rapporteur’s note) disability, it is not in any case such that it would render her incapable of coping in daily life, to some extent, or even, reservations of a biological nature aside, of getting married.

Further arguments concerning the questions posed to my daughter by the expert are aptly refuted by the attached testimonials and attestations.

- 10) The fact may also prove decisive that all remaining living children of my marriage are decent and useful people. Eight of my nine children are living; one died of pneumonia at the age of five. My son Ferdinand Tietz, inspector and office director in Hummel-Radeck, Lüben/Silesia; Hermann Tietz, staff sergeant airman, currently at the front; Karl Tietz, owner of a pharmacy (he passed a state examination with a good grade), currently infantry regiment at the front; Wilhelm Tietz, lance corporal, working as an assistant at the armoury in Glatz (he took first place in the Reich Vocational Contest in 1939).

Maria Tietz, a seamstress in Schönewalde, Frankenstein region; Hildegard Sauer, nee Tietz, wife of sergeant Sauer, training ground Stranz near Neuhammer on the Kwisa.

Ursula Wosnetza, nee Tietz, wife of sergeant Wosnetz in command of the Neuhammer training ground on the Kwisa.

It should be noted, that after examining my daughter Hildegard Sauer, nee Tietz, medical advisor Dr Willimsky issued a certificate that she was able to marry.

It grieves [me] particularly, that my third child, Hedwig Wenzel, nee Tietz, is deemed to have a congenital defect, whereas the remaining seven children have no hereditary diseases and possess natural aptitudes. This is a matter of the honour of the entire family, my sons-in-law and my future grandchildren.

I, too, fought at the front and for all these reasons I request a rigorous examination of the case and a decision. I am prepared to have my daughter Hedwig re-examined by a medical specialist.

Heil Hitler!  
*Ferdinand Tietz*  
*Tax assistant*  
*Writing as a father*

8 attachments





Kaiserswalde village, 1930s

**H**edwig Wenzel was sterilized on 7 March 1941 in Frankenstein (Ząbkowice Śląskie). That is the date that appears on the hospital accounts. The Bethania hospital issued an invoice for 136 RM, and Dr Johannes Daerr – for 50 RM. The sums were to be paid from the Wrocław province budget.<sup>1</sup>

Back in December 1933, it was projected that the cost of enforcing sterilization in the Reich would come to around 14 million RM. These costs were far exceeded by the cost of caring for the sick. Sterilization was meant to be a solution to social problems. To put it bluntly – it was a method of eliminating so-called defective citizens. On the other hand, there was also the question of familiarizing Nazi society with new methods of “thrift” with regard to health and social care. This reasoning was to have enormous influence on the views of the average citizen of the Reich.<sup>2</sup>

Hedwig Wenzel’s sterilization was decided by the court in Wrocław in February 1940. The woman did not report for the procedure voluntarily, therefore she was arrested on 5 July. In broad daylight, on Dorfstrasse in the village of Kaiserswalde (Lasówka), district of Habelschwerdt (Bystrzyca Kłodzka), she was put in a car and driven to the hospital in Neurode (Nowa Ruda). We don’t know if she ended up in the “Maria Hilf” hospital, where the religious sisters took part in the sterilization procedures, or to Bracki Hospital. She was certainly there no longer than 24 hours. Next, she was driven 17 kilometres to the village of Schönwalde (Budzów), to the home of her father – Ferdinand Tietz. It is thanks only to him that we are able to recreate even part of Hedwig’s story.

1 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8447, p. 65.

2 K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924-1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 239.

On 5 September 1940, Ferdinand Tietz, a tax assistant, father of eight children, sent a letter to the Chancellery of the Third Reich.<sup>3</sup> In six typewritten pages, he tried to persuade officials that his third child, Hedwig, should not be sterilized. In all probability, thanks to his intervention at the regional court in Klodzko, they managed to delay the date of surgery and take the opportunity to send a plea to the Führer.

Among other things, Hedwig's father argued that his daughter had already given birth to one healthy child who was now almost three years old. After the mother's arrest, the child was left without care. At the same time, he drew attention to the fact that the diagnosis of the local doctor, Dr Willimsky of Frankenstein was wrong: "It is not true that my daughter is able to complete only simple tasks under supervision."<sup>4</sup>

Tietz was uncompromising in listing the authorities' lack of logic. He pointed out that a lack of education (one of the "accusations" against Hedwig) could not necessitate referring a person for sterilization, because that would mean sterilizing a great many weak students. He referred to the positive opinions of his daughter held by the mayor and local tradesman Doerner. Unfortunately, the eight attachments containing supportive testimonials have vanished from Hedwig's file. A written statement has survived by the mayor from Kaiserswalde, who was summoned to Frankenstein in October. The mayor had a common surname in those parts, the same as the accused: Konrad Wenzel.

Mayor Wenzel declared first of all that he knew the situation of this family very well. Secondly – proceeding with surgery in Hedwig's case could result in a permanent incapacity to work. The final sentence of his statement hints that in the case of this woman, the procedure could end in a nervous breakdown. Thanks to his account, we learn something more about Hedwig's private life and her family problems.

The woman diagnosed by the local doctor as "capable of only simple tasks" had been living alone since spring 1938. She was also raising her son by herself and managing the house: "Mrs Wenzel is thrifty, hard-working and a good mother to her 3-year-old healthy child. If her nerves are a little on edge currently, then this is the result of earlier marital disagreements and arguments. Mrs Wenzel is liked in the community

---

<sup>3</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

and no one has a bad word to say about her.”<sup>5</sup> Disagreements and arguments in this case are synonymous with physical abuse. Hedwig’s husband, Hermann, was a blacksmith by trade.<sup>6</sup> The pair lived together for three years before marrying. After they married, their home was peaceful. The situation changed, apparently, in 1933, that is – as mayor Wenzel put it – “shortly after taking power”.<sup>7</sup> The cause of conflict was the communist meetings that Hedwig’s husband organized in the family home. The woman gossiped about it in the village. “From that time, Wenzel began to bully and beat his wife. On many occasions he tore Mrs Wenzel’s clothes and was cruel to her.”<sup>8</sup> The man was unemployed, so Hedwig – the victim of domestic abuse – was still the family’s only provider. In the Habelschwerdt district court, proceedings were pending against Hermann who was taken to KL Sachsenhausen at the turn of 1937/38.<sup>9</sup> His name and surname do not appear in the Book of the Dead Sachsenhausen 1936–1945.<sup>10</sup> It is very likely that he survived the war. We do not know if he ever returned to Kaiserswalde.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of February 1939, after eleven years of marriage, the couple filed for divorce. We can assume that it was Hedwig who wanted it. Her husband – according to Ferdinand Tietz – wished the marriage to continue. Unfortunately, the attachments referred to in her father’s letter have disappeared, so it is difficult to ascertain what he had in mind when writing: “If the [...] Court [...] wishes to seek the reasons [for the divorce] largely in my daughter’s outward appearance,

---

5 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 42.

6 The Kaiserswalde directory of addresses includes only one Hermann Wenzel, who lived Kaiserswalde 14. This could have been Hedwig’s husband, although under list of professions he is recorded as: *Kolonist* (settler), and not a blacksmith. Kaiserswalde address book: [https://adressbuecher.genealogy.net/addressbooks/place/object\\_187416?offset=150&max=25](https://adressbuecher.genealogy.net/addressbooks/place/object_187416?offset=150&max=25) [accessed 1 June 2019].

7 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 42.

8 Ibid.

9 Some files have survived in the Sachsenhausen National Memorial Archive concerning a few men bearing the name Hermann Wenzel. Hedwig’s husband was probably born on 5 February 1888. His camp number was 1005. He was held in block 28. He arrived at the camp on 16 October 1937. The records list his nationality as German. He worked in the Heinkel labour sub-camp. He survived the war. Sachsenhausen National Memorial Archive, Auskunft zu einem ehemaligen Häftling des KZ Sachsenhausen [accessed 27 June 2019].

10 *Book of the Dead Sachsenhausen 1936-1945*: <http://www.stiftung-bg.de/totenbuch/main.php> [accessed 1 June 2019].

11 A document has been preserved at the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen dated 28 June 1948: a list of prisoners of KZ Sachsenhausen who had survived, together with their addresses (Berlin and its vicinity) – for the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes Berlin – the Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime. Hermann Wenzel appears on this list. BHLA, Rep. 35H KZ Sachsenhausen 10/1, Potsdam, Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, sygn. 100104686.



Bracki Hospital in Neurode, where Hedwig Wenzel might have been admitted to before sterilization

then the question should be asked what sort of vision of marriage of working people is held by the [...] Court [...]."<sup>12</sup>

Evidently, one of the arguments influencing the higher sterilization court ruling concerned Hedwig's outer appearance which was supposed to have contributed to the Wenzels' divorce. The woman's father was outraged by such arguments. Once again, he drew attention to the lack of logic in the court's reasoning; in the end, the couple had lived together for eleven years, and the husband (the inmate of a concentration camp) had not wished to end the marriage. It was no doubt in the middle of divorce proceedings – two years before the sterilization operation – that Hedwig was diagnosed as having "a minor congenital disability".<sup>13</sup> Her father's battle was to prove above all that such a diagnosis did not disqualify the woman in any way from living independently. Ferdinand Tietz hoped that the Führer would refer Hedwig for further medical examination. As a former soldier – probably at the front during the First World War – he believed in the justice of the Chancellery. The case file included descriptions of all family members, and a so-called *Sippenmappe* (family tree) of the Tietz family, which also has not survived.

<sup>12</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

At the beginning of November 1940, the father's appeal was dismissed.<sup>14</sup> We do not know what happened to Hedwig between November 1940 and March 1941. The woman was sterilized by Dr Daerr – the same doctor who a few years earlier had carried out the procedure on sixteen-year-old Frieda Jäschke.<sup>15</sup> The documents summing up the sterilization programme in Lower Silesia describe him thus: "A general practitioner, a non-specialist, but with surgical training and a successful surgeon. From 1907, physician-in-chief at the Bethania hospital. Surg. [ical] training from April 1905 to September 1906 [as] assistant doctor in the 'Lutherstift' hospital in Frankfurt im Oder (Prof. Dr Pernice). He worked in surgical wards in the military garrison hospital and in field hospitals. In April and May he was a volunteer-doctor in the University Obstetrics hospital in Bonn."<sup>16</sup>

At that time, Dr Daerr did not have a deputy,<sup>17</sup> since the only specialist – Dr Fischer – had refused to carry out sterilizations for ideological reasons.<sup>18</sup> This was an isolated case. From 28 December 1934 to 15 June 1935, Dr Johannes Daerr sterilized 34 people – men and women.<sup>19</sup> He continued his "medical practice" for several years. By 31 December 1937, he had sterilized 72 men and 85 women.<sup>20</sup> In his case, each operation meant a fee of 20 or 50 RM.

Hedwig Wenzel's later fate remains unknown.

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>15</sup> See p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8421, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> In 1938–39 (until the outbreak of the Second World War), Dr. Daerr could have been assisted by his son, Eberhard, who at that time was voluntary-houseman at the Bethania hospital. Eberhard Daerr died in 2005. <https://www.munzinger.de/search/go/document.jsp?id=00000012374> [accessed 1 June 2019].

<sup>18</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8421, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> S. Kasperek, "Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934–1944", *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 54.



---

**Martha  
Schönfelder  
1940/41**

---





RK 19. NOV. 1940

Adolf Hitler  
 Kriegserziehung 1

L. Zukünftig K. M. 2. Preussische  
 2. Abgabemittel. Forcht.  
 Reichskanzlei

Herr Professor Adolf Hitler.  
 Was Ihnen nachher Ihnen oft dankbar  
 Kauf, esin Maj fyon dinsten Nachh Kerwin.  
 Ich glaube die Frauen wuerten Hoff alle  
 zu Grunden hofen lassen gefelma waerd.  
 Geheilten Sie fimm Moral geistlich die  
 Magel, fabe lalt fyon in rorigen Verabre  
 mitgefalt, dertov Kauf fucht fimmal zu  
 eine fch foch Winlan Frauen fo, deren  
 Müssen Eben die Gerechtigkeitlicher, Malen  
 In die Mimm Zeit eingewickelt werden sind,  
 Annot Arbeitun, die sich Lustmal sein  
 Die Magierung, glaublich Gelpfener.  
 Dertov Kauf Müß dafür Anverantwortlich  
 gemacht werden. Ich Müß sein dinsten  
 Mimm fuchung woffelt Müß. Less mir das  
 Müß Gotten dinsten, fabe von August ein Tennend.  
 Damit ich fuch Geladigt. Mann fimm Andon fuchtfried  
 Aufgeffindun sein, ich fuch fimm fuchbildung,  
 edne seien Unternum die Eben das Müßte Mal.  
 Also Müßte ich fimm die Zeit vom 21. 10. 1940 - 24. 11. 1940  
 Guttendun fubren.

23. NOV. 1940 Nm  
 14/6

Martha Schönfelder's letters to Adolf Hitler

Voll Mir zwei Sockler Kupf, Kuyenissen  
oder Enstimmul Kaym, ob, und wann 4  
Kuyenisse bin. Mitt dem Patent wird  
Enstimmul Kuyf, oder 40 Kuyf Kuyf.  
Dann Myster auf Litten von das Gold, oder  
das Eisenstein, denn das unsere Mann Kuyf.  
Machen Mir von der N. S. U. Entommen Gesamm

Mitt dem Kupf Kupf

Meltha Schöfelden.

Gabn Einnig Kuyf von der Enstimmul,  
Mitt dem Kupf Kupf, oder 40 Kuyf Kuyf.  
Dann Myster auf Litten von das Gold, oder  
das Eisenstein, denn das unsere Mann Kuyf.  
Machen Mir von der N. S. U. Entommen Gesamm

Enstimmul Mir Kupf Kupf Enstimmul Kupf Kupf.

Mitt dem Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf.  
Denn Mir Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf.  
Kuyf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf.  
auf dem Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf.

galt dem Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf Kupf



RK. <sup>L 20/11</sup> 16. NOV. 1940 <sup>2</sup> *Ein Mißbrauchsgesetz*

- 1. Zuständig *Ministerium*
- 2. Abgabenschrift form. Reichskanzlei

*Neu Dr. Josef / Adolf Gillms.*  
 Geben von Antritt an, immer jüngere  
 Pönd, Pönd gegen. Gleichen Ruf aus  
 zu sein. Was von einem Arzt zu  
 einem Arzt werden. Wie ein  
 ein, Menschen nicht gemacht Pönd.  
 Im 13. 11. 1940. Was ist die  
 voll ein Mann Ruf aus  
 Mißbrauchsgesetz  
 Ob das ein  
 ein  
 Mißbrauchsgesetz  
 Mit Dankbarkeit

*Matthäus Schönböcker.*

**IVg** *L 20/11*  
*Scha 21/40*  
5115

Reichsministerium des Innern  
23. NOV. 1940 Nm  
49

*Mein Vorgang*

*Gelesen  
Gelesen  
am 23. 11. 1940  
M. Schönböcker*



To the Reich Government and the Führer Adolf Hitler.

---

This week, I went to see Dr Kauf, as I have written already - this week. I think that all the women will be finished off before they receive any help. I have had two periods in the space of one month, I wrote about all this in my previous letter, the doctor once said to me that many women are in the same situation, because the Health Departments which were recently set up should work differently, [but] the government certainly thinks they are reliable.

Dr Kauf should be made to answer for this. I don't know anything about any new pregnancy. I won't let that happen, since I have had a new companion since August. That settles the matter. If some other illness is diagnosed, it will be a delusion, or I will fall ill [the illness will be confirmed?] the next time.

So I would be giving birth from 21.10.1940 to 14.11.1940.

Dr Kauf should prove, or tell me for sure whether and [since when?] I am pregnant. Nothing will come of this [sic] patent [notion?], and I am fit for nothing.

I would also like to ask for the money from my divorce, [...] who, if not my husband won't.

I will apply to the NSV [National Socialist People's Welfare].

With German  
greetings  
*Martha*  
*Schönfelder.*

I have several debts to pay, may I sent these bills next time, please write to me if I am to do this. Or will there be some time limit because of the divorce, has my husband filed an application. Later I will probably marry some companion since I am used to a better life.

I think a stop should be put to these time limits. I will send the bill. I need 20 RM for coal. I would like, [the] money [...] to the designated [...]

[Note on the righthand margin] I have this other letter too, I did not meet her straightaway. [?]

To the Reich Government and Führer Adolf Hitler.

From August, I have had a young companion, Fried Heger. I thought I was pregnant again. I was sent from one doctor to another. To the Department of Health itself. They could not establish anything for certain. On 13.11.1940 I went to see Dr Kauf, apparently, I am pregnant again.

I know very well why that is.

Either this is some kind of doctor's fantasy, or [sic] a medical patent, for sure.

You can check with the doctors.

With German  
greetings  
*Martha*  
*Schönfelder*

[Note, in red: Do not instigate] Any procedure.





The envelope containing Martha Schönfelder's letter to Adolf Hitler

Martha Schönfelder nee Jung lived at Hindenburgstrasse 162 in Waldenburg (Wałbrzych),<sup>1</sup> today ul. Niepodległości. The house at 162 survived the war. In 1940, Martha was already divorced. It is not known whom she lived with at that address. In her letters to Hitler she mentions a "young companion" Fried Heger, but she takes into account her marriage to someone else. She left two letters directed to the Reich Chancellery and Führer dated 16 and 19 November 1940.<sup>2</sup>

It is hard to ascertain exactly what happened to Martha Schönfelder at the turn of 1939 and 1940. The letters to Hitler are the record of a cry for help and of defiance towards the local health services. Martha wrote her letters by hand. Not all the sentences can be deciphered, some are completely incomprehensible. The woman was certainly pregnant. She received medical help from Dr Kauf. She writes: "I think that all the women will be finished off before they receive any help. [...] the doctor once said to me that many women are in the same situation. [...] I don't know anything about any new pregnancy. I cannot bear this much [longer], I have had a new companion since August. That settles

<sup>1</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 76, 77, 82.

the matter.”<sup>3</sup> The final sentence probably refers to the threat of sterilization or abortion. It’s possible that Martha hoped that her new partner (later her husband) would save her from the procedure. She was wrong.

/

The Reich Ministry of the Interior responded to Martha Schönfelder’s letter at the beginning of December 1940. Dr Herbert Linden forwarded the letter to the Wrocław province administration with a request to clarify whether: “the writer of this letter is mentally ill and if official intervention is necessary. It should be checked at the same time if sterilization or termination of pregnancy should be considered.”<sup>4</sup>

In mid-February 1941, a further medical statement was prepared which Dr Koller signed. The State Health Department in Waldenburg reported that the case was going on for so long because Martha Schönfelder did not turn up for examination at the appointed times. After three missed appointments, the police escorted her by force.<sup>5</sup> The examination took place at the health department at 15 Barbarastrasse (now ul. Batorego). It was established that Martha had been diagnosed schizophrenic (the first examination had taken place in February 1939) and that the sterilization court in Schweidnitz (Świdnica) had been informed of the matter. Sterilization was only a matter of time.

Thanks to the medical statement mentioned above, we know something more on the subject of Martha.<sup>6</sup> Mrs Schönfelder was born on 11 February 1905 in Steinau (from 1938 part of the suburbs of Waldenburg). In 1941 she was 36. She was a seamstress by profession. She had had one child previously who had died. She had also miscarried once. Her husband was named Herbert and he was a worker, living at Strassburgerstrasse 45 (now ul. Piotra Skargi).

Martha’s parents – Hermann and Anna Jung – lived at Steinau 5 (Kreis Waldenburg). Her father worked at the local brickyard. The women of her family had no health problems. Martha too had not suffered from any chronic illness. She had repeated a year at school. She had her first period at the age of seventeen. She was not found to have epilepsy. She worked as a servant first of all, then in a shop selling soap and cosmetics. These were casual jobs on the whole. She had no convictions. She often drank alcohol and became drunk – it is

---

3 Ibid., p. 76.

4 Ibid., p. 74.

5 Ibid., p. 83.

6 Ibid., pp. 84–91.



Wałbrzych, ul. Niepodległości 162. In this house Martha Schönfelder used to live

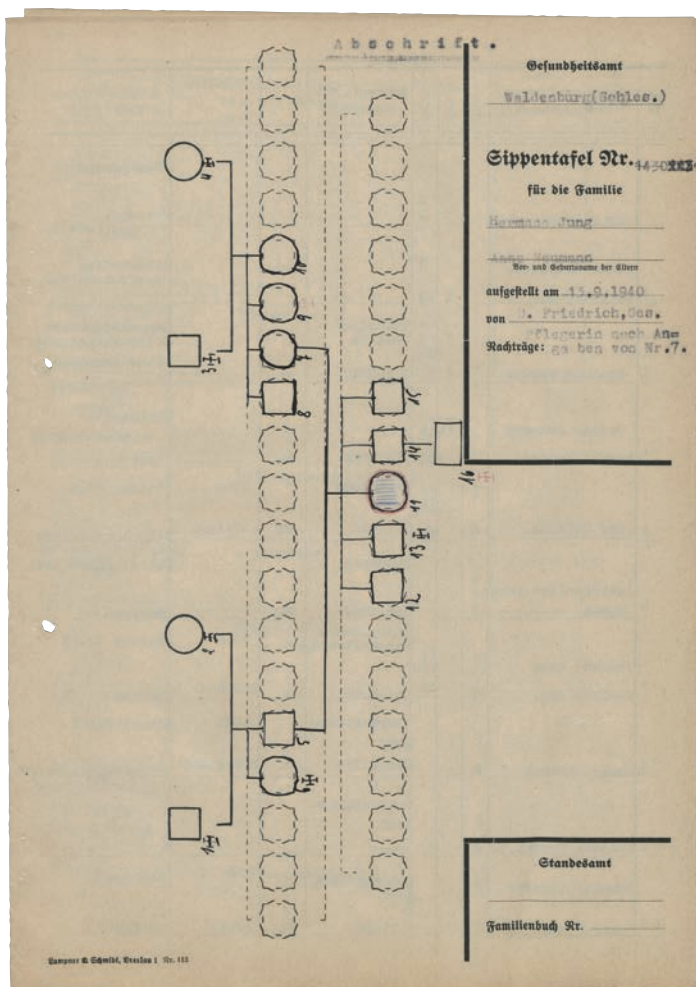
difficult to say what that might actually signify. In a conversation with a woman from the health service, Martha's mother maintained that: "Mrs Sch. used to like a drink, but in her case, as in her husband's, this was only within limits, and has not occurred since the war broke out."<sup>7</sup>

Martha's physician was Dr Arndt of Waldenburg.<sup>8</sup> At the time of examination, the woman weighed 49 kg. She was 150 cm tall. Her overall state of health was described as satisfactory. Her behaviour, however, was described as "ungracious". The statement records some comments from Martha: "I got divorced because I didn't make the coffee properly. I put the divorce papers straight in the fire."<sup>9</sup> Apparently, Martha's father hit her, so the woman slapped him. She was also characterised as impulsive. She supposedly behaved "absurdly": "I have a companion at the moment, unfortunately he is in the WM [Wehrmacht]. As long as you have your period, you can have as many

7 The official's report is not a record of the interview with Martha's parents but merely a note following the visit. For this reason, Martha is referred to as Mrs Sch. APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 99.

8 This might have been Erich Arndt, medical doctor and neurologist, resident at Freiburger Strasse 20b. *Adressbuch für die Stadt Waldenburg i. Schles. und die Nachbarorte Dittersbach, Hermsdorf, Nieder-Salzbrunn, Ober-Salzbrunn, Ober-Waldenburg und Weißstein*, Waldenburg 1933, [http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Waldenburg\\_\(Schlesien\)/Adressbuch\\_1933](http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/Waldenburg_(Schlesien)/Adressbuch_1933) [accessed 13 May 2019].

9 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 90.



APWr; Rejencja wroclawska, sygn. 8428, p. 92

Family tree added to Martha Schönfelder's medical report

companions as you like. In other circumstances, you simply look for a man who could be a father."<sup>10</sup> In addition, Martha was allegedly very tearful. Her mental state had deteriorated over the previous two years (1939–40). The family tree of the Jung family, mapping the health of all its members (a so-called *Sippenmappe*), was attached to the medical statement.<sup>11</sup> Anna and Herbert had four sons and one daughter. Martha was the Jungs' third child.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 92–96.



The cotton mill at Ober-Waldenburg - Martha Schönfelder's workplace

One of the most interesting documents in Martha's file is the copy of a report by a woman employed by the health department in Waldenburg (D. Friedrich) following a conversation with Martha's parents, with whom Martha was living at the beginning of 1940. At Easter (21–25 March), she moved to a new address. Martha was divorced in February 1940. She was deemed responsible for the dissolution of the marriage,<sup>12</sup> for reasons including quarrels, rows at her place of work, blocking access to the home, not cooking for three days (!) and suspected infidelity. Her parents maintained that their daughter began to behave oddly after her divorce: "She sat for hours next to the stove, deep in thought, leaning on her arms. From time to time, she'd burst out laughing loudly. According to the mother, her daughter tends toward melancholia, to the point even of expressing a wish to commit suicide. She would grow angry for trivial reasons, slap her father, and even tried to beat her mother. She was obnoxious and shirked work, so Mrs Jung simply threw her out onto the street."<sup>13</sup>

Other than that, Martha worked as a seamstress for Kramsta-Methner & Frahne, at a cotton-mill in Ober-Waldenburg. Her close family wanted nothing to do with her. It appears that after the sentence was declared, no one from the Jung family appealed for the decision to be altered.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 99.



It is hard to say anything about Martha Schönfelder's mental state or what was behind her disturbing behaviour. Was she in fact suffering from schizophrenia? The woman had lost a child – even before her marriage to Herbert. She had suffered a miscarriage. She was convinced that her husband was unfaithful. She met with men, but was looking for a permanent relationship. Both state officials and her own close family treated her roughly. She was regarded as a so-called “asocial” individual. All sides attempted to be rid of her at all costs.

On 19 February 1941, the Wrocław province administration contacted the health department in Waldenburg to enquire if Mrs Sch. was in fact pregnant and, if so, how far along.<sup>14</sup> The reply came less than a month later. On 14 March, an official from the province administration wrote to the Ministry of the Interior with the information that legal proceedings had been initiated regarding the sterilization of Martha Schönfelder. In her case, abortion was out of the question.<sup>15</sup> This letter constituted an answer to Dr Linden's question of December 1940.

A few months earlier, Linden had published *Guidelines in the Evaluation of Hereditary Health* [*Richtlinien über die Beurteilung der Erbgesundheit*], which aimed to help in the selection of German citizens who were divided into: asocial individuals, acceptable individuals, average citizens, and the “particularly valuable”.<sup>16</sup> “In the case of pregnant women who qualified as hereditarily sick [...], abortion was permitted from 1935; after the termination such women were sterilized. [...] the edict of November 1940 permitted abortion to the sixth month, if offspring were undesirable in terms of the interests of society.”<sup>17</sup>

In the second half of March 1941, Martha Schönfelder must have been in her final trimester. Despite the new directive, an abortion was not carried out. Her fate is unknown.

---

14 Ibid., p. 101.

15 Ibid., p. 103.

16 G. Aly, *Die Belasteten. „Euthanasie“ 1933–1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt a. Main, 2013), p. 225.

17 Ibid., p. 226, 227.







---

**Pauline**

**Lux**

**1941**

---



A b s c h r i f t !

.....

Landeck, den 22.7.1941.

An das

Erbgesundheitsobergericht

in B r e s l a u.

Zu allererst danke ich, den Herrn des Senats, dass Sie so lange wie mein Mann im Felde ist, einen Eingriff bei mir nicht vornehmen wollen. Mein Mann schickte mir das Schreiben von Ihnen zu, und ich war sehr erfreut darüber. Am 17.7. dieses Monats bekam ich vom Gesundheitsamt Habelschwerdt Nachricht, dass ich mich heute, den 22.7. im Städt. Krankenhaus Bad Landeck zu einer Untersuchung einfinden soll. Bin auch zu dem bestimmten Zeitpunkt zur Stelle gewesen. Die erste Frage des Herrn Amtsarztes war, wann ich den letzten Anfall hatte. Ich sagte vor einem viertel Jahr. Nun meinte Herr Amtsarzt, dass der Eingriff gemacht werden muss, da es erbliche Fallsucht ist. Ich sagte wir sind nun schon 11 Jahre ohne Kinder, und wollen ja auch keine haben. Herr Amtsarzt liess mich aber garnicht weiter reden und meinte, ich soll mit solchen Ausreden erst garnicht anfangen. Weiter sagte er, wenn sie normal wären, würden sie es Einsehen, dass der Eingriff gemacht werden muss. All seine Anfragen waren in einem ganz unhöflichen Ton. Ich sagte, aber

Letter from Pauline Lux to the Hereditary Health Court

Herr Doktor, ich bin doch nicht unnormal. Das hab ich ja nicht gesagt, war die Antwort, und wenn sie mit Lügen anfangen, dann machen sie, dass sie rauskommen. Ich wurde so angeschrien, dass, wenn jemand auf dem Korridor gewesen, es hätte genau verstehen können. Ich sagte nur noch, dass mir in solch einem Tone noch keiner von den Herrn ist entgegengekommen, und es ist traurig, mich als Kriegerfrau so zu behandeln. Tun sie mal nicht so mit ihrer Kriegerfrau, bekam ich zur Antwort. Nun bin ich mit dem Gruss Heil Hitler gegangen. Eine Untersuchung hatt Herr A<sub>m</sub>tsarzt nicht vorgenommen. Dieses alles teile ich Ihnen mit reinem Gewissen mit, und kann es auch beedigen.

Sehr geehrte Herren des Senats !

Schweren Herzens schreibe ich diese Zeilen und bin seit dem gestrigen Tage ganz unglücklich. Mein Mann ist bereits 8 Monate nicht in Urlaub gewesen. Nur mit meinem Mann kann ich Freud und Leid teilen, und es ist wohl bitter genug, dies alles alleine zu tragen, wo ich doch jetzt den Kummer um meinen lb. Mann habe, ob er noch einmal heimkehrt. Durch das unhöfliche Entgegenkommen des Herrn Amtsarztes ist mir das Alleinsein noch schwerer gemacht worden. Unser Führer will es bestimmt nicht, dass eine Frau, deren Mann im Felde ist, so behandelt wird. Ich will es meinem Mann deshalb nicht schwer machen und e ihm davon was mitteilen, darum wende ich mich vollen Vertrauens an Sie verehrte Herren des Senats und würde Sie bitten, mir mitzuteilen, wie Sie über das Benehmen des Herrn Amtsarztes gegen mich denken.

Wenn ich unnormal wäre, würde ich wohl nicht verstehen, das Geld einzuteilen und die Zahlungen von unserm Grundstück allein zu erledigen. Auch den 1500 qm grossen Garten zum Anbau einzuteilen ist nicht einfach. Aber all dieses mache ich mit grösster Freude.

Nun bitte ich das Gericht noch einmal, so-lange mein Mann im Felde ist das Verfahren auszusetzen und auch die peinlichen Untersuchungen und Verhöre.

In der Hoffnung, keine Fehlbitte getan zu haben schliesst mit freundlichem Gruss

Heil Hitler

gez. Frau Pauline Lux,  
Bad Landeck i.Schles.  
Werkstrasse 2.





Copy!

Landeck, 22.07.1941

To

The Hereditary Health Court  
In Wrocław.

---

First of all, I thank the Judges for not proceeding with the operation while my husband is at the front. My husband sent me the letter from you and which cheered me very much. On 17.07. of this month I received the news from the Health Department at Habelschwerdt that I was to come today, 22.07., for an examination at the Municipal Hospital in Bad Landeck. I turned up at the appointed time. The first question the public doctor asked was when did I have my last attack. I said over three months ago. The doctor declared that the procedure must be carried out because it was hereditary epilepsy. I said that in 11 years we had not had children and did not wish to have them. The doctor would not let me say anything more and said I was not even to think of such excuses. Next he said: if you were normal, you would understand that the procedure must be carried out. All his questions were put in a very unpleasant tone. I said: but doctor, I am not abnormal. To which the response was: I did not say that, and if you are going to start lying then you can leave. He shouted so loud that if someone had been out in the corridor, they would have heard it clearly. I simply said that no one had talked to me in that tone before and it was very sad if that was the way the wife of a soldier was to be treated. To which I heard the reply: don't be so quick to brag about being a soldier's wife. I left with the greeting Heil Hitler. The doctor carried out no examination. I report this with a clear conscience and am prepared to swear to it.

Esteemed Judges!

I write these words with a heavy heart and am very unhappy after yesterday. My husband has not been on leave for 8 months. I can share my joys and sufferings only with him, and there is surely enough bitterness in the fact that I must bear everything alone, worrying about my dear husband and if he will ever return home. My isolation has become even more difficult as a result of the rudeness of the doctor. Our Führer surely does not wish a woman whose husband is at the front to be treated in this way. Nor do I wish to burden my husband and inform him of this, so I turn to you with complete confidence, esteemed Judges, and ask you to tell me what you think of the behaviour of the doctor towards me.

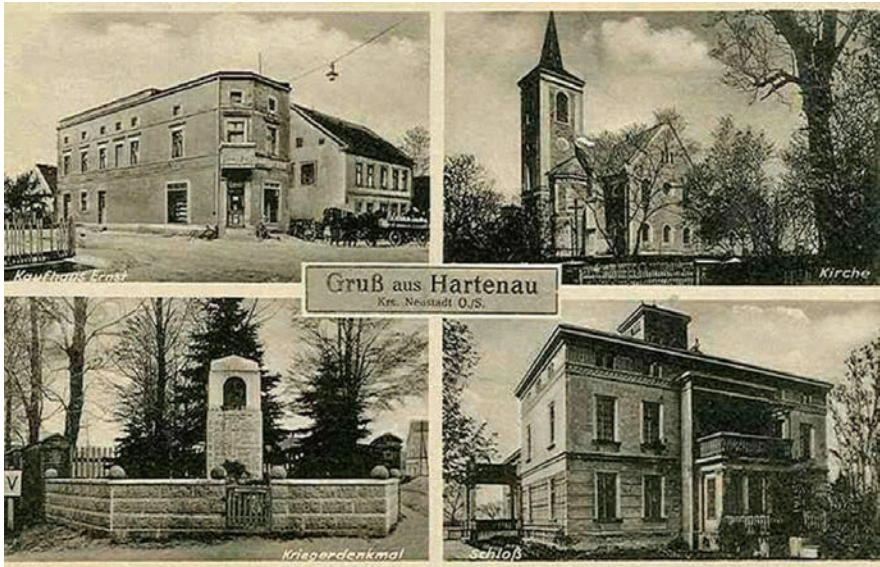
If I were not normal, I would not be able to manage money and independently make the necessary payments for our property. The management

of our garden and 1500 m<sup>2</sup> of land under cultivation is not easy either. But I am very happy to do all this.

Therefore I ask the court once again to defer this procedure, and the unpleasant questioning and examinations, while my husband is away at the front.

In the hope that I am not asking in vain, respectfully yours,

Heil Hitler  
sign. Mrs Pauline Lux,  
Bad Landeck in Silesia  
Werkstrasse 2.



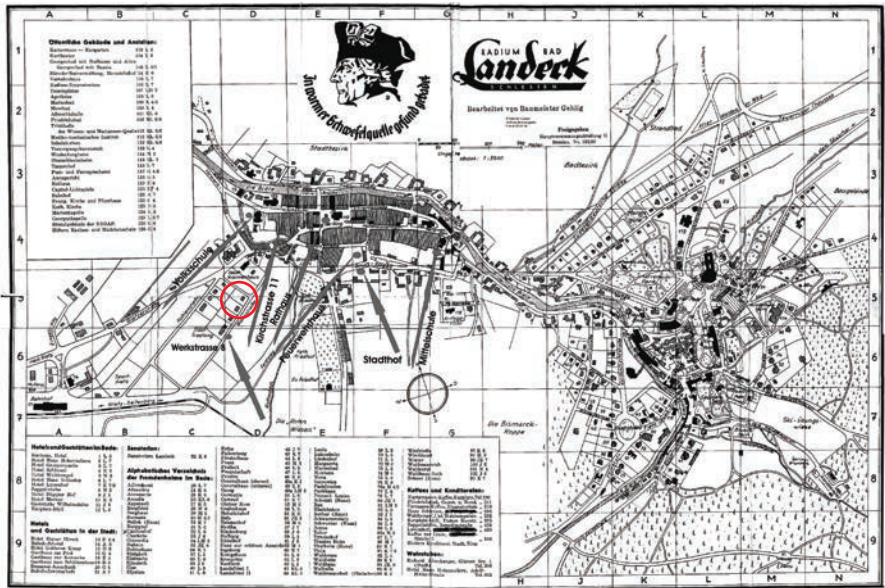
Postcard from Hartenau where Pauline Lux was born

Pauline Lux was born in Twardawa (Hartenau 1936–46). She had a husband – Paul, a locksmith – who was at the front in July 1941, probably in Bulgaria. He had not been granted leave for eight months. The woman was in contact with him by letter. Pauline was diagnosed with congenital epilepsy. According to the law, she should have been sterilized. The husband’s service in the Wehrmacht, however, worked in her favour. She believed that the Nazi authorities would respond immediately and stop the sterilization procedure.

We do not know Pauline’s age. The Luxes were childless. They lived at Werkstrasse 2 (ul. Fabryczna) in Bad Landeck (Łądek-Zdrój). Their house in Stadtbezirk can be located on a map from 1936, right next to the municipal hospital. Behind the house was a 1500 m<sup>2</sup> plot, which Pauline called a garden.

The Pauline Lux case began on 22 July 1941. A copy of the woman’s letter which has been preserved concerns her complaint about the behaviour of a health service doctor in Habelschwerdt (Bystrzyca Kłodzka). The Wrocław sterilization court postponed the sterilization procedure, but the woman was to report for further examination at the municipal hospital. It is very likely that all the neighbours knew about the court proceedings and about Pauline’s condition.

In the course of the examination, the doctor behaved coarsely: “if you were normal, you would understand that the procedure must be



From the collection geser-net.de

Plan of Bad Landeck

carried out".<sup>1</sup> The woman protested, and as a result was thrown out of the examination room. She attempted to defend herself, reminding him that she was the wife of a soldier. "Don't be so quick to brag"<sup>2</sup> – she heard in reply. Pauline pointed out that the examination did not take place and that she left with the customary: *Heil Hitler!*

Later in her letter, Pauline draws attention to the fact that she was very lonely in the absence of her husband. She had no one close with whom to talk. She trusted the authorities, and for this reason turned to the court with a plea for help: "Our Führer surely does not wish a woman whose husband is at the front to be treated in this way. Nor do I wish to burden my husband and inform him of this [that has happened to me], so I turn to you with complete confidence".<sup>3</sup> The judges were to stand in for Paul.

A very important sentence appears at the very end of Pauline's letter. The woman mentions that – despite what the local doctor may think – the examinations, questioning, and threat of surgery are very traumatic for her. She was fighting for her health in this letter. She was ready to do anything to halt the operation.

1 APWr, Rejencja wroclawska, sygn. 8428, p. 169.  
 2 Ibid., p. 170.  
 3 Ibid.



Bad Landeck, municipal hospital, where Pauline Lux underwent medical examination

Pauline's appeal was answered by Dr Dümchen from the Wrocław sterilization court (Ohlauer Strasse 45a – now ul. Oławska). The document signed by him is more than just a criticism of the behaviour of the local doctor from Bad Landeck. The author directly questioned the law for the prevention of hereditary disease: "I cannot test the truth of her [Pauline Lux's] statements. Needless to say, however, a sick woman, and what is more, the wife of a man fighting at the front, has a right to special attention and polite treatment. If information such as this spreads in the Wehrmacht, and furthermore at the front itself, the results will be unforeseeable. Epilepsy does not in any way diminish a person's worth. Epileptics can still find a place for themselves in life."<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, from April 1936, patients were examined more closely in terms of hereditary disease and their practical independence. It was recommended that doctors establish if patients were able to support themselves, look after a household, and so on. Further, doctors were obliged to ascertain the situation at a patient's workplace. If NSDAP members were concerned, a sterilization application was to be preceded by an appropriate interview.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, however, congenital

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> Reich Ministry of the Interior, decree of 22 April 1936, see: K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924-1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 251.





Photo: Herder Institute in Marburg

Wrocław, aerial view of the Old Town, Hereditary Health Court at Ohlauer Strasse 45a

epilepsy remained the fourth qualifying condition for sterilization, according to the law.

The doctor accused – Dr Hartwig – replied in two statements. On 28 July 1941 he sent a letter to the sterilization court in Wrocław. Almost a month later, he wrote to the authorities of the Wrocław province. According to his account, the examination of Pauline Lux was carried out at the request of the higher Hereditary Health Court. Hartwig denied that he had ever attacked Pauline Lux. The doctor claimed that the patient behaved rudely: “She was the one angered by the summons. [She said] that the matter was closed for her [and that] she was treated as abnormal everywhere. I replied that no one had said anything about ‘abnormality’. Mrs L. then bridled and began to insult me [...]. The statement: ‘Don’t be so quick to brag about being a soldier’s wife’ I must energetically deny and reject as untrue. During the conversation, Mrs L. behaved increasingly rudely towards me. Since I could not placate Mrs L. through kindness, I became energetic, with the result that Mrs L. eventually calmed down.”<sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to deduce from the doctor’s account if Pauline Lux really did behave rudely. The detail concerning the “energetic” attempt to calm the patient gives one pause. It is not clear what Hartwig meant,

---

6 APWr, Rejencja wroclawska, sygn. 8428, p. 179.

but the method was most likely physical. In the course of the examination, the woman indicated that she did not agree to the procedure, which the doctor found unacceptable. Later in his report, the doctor states brutally that Mrs Lux was certainly not a mentally healthy person: "I would not permit such behaviour from a person of completely sound physical and mental health. Such a member of the national community would meet with a polite, but energetic dismissal from me and a request to leave my office."<sup>7</sup>

Towards the end of the document, Hartwig complains that the duties involved in implementing the law were not the most pleasant, particularly when it came to the reactions of patients and their families. In the end, he attacked Pauline Lux as a person alien to the community and "abnormal". "With regard to Mrs L.'s appeal to the Führer, I would like to note that Mrs L. would better serve the Führer's law if she submitted to it, offering the national community the sacrifice of sterilization."<sup>8</sup> No more, no less.

In the report's final paragraph, the "energetic" doctor fires a shot at a member of the sterilization court: "It seems to me that before a judgement is made, it would be advisable, particularly in lawyers' circles, to hear the opposing party. In my opinion, as a doctor, it would not be immodest to claim that I am capable of forming a view on an individual's worth in the case of epilepsy."<sup>9</sup>

We do not know the final decision in the case of the sterilization of Pauline Lux. We do know, however, what threatened people diagnosed with epilepsy at that time.

Not quite four months earlier – on 28 April 1941 – Walter Lauer was gassed at the Pirna-Sonnenstein centre in Saxony.<sup>10</sup> He was nineteen years old. He had suffered epileptic attacks since the age of seven. He was not subjected to forced sterilization. In April 1940, he wrote a letter to his parents which was retained by the centre's management: 'Dear Mom, [although] I would be very happy if you could visit, I ask you not to embark on such a long journey, it could affect your health badly, big military transports will surely be happening now – if you can, send me an Easter parcel. If Father could visit me during the holiday,

---

7 Ibid., p. 180.

8 Ibid.

9 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 180.

10 According to estimates, 13,720 people were murdered in Pirna-Sonnenstein in 1940–41 as part of the T4 programme, and an additional thousand prisoners of concentration camps over the summer of 1941. T. Nasierowski, *Zagłada osób z zaburzeniami psychicznymi w okupowanej Polsce. Początek ludobójstwa*, (Warsaw, 2008), pp. 54–59; Pirna-Sonnenstein Memorial Site, <https://www.stsg.de/cms/pirna/startseite> [accessed 1 August 2019].



you would not have to spend so much, since Father has a Wehrmacht discount. [...] I am in the tailor's workshop here as well, but are they pleased with me? Don't worry, I'm not doing anything silly. [...] When the war ends, the secret of this centre will come out too, and maybe for some people the penny will finally drop."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> G. Aly, *Die Belasteten. „Euthanasie“ 1933-1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt a. Main, 2013), pp. 90-91.





---

**Frieda  
Jäschke  
1944**

---



Staatl. Gesundheitsamt  
Frankenstein/Schl.

Frankenstein , den 30. 12. 44

Regierung Wreslau  
- 5. JAN 1945 V.

M ✓

zoll  
8/10  
1/1

An  
den Herrn Regierungspräsidenten

Breslau  
.....

Betr.: Versager bei Unfruchtbarmachung.  
-----

Die an angeborenen Schwachsinn leidende Frieda Jäschke geb. 20. 5. 21, wohnhaft in Lauenbrunn (Aktenzeichen der Erbgesundheitsgerichtsakten 4 XII J. 114/36) ist am 21. 8. 36 im Krankenhaus Bethanien, Frankenstein durch Dr. Daerr sterilisiert worden. Die Jäschke ist trotzdem jetzt wieder Schwanger geworden. Die Schwangerschaft im 3. Monat ist am 2. 11. 44 durch Unterbrechung wieder beseitigt worden (siehe Anlage), der Operationsbericht von Dr. Daerr liegt gleichfalls bei. Eine histologische Untersuchung der ausgeschnittenen Eileiterteile hat nicht stattgefunden. Der Operateur führt das Versagen des Eingriffes auf eine Abstufung der Ligaturen zurück.

Von hier aus sind besondere Bemerkungen nicht zu machen. Es ist bisher der erste Versager, der bei dem Operateur Dr. Daerr bei sterilisierten Frauen beobachtet worden ist.

*W. J. ...*  
Medizinalrat

2 Anlagen

Letter from the medical advisor to the president of the Wrocław province concerning failed sterilization of Friede Jäschke





State Health Department  
Frankenstein/Silesia

Frankenstein, 30.12.44

To  
the president  
of province  
Wrocław

Concerning: Unsuccessful sterilization

---

Frieda Jäschke, b. 20.05.1921, of Lauenbrunn (Hereditary Health Court reference 4 XII J. 114/36), who has a congenital disability, was sterilized on 21.08.1936 by Dr Daerr at the Bethania hospital in Frankenstein. Despite this, Jäschke became pregnant again. The pregnancy was terminated in the third month on 02.11.1944 (see the attachment); an account of the surgical procedure supplied by Dr Daerr is also included. No histological examination of the removed fallopian tubes was carried out. The surgeon blames the failure of the procedure on the rejection of the ligature.

There are no further remarks on our part. This is the first known unsuccessful female sterilization by the surgeon Dr Daerr.

*Willimsky*  
Medical advisor

2 attachments





Frankenstein, Bethania Hospital

In the Wrocław province, from the moment the law applied until the end of 1937, 6,086 people were sterilized – 2,927 men and 3,159 women.<sup>1</sup> Among them was Frieda Jäschke of Lauenbrunn (Tepliwoda till 1936, Ciepłowody in the county of Ząbkowice after 1945). She was diagnosed with congenital mental deficiency. The woman was sterilized on 21 August 1936 in the Bethania hospital in Frankenstein (Ząbkowice Śląskie) about 20 kilometres from her home. The operation was carried out by Dr Johannes Daerr, who had been performing sterilizations since 1934. Eight years later, Frieda returned to the hospital pregnant. Medical advisor Willimsky,<sup>2</sup> described Frieda as: “the first known unsuccessful female sterilization by the surgeon Dr Daerr”.<sup>3</sup> Nothing more.

The documentation concerning Frieda Jäschke dates from the end of December 1944. On 6 September that year, the sterilization programme was completely suspended until further notice, due to the general mobilization and the situation at the front. In his book on forced sterilization in Lower Silesia, Stefan Kasperek talks about the symbolism of the final page preserved in the medical documentation: “The programme’s

1 See: S. Kasperek, “Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934–1944”, *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 57; K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924–1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 269.

2 The same medical advisor diagnosed Hedwig Wenzel. See p. 107.

3 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8422, p. 183.

last document from this region is dated 30.XII.1944 and concerns the pregnancy of a previously sterilized woman. Such incidents, specially recorded throughout the programme's duration, were not isolated."<sup>4</sup>

Only three documents have been preserved in the State Archive in Wrocław concerning Frieda Jäschke. We do not know if anyone tried to prevent the sterilization of the sixteen-year-old girl in mid-1936. We know she was unmarried and her date of birth was 20 May 1921. These are the sole details to be found in the official and medical records. The medical error was more important than the patient herself.

It is hard to say what influenced the decision of the court in the case of this young woman, who referred her for sterilization, or how the mental deficiency was ascertained. At the time of the operation, Frieda was a minor. What was the position of her family and those close to her? Perhaps the diagnosis was similar to that of D.: "D. Could not cope at school and left after the third class, failing to pass in the majority of subjects. Serious gaps also emerged in intelligence tests conducted in the Polish language. The court for genetic health ordered that D. be observed. [...] His poor knowledge of the language meant that specialist tests to gauge the level of intelligence met with difficulty, since they could be conducted only in Polish. D. is able to write his surname and a few letters. He does not know how to count. He kept getting up and laughing for no reason."<sup>5</sup>

The sterilization application in the boy's case was rejected as a result of his guardian's objections. In the presence of an interpreter, D. was able to answer all the questions, despite being unable to read, write, or count: "It was also ascertained that his groundless giggling was a sign of confusion."<sup>6</sup> In the case of Frieda, however, the sterilization went ahead.

In May 1939, Lauenbrunn had 1529 inhabitants,<sup>7</sup> including 764 women. Frieda was one of them.

The surname Jäschke appears four times in the directory of addresses for 1939<sup>8</sup>:

- Ernst Jäschke – stonemason – house no. 75
- Luise Jäschke – pensioner – house no. 66
- Paul Jäschke – farmhand – house no. 65
- Selma Jäschke – a painter's widow – no. 86.

---

4 Kasperek, "Przymusowe sterylizacje", p. 60.

5 Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 252.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

7 Statistics based on the study: *Erinnerungen an Lauenbrunn. Krs. Frankenstein - Schleswig*, Kurt Schüttler (Hasbergen, 1988), pp. 176-77.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 172.



Map of Lauenbrunn in October 1939

Unfortunately, it is hard to establish which family was Frieda's. Ernst had a wife, Anna, and they certainly lived at the house at no. 42.<sup>9</sup> Nothing is known about Luise. Paul died during the war.<sup>10</sup> Selma worked in a provisions store. Her husband Erwin was a painter and died very early. They lived in a sizeable multi-family house which was attached to the forge. Selma and Erwin probably had three sons.<sup>11</sup> One of them, also called Erwin, was immortalized in a school photograph of 1921. A small girl can also be seen on the photograph – Lisabeth Jäschke, who could have been Erwin's sister or cousin.<sup>12</sup> The Jäschke family house has been marked on a postcard of Tepliwoda from 1920, and labelled: Martin Jeschke's Warenhandlung.<sup>13</sup> Martin was most likely the father of Erwin the painter. There was also Fritz and his family who lived in a multi-family house at no. 72.<sup>14</sup> But there is no trace of Frieda.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 158.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> In a study on the history of Lauenbrunn, the author uses Jäschke i Jeschke interchangeably.

<sup>14</sup> *Erinnerungen an Lauenbrunn*, p. 70.





Photo: Polska-org.pl

Pre-war postcard from Tepliwoda, 1915–25

On the basis of three surviving reports, it can be ascertained that Frieda's case was concluded on 30 December 1944. The letter from the District Health Office in Frankenstein reached the province administration on 5 January 1945. The pregnancy had already been terminated on 2 November 1944, in the third month, without waiting for a reply from Dr Daerr who did not respond to Frieda's case until 7 November. His report ends with the sentence: "This is the first unsuccessful sterilization I have performed; all procedures followed the same method."<sup>15</sup> Dr Johannes Daerr was also responsible for the sterilization of Hedwig Wenzel in March 1941.<sup>16</sup>

The progress of the "case", though not the patient's state of health, was reported by Dr Erna Rummeld-Tilk, a specialist in women's ailments. We even know that she telephoned the administration in Frankenstein ten days after the abortion. She did not send a confirmation letter until the end of December. In 1944, Dr Rummeld was forty-three, and Frieda Jäschke – twenty-three years old. Dr Rummeld died in 1974. It is not known what happened to Frieda.

<sup>15</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8422, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> See p. 107.







---

**“Inferior” victims**

---



Some patients subjected to forced sterilization died as a result of post-surgical complications. Maria Treidler died at the age of twenty-four – four hours after the procedure. Her death certificate bears the date 14 October 1937.<sup>1</sup> Her personal details: unemployed, single. No address or precise date of birth.

Maria's operation was carried out by Dr Engel (gynaecologist) who worked at All Saints Hospital in Wrocław from 1936 to 1938 (Kranken-hospital zu Allerheiligen in Breslau). By the end of 1937, sixteen doctors from this hospital had carried out 694 operations sterilizing men and women.<sup>2</sup> Maria had an infection cluster in her lung. Eunarcon was used as an anaesthetic during the operation. Her urine samples revealed no trace of any damage to the liver. Her pulse and breathing were normal throughout the operation. Four hours after surgery, breathing difficulties appeared. The woman was given a whole series of medication. Her breath grew weaker. She died at exactly 19.07. The autopsy was carried out by Dr Ausbüttel.

Maria Treidler was one of eighteen female victims of sterilization operations in the Wrocław province. Apart from her, in June 1935 there died: Gertruda Hanke, Charlotte Sander, Elza Schmeckan, Klara Zeuner, Maria Tietze, Anna Sperling, Jadwiga Pelzel, Emma Zeisberg, Elfryda Hötzel, Martha Bergel, Dorota Rahner, Charlotta Woschlinisky, Gertruda Laufner, Małgorzata Lehnert, Elżbieta Rinke, Annamaria Exner and Elli Schefel. In all likelihood (we don't have all the personal data), the eldest was thirty-eight and the youngest fourteen years old.

There was a much greater risk of death due to complications for women than for men: "Of 4,000 women sterilized in the province, 18 deaths are known to be connected with the surgical procedure. In actual fact, there were undoubtedly many more. [...] The lack of evidence for male deaths probably results from a gap in the archival material. [...] The most common complications were infection, particularly of the lungs or peritoneum."<sup>3</sup> The incompetence of some doctors was another cause of death.

The story of Maria Treidler survives only as an example of a "medical mistake". Everything we know about this woman – the details of the operation, medication, and results of the autopsy – were sent to Berlin on the instructions of Dr Herbert Linden. Maria's case came back to

---

1 All information regarding Maria Treidler: APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8427, pp. 318–22. Cf. S. Kasperek, "Przymusowe sterylizacje w rejencji wrocławskiej 1934–1944", *Przegląd Lekarski* 1979, nr 1, p. 58; K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924–1944* (Toruń, 2003), p. 265.

2 Kasperek, "Przymusowe sterylizacje", p. 54.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Wrocław in March 1938. Linden requested that medical documents be sent concerning “the fatal incident during a sterilization at All Saints Hospital in Wrocław”. The province administration replied on 11 April. After studying the documentation, the case was pronounced closed. Maria and a dozen or so other women had died as a consequence of a procedure which was not a penalty, but a “salvation”. We do not know where her grave is to be found.

/

It began with sterilization legislation – it ended with the Final Solution. The dozen biographies of victims of forced sterilization in Lower Silesia at the turn of the 1930s and 40s provide no more than an outline of the procedure – an extract from the files – a tiny fragment of a complicated story. In this case, the letters requesting “acquittal” provide a point of departure to tell the bio-political history of the Third Reich. Their writers often regarded themselves as fully legitimate citizens of the Reich. They did not wish to be part of the so-called margins. They did not oppose policies persecuting particular groups. They fought only for the right to have descendants and to make decisions for their own bodies without state interference. Some also wished to bring glory to the national-socialist community, but not at the cost of their own health.

In the Third Reich, those suffering from inherited conditions were treated as a symbol of hidden disease. Some families rejected “suspected” members. Some of the sick appealed against the judgement. Not many rebelled against the operation. They are the heroes and heroines of this book. Some – for the good of their families – agreed to the procedure, in order to forget the shame as quickly as possible. One condition was that the operation take place away from their home towns. Far from their neighbours.<sup>4</sup>

The letters of many relatives of the sick to Hitler are a record of fear in the face of losing someone dear. At the same time, each successive personal document of the heroes and heroines witnesses to their battle for recognition. No one wanted to be counted among the “burdened”. Local communities, such as Schönwalde, Lauenbrunn, Rogau-Rosenau, or Schwiebedawe, became distrustful. Fellow citizens posed uncomfortable questions, medical confidentiality lost any meaning, and if one member of a family was sick, suspicion fell on all the rest. The writers of the letters thus tried to prove their “innocence”. They submitted all possible medical information simply to cast off the odium of hereditary

---

4 Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 265.

disease. The one possible rescue from the sentence was to prove that the mental impairment or other disorder was the result of a trauma which was now in the past.

The families of the “inferior” were under the constant supervision of the local doctor. The law preventing offspring with hereditary diseases permitted secret investigations involving practically all the members of a given community. Any concerns that a family member might be presenting symptoms of a condition listed in the bill were to be reported immediately. Anyone could supply information. Neighbours repeated gossip and a representative of the state health services was “informed” of the existence of a suspected “occurrence”. The health of the community was also monitored by school doctors and medical support staff. Thanks to the work of “informers”, a data bank was formed which served to monitor citizens for years. It catalogued not citizens, but merely “defective genetic material”.

/

In the records preserved in the Wrocław province, the account of a “medical case” is often limited to a single document. The best-preserved collection consists of bills for successive sterilization procedures on which the names and surnames of patients are listed. Nothing more was required. An invoice was drawn up for each consecutive procedure. The human being was of no importance at all.

Some of these records will probably never see the light of day. The reasons are prosaic: today, the letters of families and close friends are practically illegible. It is hard to decipher the handwriting or make out damaged documents. Some biographies cannot be reconstructed. There are too many gaps. It is much easier to find a doctor who carried out such procedures than any trace of a patient. Those sterilized disappeared, and the medical staff continued in their professions – even after the war.<sup>5</sup>

The political views held by the heroes and heroines of these biographies should not affect the process of commemorating them. It is hard to decide if the family of a sick person was sincerely devoted to the national socialist party, or if they were trying to use every available argument in the fight against sterilization. The majority of letters are addressed to the “dear Führer” who could influence the decision of

---

5 Cf. E. Klee, *Deutsche Medizin im Dritten Reich: Karrieren vor und nach 1945* (Berlin, 2001); G. Aly, *Die Belasteten. „Euthanasie“ 1933–1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt a. Main, 2013).

the court. They did not know what could influence the decision of the Chancellor, but they had blind faith in his power.

In some cases, military service rescued the situation. In others – recruitment in the army was tantamount to a sentence. If the military doctor in the Schweidnitz district command had not informed on Alfons Bittner, then maybe he would have managed to avoid surgery. The man's severe mental impairment was first noted during the recruitment process in August 1939. In addition – as the school tutor reported – Alfons was “clearly drawn to physical contact with other pupils, which was interpreted as a dangerous sexual predisposition”.<sup>6</sup>

In accordance with the law, social status had no influence on a sterilization ruling. The most important thing was genetic disease. This provision remained on paper only. In many cases, suspected congenital intellectual impairment was used as a point of departure to harass individuals from poorer families. They were classified as “asocial”.

For the authorities, the most important concern with regard to potential victims of sterilization was their capacity to be self-sufficient.<sup>7</sup> Family wealth also had enormous influence on the court's decision, along with an individual's origins, criminal record and local reputation. From this perspective, the law on preventing offspring with hereditary disease was the first step in apprehending and stigmatizing individuals recognised to be a threat to national socialist society. In reality, those with criminal records, or citizens who were inconvenient from a political or social point of view, could be deemed genetically “burdened” or “afflicted”.<sup>8</sup> The definition of “asocial” was a broad one and never conclusively clarified.

In the case of “severe alcoholism”, as listed in the bill, only social considerations applied. A “flawed” family history could lead to the sterilization of a child over the age of ten. This was the fate of Frau D.,<sup>9</sup> who was sterilized at the age of seventeen (1938).<sup>10</sup> She was deemed a “social

---

6 APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8428, p. 157.

7 Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 251.

8 Cf. G. Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986); C. Spring, *Zwischen Krieg und Euthanasie. Zwangssterilisationen in Wien 1940–1945* (Wien–Köln–Weimar, 2009); H. Amesberger, B. Halbmayr and E. Rajal, “*Arbeitsscheu und moralisch verkommen*”. *Verfolgung von Frauen als ‘Asoziale’ im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin–Wien, 2019), pp. 25–30.

9 Frau (Miss) D. is the pseudonym adopted by the witness for the purposes of an interview with Christa Paul and Reinhild Kassing. Cf. Ch. Paul, *Zwangsprostitution. Staatlich Eerrihete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1994).

10 Ch. Paul and R. Sommer, “SS-Bordelle und Oral History. Problematische Quellen und die Existenz von Bordellen für die SS in Konzentrationslagern”, *BIOS* 19, no. 1 (2006), pp. 124–42; J. Ostrowska, *Przemilczane. Seksualna praca przymusowa w czasie II wojny światowej* (Warsaw, 2018), p. 108–11.



misfit". She had three siblings and came from a broken home. The father did not support the children financially. The mother and children presumably barely eked out an existence. Frau D. was transferred to a home for difficult youth and diagnosed "sexually dangerous". To the end of her life, she was not recognized as a victim of Nazi persecution. She received a one-off payment of 5,000 marks as compensation for the sterilization procedure. She died at the age of 77.

/

*Of course, I would have preferred to learn that [my grandmother] had been in the Resistance, that she had endangered her own life by hiding Jews, or simply that she had sabotaged components in the factory where she was working – or anything else that one could be proud of. We always dream of having a glorious family, whatever kind of glory it might be. But there is no changing the past. The best you can do is to ask yourself: what can be made of this history of which I am so ashamed?<sup>11</sup>*

---

**Didier Eribon**

To date, the heroes and heroines of this book have not been recognized as victims of the Nazi regime. They belong to one more group of forgotten victims of Nazism.

From 1934, at least 10,379 people were sterilized in Wrocław and Opole provinces.<sup>12</sup> Of these, 7,238 were from the Wrocław district. The figures were undoubtedly higher, especially as the listings for 1938 have not survived. Hundreds of bills, reports, and letters concerning those referred for surgery, or those who managed to avoid it, are the only traces of their existence. Names and surnames will remain on the pages of these documents alone. In the Polish collective memory, the victims of forced sterilization do not exist.<sup>13</sup> First of all, they remain anonymous; secondly, most were of German descent; thirdly, their suffering (often

---

<sup>11</sup> D. Eribon, *Returning to Reims*, trans. M. Lucey (Los Angeles, 2013), p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> Claudia Spring, among others, has written about the lack of commemoration and recognition of this group of war victims: C. Spring, "Lautes Reden und vielsagendes Schweigen. NS-Zwangsterilisationen und ihre Rechtfertigung nach 1945", in: *Diktatorenpuppe zerstört, Schaden gering*, ed. by L. Bolyos and K. Morawek (Vienna, 2013), pp. 157–61.

dating from before the war) is taboo. On the one hand, national stereotypes are in play, on the other – the stigma of mental illness. Some of those forcibly sterilized are still described with impunity as “devoted followers of Hitler”, or as people “from the social margins” who got the punishment they deserved. Today, their nationality, party affiliation and political preferences should not influence the selection process of Polish collective memory. Unfortunately, the complete opposite is the case. For many today, the German is still the perpetrator – he never was, is, or can be the victim.<sup>14</sup>

In Poland, over 70 years after the war, their memory is of no value – it does not exist, as it does not exist for other groups of forgotten victims of Nazism who are overlooked because of their background, sexual orientation, religion, or reasons for arrest. In addition, there is the stigma of double exclusion. If someone has been forgotten, then it must be for the best. The abhorrence of mental illness is so strong, that it is better to sacrifice the memory of the victims for the good of those who are living here and now. Perhaps, too, the family of a victim do not wish people to know that one of their own was deemed ill, with disability, asocial, incapable and, ultimately, defective. From 1934, in the Wrocław province, people were sterilized from cities, villages, and towns which were integrated into Poland after 1945. If they survived – they were driven out.<sup>15</sup> Their experiences and biographies are part of the history of this region.

Their suffering is a missing element of Polish collective memory and should be recovered at last.

**Joanna Ostrowska**

---

14 In Warsaw, during the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Warsaw Uprising, a member of the All-Polish Youth, Mateusz Marzoch, chanted: “One bullet, one German”. He was answered by a crowd hundreds strong. A. Szczęśniak, *Narodowcy: “Jedna kula, jeden Niemiec”. Policja na ich usługach blokuje pracę “lewackiej szczujni OKO.press”*, <https://oko.press/narodowcy-jedna-kula-jeden-niemiec-aktywistki-pamietamy-i-prosimy-o-opamietanie-duzo-zdjec/> [accessed 8 August 2019].

15 Cf. among others: H. Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer. Deutsche in polnischen Lagern 1944–1950* (Berlin, 1998); M. Weber, *Frauen auf der Flucht* (Bielefeld, 2005); H. Plüschke, E. von Schwerin and U. Pless-Damm, *Wypędzone. Historie Niemek ze Śląska, z Pomorza i Prus Wschodnich. Trzy szczere świadectwa kobiet bezbronnych wobec zwycięzców*, trans. E. Czerwiakowska (Warsaw, 2013).

---

# Afterword

---



## **“Those who are hereditarily ill can be subjected to sterilization...” Sterilization for eugenic reasons in the Wrocław province (1934-44)**

The mechanisms of excluding have a long history, but in the first three decades of the twentieth century – the “glory days” of the then internationally successful eugenics movement – exclusion had a somewhat different dimension: the already considerable fear at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of the degeneration of the human species, supposedly the result of the genetic transmission of all kinds of disability,<sup>1</sup> intensified tendencies to stigmatize the sick. Various “healing” programmes arose in response to the growing sense of threat, to mention only sanitation reforms and campaigns to combat social diseases, such as alcoholism or prostitution (the social hygiene movement), or intervention in procreation and the reinforcement of processes of selection/elimination (the eugenics movement). The birth of a new scientific field – genetics – at the threshold of the twentieth century,<sup>2</sup> and the accompanying growing trend towards biological determinism, encouraged decisive action and the first decades of the century saw a growing interest in sterilization as a method of improving the quality of future generations.<sup>3</sup>

Support for radical solutions also grew in Germany, where, on a wave of post-war frustration and difficulties resulting from the world economic crisis, there was “a climate of moral consent for an instrumental approach to certain categories of people who, whether for economic or health reasons, were proving a burden to German society”.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 30s, the “sterilization debate” emerged from the secluded laboratories of a narrow group of specialists and became a subject of discussion on the forum of state bodies colonizing a field

- 
- 1 The theory of the degeneration of the human species, published in 1857 by the French psychiatrist Bénédict Augustin Morel (1809–1873), stated that this was a process arising in response to the influence of unfavourable environmental conditions, with pathological characteristics being passed down through the generations with increasing intensity. The theory was therefore one of the possible interpretations of the concept of the inheritance of acquired characteristics known as Lamarckism.
  - 2 In 1900, the laws of inheritance formulated by Gregor Mendel in 1865 were becoming known. Hugo de Vries, Carl Correns and Erich von Tschermak came to Mendel's work quite independently and confirmed his findings. In 1905, William Bateson introduced the term “genetics”, and in 1909 Wilhelm Johannsen introduced the term “gene”, replacing the previously used term “hereditary factor”.
  - 3 From 1907, sterilizations for eugenic reasons were carried out in the state of Indiana, USA. By 1939, 30 US states had introduced sterilization laws and between 1907 and 1939, 45 thousand people underwent the procedure; sterilization legislation was also introduced in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, in the states of the Scandinavian Peninsula, and the Baltic states.
  - 4 M. Musielak, *Steryliczacja ludzi ze względów eugenicznych w Stanach Zjednoczonych, Niemczech i w Polsce (1899-1945)* (Poznań, 2008), p. 165.

that was previously the domain of welfare schemes. In July 1932, one theme discussed at a meeting of the Prussian State Health Commission (*Preussische Landesgesundheitsrat*), was “Eugenics in the service of social welfare” (*Eugenik im Dienst der Volkswahrtpflege*). Their deliberations led to a legislative initiative in November 1932 which was presented as a draft bill for voluntary sterilization for eugenic reasons, which envisaged that an “individual suffering from a hereditary mental illness, mental impairment, epilepsy or other similar hereditary condition, or a carrier of such conditions, can be subjected to sterilization insofar as they give their consent and if, according to medical research and knowledge, there is a high probability that any offspring of theirs could expect to suffer severe physical or mental disability”<sup>5</sup> This draft served as the “matrix” for the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases of 14 July 1933.

### **“A billion on hereditary sick – a year’s expenses”**

On 21 November 1933, the Wrocław daily *Nationalsozialistische Schlesische Tageszeitung* published some alarming statistics concerning state spending on social services. At the beginning of 1930s, as Friedrich Burgdörfer, director of the Reich Statistical Office, reports, around 6 million people enjoyed state support, and the costs of maintaining the welfare system came to around 2 billion RM annually, at least 1 billion of which was spent on caring for: “the hereditarily ill, asocial elements, and criminals”, who, according to Burgdörfer’s calculations, numbered around 1.6 million. Aware that such speculation could provoke alarm among war invalids, pensioners or victims of the economic crisis, forced to rely on public resources, the author clearly emphasises that liabilities regarding social welfare are unavoidable. Nevertheless, he underlines that: “At least part of these nonproductive expenses, which are borne by the biologically and socially healthy element of the population, hindering its biological development, could be avoided by introducing eugenically-based population policies, namely the timely prevention of completely unrestrained procreation by hereditarily ill, asocial and inferior elements [of society].”<sup>6</sup> In this way, sterilization for eugenic reasons was discreetly introduced into the arsenal of social welfare measures.

---

5 *Die Eugenik im Dienste der Volkswohlfahrt*, in: *Eugenik, Erblehre, Erbpflege* (1932), Bd. 2, H. 11/12, pp. 248–49.

6 *Eine Milliarde für Erbkrankte – die Ausgaben eines Jahres* [A billion on hereditary diseases – a year’s expenses], *Nationalsozialistische Schlesische Tageszeitung*, 4/299 (1933).

The article was published shortly before the Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*) of 14 July 1933 came into force; the Law provided for the forced sterilization of genetically diseased (*erbkrank*) individuals whose offspring, in accordance with medical experience and knowledge, had a high probability of being afflicted with significant physical or mental disability. For the purposes of the law, “the hereditarily ill” included those who had been diagnosed with congenital mental deficiency, schizophrenia, manic-depressive psychosis, hereditary epilepsy, Huntingdon’s disease, hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness, serious developmental problems and severe alcoholism.<sup>7</sup>

Complicated questions of genetic inheritance could not stir the imaginations of an audience lacking adequate preparation. Meanwhile, the pedantic calculations of annual expenditure on the sick residing in asylums which began appearing in the press, the suggestive juxtaposition of the daily costs of maintaining persons with physical (6 RM) and mental (4.50 RM) disabilities with the daily pay of a healthy German worker (2.50 RM)<sup>8</sup> could provoke the sensitively strung imaginations of citizens harrowed by crisis. Statistical data, underpinned by skillful manipulative language and the image of “degenerates” in the background, paved the way for the smooth introduction of legislation, which fundamentally restructured the private lives of thousands of Germans. The sterilization law was, after all, the first, but not only legal act regulating the intimate lives of citizens with the aim of “raising the vital quality of the German nation”. “The sense of these laws and the rapidity with which they were issued cannot be grasped as long as they are confined to the domain of eugenics. What is

decisive is that for the Nazis these laws had an immediately political character.”<sup>9</sup>

---

7 *Reichsgesetzblatt I* (1933), p. 529. Ernst Rüdin and his colleagues who worked on the act were aware that the catalogue of indicators for sterilization was based only on certain assumptions and the confirmation of the level of risk of inheriting these conditions required further research. In the meantime, an individual approach was recommended during examination and the formulation of a “hereditary prognosis”.

8 “Die Belastung des deutschen Volkes durch krankhaft Veranlagte”, *Nationalsozialistische Schlesische Tageszeitung*, 5/104 (1934).

9 G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California, 1998), p. 95.



# Reichsgesetzblatt

## Teil I

1933	Ausgegeben zu Berlin, den 25. Juli 1933	Nr. 86
<b>Inhalt:</b>		
	Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses. Vom 14. Juli 1933	§ 529
	Fünfte Verordnung zur Durchführung der Verordnung über die Devisenbewirtschaftung. Vom 20. Juli 1933	§ 531
	Verordnung über die Errichtung einer vorläufigen Filmkammer. Vom 22. Juli 1933	§ 531
	Verordnung über Zolländerungen und Ausführschein. Vom 24. Juli 1933	§ 533
	Verordnung zur Durchführung des Gesetzes über die Aufhebung der im Kampf für die nationale Erhebung erlittenen Dienststrafen und sonstigen Maßregelungen. Vom 25. Juli 1933	§ 535

### Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses. Vom 14. Juli 1933.

Die Reichsregierung hat das folgende Gesetz beschlossen, das hiermit verkündet wird:

#### § 1

(1) Wer erbkrank ist, kann durch chirurgischen Eingriff unfruchtbar gemacht (sterilisiert) werden, wenn nach den Erfahrungen der ärztlichen Wissenschaft mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit zu erwarten ist, daß seine Nachkommen an schweren körperlichen oder geistigen Erbshäden leiden werden.

(2) Erbkrank im Sinne dieses Gesetzes ist, wer an einer der folgenden Krankheiten leidet:

1. angeborenem Schwachsinne,
2. Schizophrenie,
3. zirkulärem (manisch-depressivem) Irresein,
4. erblicher Fallsucht,
5. erblichem Weistanz (Huntington'sche Chorea),
6. erblicher Blindheit,
7. erblicher Taubheit,
8. schwerer erblicher körperlicher Mißbildung.

(3) Ferner kann unfruchtbar gemacht werden, wer an schwerem Alkoholismus leidet.

#### § 2

(1) Antragsberechtigt ist derjenige, der unfruchtbar gemacht werden soll. Ist dieser geschäftsunfähig oder wegen Geisteschwäche entmündigt oder hat er das achtzehnte Lebensjahr noch nicht vollendet, so ist der gesetzliche Vertreter antragsberechtigt; er bedarf dazu der Genehmigung des Vormundschaftsgerichts. In den übrigen Fällen beschränkter Geschäftsfähigkeit bedarf der Antrag der Zustimmung des gesetzlichen Vertreters. Hat ein Volljähriger einen Pfleger für seine Person erhalten, so ist dessen Zustimmung erforderlich.

(2) Dem Antrag ist eine Bescheinigung eines für das Deutsche Reich approbierten Arztes beizufügen, daß der Unfruchtbarzumachende über das Wesen und die Folgen der Unfruchtbarmachung aufgeklärt worden ist.

(3) Der Antrag kann zurückgenommen werden.

#### § 3

Die Unfruchtbarmachung können auch beantragen

1. der beamtete Arzt,
2. für die Inassen einer Kranken-, Heil- oder Pflegeanstalt oder einer Strafanstalt der Anstaltsleiter.

#### § 4

Der Antrag ist schriftlich oder zur Niederschrift der Geschäftsstelle des Erbgesundheitsgerichts zu stellen. Die dem Antrag zu Grunde liegenden Tatsachen sind durch ein ärztliches Gutachten oder auf andere Weise glaubhaft zu machen. Die Geschäftsstelle hat dem beamteten Arzt von dem Antrag Kenntnis zu geben.

#### § 5

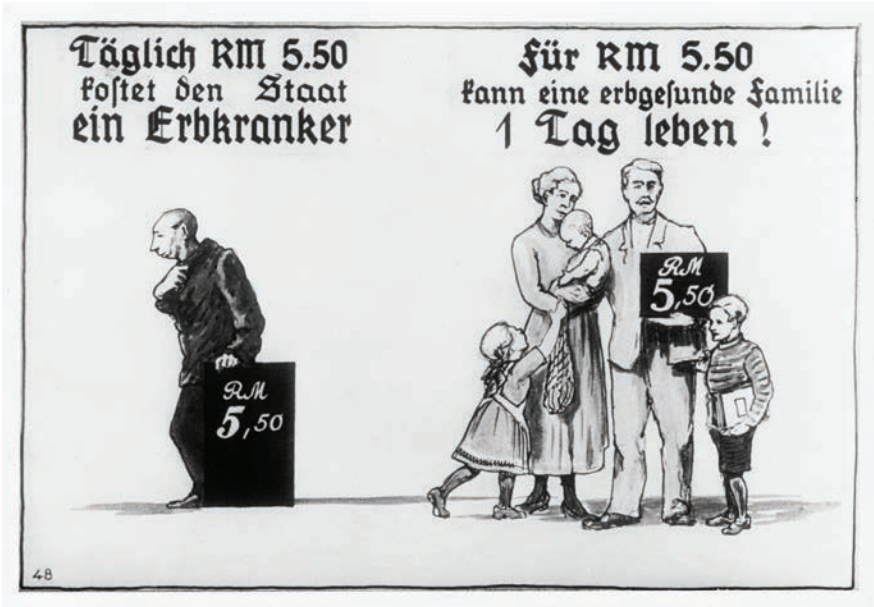
Zuständig für die Entscheidung ist das Erbgesundheitsgericht, in dessen Bezirk der Unfruchtbarzumachende seinen allgemeinen Gerichtsstand hat.

#### § 6

(1) Das Erbgesundheitsgericht ist einem Amtsgericht anzugliedern. Es besteht aus einem Amtsrichter als Vorsitzenden, einem beamteten Arzt und einem weiteren für das Deutsche Reich approbierten Arzt, der mit der Erbgesundheitslehre besonders vertraut ist. Für jedes Mitglied ist ein Vertreter zu bestellen.

(2) Als Vorsitzender ist ausgeschlossen, wer über einen Antrag auf vormundschaftsgerichtliche Genehmigung nach § 2 Abs. 1 entschieden hat. Hat ein beamteter Arzt den Antrag gestellt, so kann er bei der Entscheidung nicht mitwirken.

The text of the Law to Prevent Hereditary Sick Progeny, published in "Reichsgesetzblatt", 25 July 1933



Propaganda poster. "Comparison" of the daily cost of living for a person with a hereditary disease and a healthy family

### ***Kindersegen* – blessed with children**

Directing the population's birth-rate included projects aimed at eliminating undesirable genetic material (negative eugenics) while at the same time increasing material considered valuable from a biological perspective (positive eugenics).<sup>10</sup> This demanded the promotion of procreation on a hitherto unknown scale, and various financial incentives were introduced for people who satisfied the criteria of "hereditary health". This policy of selective pronatalism included loans for young married couples, benefits for large families (*kinderreiche Familien*)<sup>11</sup> and gestures of a purely symbolic character – orders of merit and honorary books for the German-Mother. "During this time" Gisela Bock notes, "Gebärzwang (compulsory childbearing) did not go beyond what was usual. National Socialist compulsion and terror was reserved for

<sup>10</sup> The terms negative and positive eugenics are not in any way value judgements, but refer merely to either restrictive measures (sterilization law, legislation prohibiting marriage or adoption) or supportive ones (conditional support, that is financial help for young married couples, or for large families) dependent on health.

<sup>11</sup> Benefits were granted to families who raised no eugenic concerns and where there were at least four healthy children. Large families who were evaluated as a "pathological element" received no financial support from the state and were termed "*asoziale Großfamilie*" – large asocial family.



Propaganda poster: “What are the costs of maintaining the hereditary sick? One years’ hospital care: 3000 RM – equals the annual income of 2 workers; 7 years in a reformatory home – 7000 RM – annual income of 4 workers; 10 years in a mental asylum – 17 000 RM – annual income of 10 workers”

antinatalism, not for pronatalism. National Socialism did not nationalize the birth question by compelling women into childbearing, but by preventing women from childbearing.<sup>12</sup> The eugenics experiment in the Third Reich, linking antinatalist policies with selective pronatalism, constituted the culmination of a programme which aimed to extend control over the biological bedrock of the population’s existence. The signal that: “the national socialist seizure of power would not be purely a political act but, in the context of radical population policies, also a biological seizure of power” was evidenced by Hitler’s remarks on the subject of sterilization.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> G. Bock, “Antinatalism, Maternity and Paternity in National Socialist Racism”, in: *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*, ed. D. Crew (London - New York, 1994), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> W. U. Eckart, “‘Ein Feld der rationale Vernichtungspolitik’. Biopolitische Ideen und Praktiken vom Malthusianismus bis zum nationalsozialistischen Sterilisationsgesetz”, in: *Die nationalsozialistische Euthanasie Aktion T4 und ihre Opfer*, ed. G. Hohendorf, P. Fuchs, P. Richter, Ch. Mundt, and W. U. Eckart (Paderborn, 2010), p. 37.



Propaganda poster “proving” that by the time a hereditary sick person reaches 60 years of age, they will have cost the state budget, on average, 50 000 RM, 1939

### **“Sterilization is not a punishment but a liberation”**

“Those who are physically and mentally unhealthy do not have the right [are not permitted] to perpetuate their suffering in the bodies of their children. [...] To be sick and weak is not a disgrace, but a misfortune to be deplored; it is a crime, however, and even a disgrace to burden an innocent being with this misfortune through one’s egoism.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1940), pp. 447–48; see: Eckart, “Ein Feld der rationale Vernichtungspolitik,” p. 36.



The criminalization of defective genetic inheritance foreshadowed the use of sanctioned coercion; it also pressurized those affected by the law and was meant to induce guilt – not so much for being ill, but for the further transmission of pathological material. While instructions from the Ministry of the Interior<sup>15</sup> underlined that patients should be reassured that sterilization was not a punishment, but a necessary means to maintain the health of the community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), in actual fact, these individuals were treated as accused culprits who – should they resist – were escorted under police supervision, and the sterilization proceedings were reminiscent of a trial.

In accordance with the procedure, doctors, directors of educational institutes and penitentiaries and medical support staff were obliged to report anyone subject to the provisions of the law. Those denounced had to report for examination at hereditary health clinics. If the official doctor concluded that a particular case qualified for sterilization, he would submit an application and forward the case to the Hereditary Health Court (*Erbgesundheitsgericht*) whose dense network extended throughout the entire country.<sup>16</sup> The court's decision was final, although there was a possibility of appeal to the higher court (*Erbgesundheitsobergericht*) and, ultimately, to the Führer himself.<sup>17</sup>

Administering a developed eugenics policy necessitated the creation of a data bank, which would facilitate the quick identification of individuals who, in eugenic terms, were subject to restrictions. The project to establish a central hereditary registry was begun in 1936<sup>18</sup>; in the meantime, the implementation of eugenics laws demanded considerable involvement on the part of medical staff. Those seeking a marital loan or benefits for children had to submit to examination; these were also carried out in adoption cases or of people intending to marry, should any doubts exist concerning their “suitability for marriage” (*Ehetauglichkeit*). The law for the protection of the hereditary health of the German people (*Gesetz zum Schutze der Erbgesundheit des*

---

15 There was no separate Ministry of Health in the Third Reich. The Abteilung IV Volksgesundheit at the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for health policy.

16 The initial plan was to establish around 1,700 hereditary courts; in the end, there were no more than 200–300. Sh. F. Weiss, “The Race Hygiene Movement in Germany, 1904–1945”, in: *The Wellborn Science. Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil and Russia*, ed. M. Adams (New York – Oxford, 1990), p. 44.

17 Cf. K. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne higieny ras i ich realizacja na przykładzie Śląska w latach 1924–1944* (Toruń, 2003), pp. 240–57.

18 Cf. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, pp. 144–53; idem, “Trzeba bronić społeczeństwa: nazistowski eksperyment eugeniczny na biologicznym ciele narodu,” in: *Wybrane aspekty sterylizacji ludzi ze względów eugenicznych, medycznych i społecznych*, ed. M. Musielak (Poznań, 2009), vol. 4, pp. 77–90.



Propaganda poster: „The horrifying progeny of a heavy drinker: 894 descendants within 83 years, including 40 inmates of poorhouses, 67 notorious criminals, 7 murderers, 181 prostitutes, 142 beggars. 437 (around 50%) asocial family members, costing the state 5 mln RM”

*deutschen Volkes – Ehegesundheitsgesetz*) of 18 October 1935 introduced a ban on marriage if there was any fear of “loss of valuable genetic material”, which in practice usually meant restrictions for victims of sterilization. Such individuals were not permitted to marry a partner who was healthy and suitable for reproduction and in case of doubt, fiancés were sent for examination.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, pp. 153, 185–227.

**“...she is not particularly bright...”**

A key element of the examination was an evaluation of a family's intellectual abilities and moral profile. A standard intelligence test was constructed based on the Binet-Simon intelligence scale, which was supplemented with questions testing knowledge from the school curriculum. Answers were required, for example, to such questions as: “What is the capital of France?” “Who was Luther?” “Who discovered America?” or “What is the difference between a state prosecutor and a lawyer or between a mistake and a lie?” “Contemporaries knew that intelligence tests were of limited use, since studies of normal and backward students in East Prussia, revealed identical levels of ignorance regarding Bismarck or Christopher Columbus. Only 7 per cent of normal children could spot the difference between a state prosecutor and a lawyer [...]”<sup>20</sup> A ministerial decree of April 1936 therefore advised that the examination should also assess an individual's capacity to earn an independent living, manage a household, and their general life style, which clearly suggests that, in practice, social indicators were a crucial criterion in qualifying for sterilization, though there was no mention of this in the law. Despite the relaxation of criteria involving intellectual capacity, individuals deemed mentally deficient made up around 60 per cent of those directed for sterilization.<sup>21</sup>

The prevailing evaluation model is couched in the language of epicrisis (medical history), which is the language not of diagnosis, but of moral judgement: “During the intelligence test, N. appeared to be overwhelmed, he replied slowly and quietly with little interest and smirking inanely. In the area of arithmetic and general knowledge his results were very unsatisfactory. The impression he made on the expert (*Sachverständige*) was confirmed during his interview at the EGG and EGOG [*Erbgesundheitsgericht* and *Erbgesundheitsobergericht*]. He has obvious difficulty with calculation; he managed to read an extract from the newspaper, but could cite the content of the text he had read only with assistance and unsatisfactorily; apparently he is unable to explain illustrations within a presented situational context. As already observed, a faint, inane smirk appeared on his face and no sign of any particular engagement. The appeal itself, given its mistakes and disorganized

---

20 M. Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London, 2000), pp. 356–57.

21 “The German Psychiatric Association thought in terms of idiocy (an IQ of 0–19) or imbecility (an IQ of 20–49). However, the men whose task it was to outline the precise scope of the sterilization law wished to include ‘mild feeble-mindedness’, or debility, that is people with an IQ of 50–70. This was no academic matter, for while 100,000 people were liable to sterilization under the first rubric, nearly a million would be affected by the second, including about 10 per cent of recruits to the armed forces.” Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, p. 356.



composition, constitutes further proof of the existence of congenital mental retardation. There is no expectation that he will be able to support himself – his employer notes that he was never an independent worker and that his behaviour often appeared abnormal. He frequently switched employment. The mental limitations of his mother's sister indicate the existence of a family affliction.”<sup>22</sup>

“[...] physically healthy, no hereditary illness was established. She is not particularly bright, but no mental underdevelopment has been established. An unstable character from the social point of view. She already has two children with Pf., and two more illegitimate children. She is unable to provide the surname of the father of the youngest child [...]. Since she cannot be considered a hereditarily valuable member of the community, and has two children with Pf. already, marriage to the above is not an obstacle, since in this way she can be excluded from reproduction.”<sup>23</sup>

The widely applied criterion of social usefulness led, in practice, to the stigmatization and sterilization of individuals whose lifestyles did not fit into the universally accepted model of an exemplary member of the national community. “It is in the nature of things that we tend to have to view such people through the documentation of their persecutors, or suitably recycled by historians who see these people as victims, which they undoubtedly were. Rarely do we have autonomous personal accounts of people deemed to have been anti-social.”<sup>24</sup>

### ***Die Belasteten – the burdened***

“At the beginning of 1936, at the age of thirty-six, one of my older sisters suddenly developed a mental illness (schizophrenia); she was subjected to sterilization and has been in a clinic ever since. This incident has cast a threatening shadow over the life of my family and my siblings and it seems that we will never be free of it. It has already cost us many days and hours of grief, anxiety and tears. [...] Are families such as mine, in whose bloodline a hereditary disease has appeared once, to be considered generally worthless? Are marriages permitted between partners from similarly afflicted families if the couple consciously undertake to sacrifice having children, with the aim of adopting ultimately?

---

22 Methner, “Aus der Tätigkeit der Breslauer Erbgesundheitsobergericht“, *Ärzteblatt für Schlesien*, 1939, 6(6), p. 96.

23 The case concerned repealing the provisions of the act on the protection of marital health due to the fact that the man had previously been sterilized for reasons of mental deficiency, and so could not marry a healthy person capable of procreation. APWR, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8469, unpaginated.

24 Burleigh, *The Third Reich*, p. 369.

Is it possible to make contact with families in a similar situation in the province of Lower Silesia or elsewhere?" – asks Wilhelm Schneider in a letter directed to the Reich Department of Health in January 1941. Agitated by his conversation with the doctor from the district health department – from which it had emerged that, due to his sister's illness, not only were his children subject to the restrictions of the eugenics legislation, but that this would affect their professional careers – the desperate father asks: "Is it desirable or necessary in the interests of the people, that the severest of standards should be applied when evaluating a family's hereditary features, perhaps even exceeding the demands of state legislation?"<sup>25</sup>

A diagnosis of "hereditary affliction" (*erblich belastet*) meant not only relinquishing the experience of motherhood or fatherhood or the collapse of matrimonial plans; equally painful was the sense of humiliation that victims and their relatives experienced. Families labelled hereditarily defective became the subject of gossip, particularly in small towns, where news spread quickly about who had not received a loan, who was "unfit for marriage", or who had been referred for sterilization.<sup>26</sup> Mistrust of doctors and doubts about medical confidentiality meant that patients wishing to hide the shameful fact of sterilization from their neighbours requested that the procedure take place away from where they lived, even choosing to bear the costs of their own mutilation.<sup>27</sup> These were not isolated cases, since four years after the sterilization law had come into force, doctors and officials ensuring the efficient implementation of the law were reminded that those subject to it should be informed that being sterilized did not mean that their personal worth was diminished. Nevertheless, population policies meant limited possibility of contracting a marriage.<sup>28</sup>

The prospect of sterilization often caused mental shock, suicidal thoughts and family dramas, as witnessed by appeals against the decision of the Hereditary Health Court, frequently lodged by the parents of those threatened with the procedure.

In May 1936, the father of Artur Müller, after exhausting all avenues anticipated by the procedure, wrote to Hitler's sister: "I realise that our Führer cannot deal with every trivial matter, every individual fate. But in this case, since it is a question of protecting a respectable family from a great misfortune and deterring my son from taking his

---

<sup>25</sup> APWr, Rejencja wrocławska, sygn. 8419, pp. 236–37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, sygn. 8426, p. 230.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, sygn. 8420, p. 147.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, sygn. 8422, p. 38.

own life, I wish to try this avenue also, so that the misfortune which threatens my family should finally be averted. I am sending you the documentation so that you can convey it to your brother, the Führer and Chancellor of the Reich. [...] The attached documents convey all the circumstances of my son's case correctly and in accordance with the truth. But from these same documents it emerges that the Führer has not received my petition. It emerges from the report that, within three weeks, my son, who suffers from no inherited condition, will be taken by force to hospital and sterilized. [...] Trusting that you will be in a position to convey my petition directly to your brother, I most sincerely beg you to present this case to the Führer in whatever way you consider to be most appropriate. [...] I and my family will remain forever grateful to you for your generous efforts."<sup>29</sup>

Individuals who qualified for sterilization attempted, along with their relatives, to prove their worth, listing their services to the state and to society, their membership of the NSDAP – which was no protection from the procedure in any case<sup>30</sup> – or arguing that the illness was acquired and that the family had no history of mental disorder or other dysfunction.

The patchiness of the sources means that the efficacy of the appeals cannot be established. On average, the courts confirmed around 94 per cent of sterilization directives<sup>31</sup>; the registered number of such referrals, however, is notably higher than the number of procedures carried out,<sup>32</sup> which indicates that a procedure was abandoned once the case had been considered. We have precise data only for the first two years in which the law was in force, when 64.5 per cent of sterilization directives ended in surgery.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, sygn. 8426, pp. 106–07.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, sygn. 8430, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> G. Bock, *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986), p. 247.

<sup>32</sup> Udo Benzenhöfer and Hanns Ackermann reckon that throughout the Reich there were 436,000 sterilization court hearings and 294,000 procedures. See: U. Benzenhöfer and H. Ackermann, *Die Zahl der Verfahren und der Sterilisationen nach dem Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* (Münster, 2015), p. 26. The authors do not take into account the numbers from Silesia. Cf. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, pp. 247, 269–70.

<sup>33</sup> Benzenhöfer and Ackermann, *Die Zahl der Verfahren*, p. 9; cited in Bock, *Zwangsterilisation*, p. 232.

**“No cases are known of propaganda hostile to the law”<sup>34</sup>**

Attempts to document that an illness in a given case was the result of external factors and not “defective heredity” suggest that the eugenics propaganda had been quite successful. The writers of appeals usually aimed to quash individual directives without questioning the letter of the law. “I would like to point out,” wrote the father of Heinrich Hindemith, indignant at the court’s ruling, “that I am neither a Catholic nor an opponent of the law to protect the hereditary health of the German people”.<sup>35</sup> After years of being fed a vision of the inevitable biological deterioration of “ordinary Germans”, they did not question the politics of regimenting procreation in the interests of the collective; nor did the programme to eliminate individuals regarded as “worthless” arouse any mass opposition. Among the broad group of beneficiaries of the system, enjoying marital loans and subsidies for children, the authorities’ passion for “cultivation”, for “separating and setting apart useful elements destined to live and thrive, from harmful and morbid ones, which ought to be exterminated”<sup>36</sup> could even meet with complete understanding. A form of collective resistance to the implementation of the provisions of the sterilization law was noted only in Upper Silesia, where representatives of the Polish minority, citing the Geneva Convention, achieved a suspension of the law with regard to Poles until 1937, that is, for as long as the convention was in force.<sup>37</sup>

The dignitaries of the Catholic church took a negative position on sterilization. “In general, however, the Catholic church in Germany was not unequivocal in its approach to eugenics, which consequently permitted the authorities largely to quash the resistance of Catholic circles with regard to sterilization. This dissonance is evident, beginning with the contradiction between the official, institutional condemnation of the sterilization law and the granting of absolution in the confessional to medical staff for reporting patients with hereditary conditions, and ending with divergent interpretations regarding whether

---

**34** Isolated cases of resistance to the implementation of the act’s provisions were noted and the central authorities awaited reports from the appropriate provincial authorities on what countermeasures had been taken. In Silesia – according to reports from care institutions – no “hostile propaganda” had been recorded. APWr, Wydział Samorządowy Prowincji Śląskiej (1986), p. 121 ff.

**35** APWr, Rejencja wrocławska sygn. 8426, p. 231.

**36** Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge 1989), p. 70.

**37** Cf. F. Połomski, “Spór o stosowanie hitlerowskiego ustawodawstwa sterylizacyjnego do Polaków na terenie Opolszczyzny”, *Studia Śląskie*, vol. 3 (1960), pp. 179–85; Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, pp. 274–81; idem, “War Against the Unfit. Eugenic Sterilisation in German Silesia 1934–1944. Sine Ira et Studio”, *International Journal of Mental Health*, 36/1 (2007), pp. 79–89.

sterilized individuals could marry [...]. Germany's Protestant churches were marked by similar ambiguity with regard to the sterilization law. [...] But if Catholic Germans could base their views of sterilization on the incontrovertible interpretation provided by the encyclical *Casti connubii*, Protestants had to rely on the interpretations of their own theologians, which could sometimes differ significantly."<sup>38</sup>

The eugenics sterilization programme met with no reservations on the part of the medical profession. Quite the opposite, as a notable majority of doctors supported moulding the "biological body of the nation" by means of regulating the population's reproduction. The gradual integration of medicine and power from the end of the eighteenth century inevitably led to the consolidation of health policy, encompassing not only a range of reforms aiming to improve levels of hygiene, but also introducing an element of supervision of healthy behaviours and private life in general. The pillars of this 18<sup>th</sup>-century noso-politics<sup>39</sup> – wrote Michel Foucault – were the medicalization of the family and the emphasis on the role of hygiene and medical institutions as tools of social control.<sup>40</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century perpetuated this quasi-political function of medicine, alongside the misused biological metaphor of society, which we see culminating in the Third Reich, when the "care of life" inherited from eighteenth century police science is, in now being founded on properly eugenic concerns, absolutized."<sup>41</sup>

The zealous promotion of eugenic policies in medical circles and among representatives of professions concerned with asylum care also emerged, to a certain extent, from the deficiencies of therapy, which were particularly glaringly visible in psychiatric treatment. Modernizing tendencies and the introduction of so-called active forms of therapy in the 1920s drew attention to those sufferers of serious disorders who were unresponsive to therapies, particular all work-based therapies. They began to be viewed as millstones (*Balastexistenzen*) and – as Hans-Walter Schmuhl notes – "if their resistance had hitherto been regarded as a failure of psychiatry, it was now recognized as a sign of congenital inferiority, a proof of their incurability. From the viewpoint of psychiatrists seeking reform, institutionalized patients reckoned incurable threatened the essential necessary modernization

---

38 Musielak, *Sterylicacja ludzi*, pp. 197–204; 199–200.

39 Gr. *nosos* – disease.

40 Cf. M. Foucault, *Polityka zdrowia w XVIII wieku* [Politics of health in the 18<sup>th</sup> century], *Klio. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym* 15 (2011), pp. 7–17. *The Foucault Reader. An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. P. Rabinow (London, 1991), pp. 279–284; Uzarczyk, "Trzeba bronić społeczeństwa", pp. 77–90.

41 Agamben, *Homo sacer*, p. 93.

of psychiatry.”<sup>42</sup> In the eyes of psychiatrists, lightening the load of asylums was possible only on condition that possibilities of procreation were restricted for the “genetically burdened”. In total, 35 per cent of institutionalized patients were sterilized.

### **Without an epilogue**

The lack of full documentation makes it impossible to track the dynamics of the law’s implementation. The data which have been preserved, however, indicate that most sterilization procedures were carried out in the first three years after the law was introduced; in subsequent years, the number of cases falls steadily,<sup>43</sup> though the procedures continued until the end of the Second World War. Until recently, it was accepted, following Gisela Bock, that around 360 thousand Germans were sterilized for eugenic reasons in the years 1934–45, of whom around 5 thousand died as a result of post-surgical complications, and that 90 per cent of the latter were women.<sup>44</sup> In the light of newer research, the number of procedures carried out comes to a little over 300 thousand, omitting the annexed territories.<sup>45</sup>

The law for preventing offspring with hereditary diseases was not formally rescinded after the end of the Second World War. During the so-called Nuremberg Doctors Trial, the question of sterilization for eugenic reasons was of marginal concern – interest was focused on human experimentation in concentration camps – and the medical staff embroiled in the sterilization of over 300 thousand German citizens were not to be found among the accused. Volker Roelcke notes that “the existence of eugenicist organizations and the universal practice of sterilization in many western societies, alongside the international links existing between eugenicists and geneticists, would have made

---

42 H. W. Schmuhl, *Zreformowana psychiatria a masowa zagłada*, in: *Nazizm, Trzecia Rzesza a procesy modernizacji*, ed. H. Orłowski (Poznań, 2000), p. 390.

43 Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, the sterilization programme was radically curtailed: the implementing regulations of the act of 31 August 1939 directed that referrals for sterilization should be submitted only if there was no doubt regarding the burden to the family and if the dangers of procreation were very great.

44 Bock, *Zwangsterilisation*, pp. 237–38, 380.

45 Benzenhöfer and Ackermann, *Die Zahl der Verfahren*, p. 26. The authors reckon the number of procedures came to 294 thousand, but this did not include the data from the area of Silesia– 10,379 people; cf. Uzarczyk, *Podstawy ideologiczne*, p. 270; Volker Roelcke states that 360 thousand patients underwent the procedure, of whom 300 thousand were deemed to suffer from mental disorders, and 60 thousand from other conditions listed in the act; cf. V. Roelcke, “Deutscher Sonderweg? Die eugenische Bewegung in europäischer Perspektive bis in die 1930er Jahre”, in: *Die nationalsozialistische Euthanasie*, p. 53.

judging only German eugenicists [a] very difficult [task].<sup>46</sup> All the more as sterilization for eugenic reasons was still being carried out – albeit less enthusiastically – in the USA and Scandinavian states. It was not until 2007 that the Bundestag recognized the law of 14 July 1933 as unconstitutional; nevertheless, the victims of sterilization were not accorded the status of victims of Nazi persecution.

The stories of those subjected to forced sterilization for eugenic reasons have vanished along with their heroes. Until recently, these questions remained of marginal interest to historians, and the first publications devoted to the birth of eugenics and the implementation of its postulates focused more on examining its cultural context and describing the operative mechanisms of institutions engaged in implementing eugenicist laws. The surviving medical records and fragments of letters and appeals are the only trace of the experiences of thousands of people regarded as “inferior elements”, distorting the image of the ideal society. Today, the histories of their illnesses are the only source through which their stories can be known.<sup>47</sup>

**Kamila Uzarczyk** – doctor of humanities, historian, adjunct of the Institute for Medical Humanities at Wrocław Medical University. Her research interests include questions concerning the establishment and function of the social hygiene and eugenics movements; medical experimentation during the Second World War; the extermination programme of patients from psychiatric institutions and asylums in the Third Reich. She is currently working on a project dedicated to the situation of Polish “DPs” (displaced persons) in Austria and the “child restitution” after the Second World War.

---

<sup>46</sup> Roelcke, “Deutscher Sonderweg?” p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. U. Müller, “Metamorphosen – Krankenakten als Quellen für Lebensgeschichten”, in: *Das Vergessen der Vernichtung ist Teil der Vernichtung selbst. Lebensgeschichten von Opfern der nationalsozialistischen “Euthanasie”*, ed. P. Fuchs, M. Rotzoll, U. Müller, P. Richter, and G. Hohendorf (Göttingen, 2007), pp. 80–99.



## **Acknowledgements**

This book would not have appeared without the help and support of numerous people and institutions. I would like to thank the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Wrocław for their archival support in 2015–16.

Enormous thanks are due, above all, to the staff of the State Archive in Wrocław – particularly Izabela Różowiec.

For support throughout publication, I would like to thank Dr Kamila Uzarczyk, Dr Aleksandra Janiszewska, Anna Wojnarowska-Olek, Ewa Czerwiakowska, Prof. Jacek Leociak, Andrzej Lasocki, Michał Zygmunt and Paweł Soszyński.

---

# Contents

---

From the Author	7
Luise Christoph 1935	13
Maria Schlagner 1936	31
Charlotte Mende 1937	49
Frieda Gurtner, Else Pyrek, Paul Potopantke 1938	65
Max Leuschner 1938	81
Erika Regel 1939	93
Hedwig Wenzel 1940	107
Martha Schönfelder 1940/41	125
Pauline Lux 1941	141
Frieda Jäschke 1944	157
“Inferior” victims	169
“Those who are hereditarily ill can be subjected to sterilization...” Sterilization for eugenic reasons in the Wrocław province (1934–44)	177
<i>Kamila Uzarczyk</i>	
Acknowledgements	196

© Copyright by Ośrodek KARTA, 2019  
© Copyright by Joanna Ostrowska, 2019  
© Copyright by Kamila Uzarczyk, 2019

**EDITOR** Hanna Antos

**TRANSLATION FROM THE GERMAN** Anna Wojnarowska-Olek

**IMAGE SELECTION** Joanna Ostrowska, Małgorzata Pankowska, Katarzyna Płażyńska

**GRAPHIC DESIGN, TYPESETTING** Agnieszka Warda

**PHOTOGRAPH PROCESSING** Tandem Studio

**COVER PHOTOGRAPH** Cover of medical leaflet: H. Burchardt,  
*ABC der Eheberatung* [ABC of marriage guidance], Stuttgart 1940  
State Archive in Wrocław

Ośrodek **Karta**

Ośrodek KARTA

ul. Narbutta 29, 02-536 Warszawa

tel. (48) 22 848-07-12

ok@karta.org.pl

distribution: kolportaz@karta.org.pl

internet bookstore: ksiegarnia.karta.org.pl

www.karta.org.pl

The project “Victims of forced sterilization in Lower Silesia, 1934–44”  
is part of the “Forced Labour and forgotten victims” programme,  
funded by the “Memory, Responsibility, and Future” Foundation.



This publication does not represent the views  
of the “Memory, Responsibility, and Future” Foundation.  
Responsibility for the content rests with the authors.

First edition

Warsaw 2019

ISBN 978-83-65979-70-4



**Joanna Ostrowska** – Doctor of humanities, historian and film expert. She has lectured at the Department of Jewish Studies, Jagiellonian University; the Boundaries Research Group, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań; Gender Studies course, University of Warsaw; and Postgraduate Polish-Jewish Studies at the Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research interests include the phenomenon of sexual violence during the Second World War and the forgotten victims of the Third Reich. She is the author of *Przemilczane. Seksualna praca przymusowa w czasie II wojny światowej* [The unmentioned. Sexual Forced Labor during World War II] (2018) and editor and author of the afterword to the Polish editions of *The Men with the Pink Triangle* by Heinz Heger (2016) and *Damned Strong Love* by Lutz van Dijk (2017).

---

## **The law for the prevention of offspring with hereditary diseases was enacted a year after Hitler had taken power.**

---

Everyone whom the law deemed physically or mentally 'defective', or who was inconvenient from a political or social viewpoint, was subjected to forced sterilization. Physicians and neighbors stood guard. Anyone could denounce you. Identification, stigmatization, exclusion lead to extermination. The Third Reich very quickly took care to create a zone free of those who might threaten the healthy tissue of the nation and burden society. These are not victims who are easily acknowledged. This book reinstates their memory and their dignity. The documents show how those condemned and their families resisted the ruling. In a state in the grip of ideological madness, no one could feel safe. Not then, not now.

**Prof. Jacek Leociak**

Institute of Literary Research, Polish Academy of Sciences,  
Centre for Holocaust Research, Institute of Philosophy  
and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences