

Adele Agnes Helene Wolff, née Levy

Born: 02.05.1870, Fraustadt

Died: probably before 17.01.1941

Helene Wolff was born as the Jewish daughter of Meyer Levy and Roza Levy, née Hirschberg, on May 2, 1870 in Fraustadt, in the then province of South Prussia. She had five siblings. Her older brother Leopold was born in Fraustadt in 1867, the younger brother Ludwig in Berlin in 1874. Little is known about Ludwig; the brother Leopold was a bankruptcy judge at the district court of Charlottenburg until his forced retirement in 1933. Other siblings were Oscar Hermann Levy (born 27.03.1876 in Berlin, died 09.08.1955), Margerite Hamburger (née Levy) and Louise Koffka (née Levy).

Little is known about the parents Meyer and Roza. They moved to Berlin in 1874 at the latest and were registered at Mohrenstrasse 53 at the time their third child Ludwig was born.

In 1888, at the age of 18, Helene married the Jewish Justice Councilor Richard Wolff (*07.09.1854, Cologne). The couple moved into an apartment at Schaperstraße 19 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. Richard Wolff converted to the Protestant faith in 1903, Helene a few years later, in 1931. The couple lived in wealthy conditions. Richard died already in 1915, their marriage was childless.

Helene Wolff was a painting student of Lovis Corinth and owned some pictures of the master. Paintings from their possession were loaned to the National Gallery for the major Lovis Corinth exhibition in 1926. Written correspondence with Ludwig Justi, then director of the National Gallery, suggests Helene's connoisseurship and expertise in the fine arts.

Helene Wolff lived a self-determined life as a widow until the 1930s, this only changed with Hitler's seizure of power and the subsequent anti-Semitic reprisals by the National Socialists, to which Helene Wolff was subjected as a "fully Jewish".

Until 1930 Helene Wolff was registered at Schaperstrasse 19, from 1930 she can be found in the Berlin address books at Breite Strasse 2b in Schmargendorf, from 1934 in Steglitz, Friedrichsruher Strasse 27. It is not possible to reconstruct concretely how much Helene Wolff suffered from the persecution measures of the National Socialists until 1938. Her relocations, a renewed activity as a painter as a woman over 60 years old and the unsuccessful attempt to sell parts of her painting collection to the National Gallery Berlin in 1934 suggest that Helene was in financial difficulties.

The "*Second Ordinance for the Implementation of the Law on the Change of Surnames and First Names*" also applied to Helene. In letters from the Steglitz tax office, she was addressed with the middle name "*Sarah*", which classified her as a Jewish German. In the notice of the Berlin-Steglitz tax office to Helene Wolff concerning the Jewish Wealth Tax (*Judenvermögensabgabe*) to be paid, the amount was set at RM 2600, to be paid in 4 instalments of RM 650 each. The letter is dated 30.12.1938, by which time her brother Leopold was already looking after his sister.

In April 1938, Helene Wolff was admitted to the Wittenau sanatoriums (today Karl Bonhoeffer Clinics) as a result of forced admission by the Berlin police authorities. Her sister-in-law stated in the compensation proceedings that Helen was overly sensitive to the ever-increasing anti-Semitic wave. The atmosphere in the sanatorium in Wittenau had burdened her too much emotionally, so that her brother Leopold had her moved to the Sanatorium Waldhaus am Nikolassee as early as 12 May 1938, in order to "protect her from renewed attacks", as her sister-in-law described it.

Helene Wolff's fortune was soon exhausted by the high institution and transport costs, and despite the dissolution of the household. According to her sister-in-law, her brother Leopold had been paying for his sister's accommodation since February 1939, even though he himself had come into financial difficulties due to the National Socialists' anti-Semitic policy of repression. In October of the same year, Leopold had his sister transferred again, to an institution in Branitz, Eastern Silesia, which was especially recommended to him. The sister-in-law further described how Helene, a few weeks after her arrival on the orders of the police chief of Breslau, was first transferred to the "Silesian Provencal Lunatic Asylum Leubus" (today Lubiaz, Poland). The further transfer to the "Chelm Lunatic Asylum" („Irrenanstalt Chelm“, city of Chelm, east of Lublin, Poland), again by the police chief, must have taken place in December 1940 according to the description of Margarethe Lenhard.

From there the family received a letter that Helene Wolff had died of "arteriosclerosis" on 17 January 1941, hardly three weeks later.

About the psychiatric institution in Chelm near Lublin it is known today that 441 patients were shot by SS units there in January 1940. The clinic subsequently functioned as a military camp and barracks, but was continued on paper as part of the National Socialists' euthanasia program and the so-called "T4 Action" for the benefit of the National Socialists. A Nazi special registry office in Chelm, actually based in Berlin, issued false death certificates under the names "Irrenanstalt Chelm", "Irrenanstalt Cholm" or "Ortspolizeibehörde Chelm II", invoiced the Reich Association of Jews for care costs and kept correspondence with concerned relatives of Jewish patients who were taken in closed transports to Nazi death camps from summer 1940 onwards and murdered there. The T4 Central Office tried to conceal the transports in this way.

The transfers of Helene Wolff, described by her sister-in-law, could possibly also be related to transports of December 17 and 19, 1940: "Inzwischen ist bekannt, daß die jüdischen Kranken aus den Heil- und Pflegeanstalten Schlesiens (Leubus, Branitz und Bunzlau) im Laufe des Jahres 1940 in Leubus zusammengeführt wurden. Von hier aus wurden sie in zwei Transporten am 17. und 19. Dezember 1940 in die Irrenanstalt Cholm (polnisch Chelm) transportiert und dort getötet. Diesem Euthanasiemord fielen rund 150 schlesische Juden zum Opfer." (In the meantime it is known that the Jewish patients from the sanatoriums and nursing homes in Silesia (Leubus, Branitz and Bunzlau) were brought together in Leubus in the course of 1940. From here they were transported in two transports on 17 and 19 December 1940 to the mental hospital in Cholm (Polish: Chelm) and killed there. Around 150 Silesian Jews fell victim to this euthanasia murder.)

It can be assumed that Helene Wolff was murdered in the course of the T4 action. This was already clear to the relatives when they were informed of Helene's death. Her sister-in-law wrote in the compensation proceedings: "*What my husband wanted to achieve, to protect and heal the sister, has been destroyed by the Nazi practice of murdering mentally frail and sick people.*"

Helene Wolff died childless at the age of about 70 years.

Her brother Leopold was spared the knowledge of the murder of his sister, he died of liver cancer in Berlin on 5.7.1940. His wife Margarete Levy, later Lenhard, stayed in Berlin and after the war filed several applications for compensation, among other things for the loss of the legal journal "*Konkurs und Treuhandwesen*" (Bankruptcy and Fiduciary Matters) founded by her husband, which had to be sold to the *Carl Heymann Verlag* in 1935 by order of the National Socialists. Their daughter Rose-Marie Hirsch (*1913) and her husband Robert managed to emigrate to Palestine, the elder son Ernst (*1916) was killed on the Eastern Front near Niestepowo on 22 June 1941. The

youngest son Georg (*1924) was taken away from his parents' home in 1943 as a first-degree "Mischling" and spent the war years in various locations and Forced Labor camps.

The family history research was conducted by Stefanie Wilson M.A., Berlin, on behalf of Ketterer Kunst GmbH & Co KG

¹ Birth certificate Ludwig Levy, LAB P Rep.802 Nr.233, Reg.No. 148.

² Centrum Judaicum Berlin (CJA), 2 A 1, exit file (Wolff, Helene and Richard)

³ Staatliche Museen Berlin (SMB), ZA, I-NG 677.

⁴ Berlin address books 1799-1970, digitized <https://digital.zlb.de/viewer/cms/141/>

⁵ „Zweite Verordnung zur Durchführung des Gesetzes über die Änderung von Familiennamen und Vornamen“, RGB1 I, 1044

⁶ LABO, Reg.No. 11.830, D33

⁷ LABO, Reg.No.11.830, M14

⁸ <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/euthan/chelm.html>, last accessed on 28.06.2020

⁹ Willy Cohn: Kein Recht, nirgends: Breslauer Tagebücher 1933 – 1941, 2007, p. 352, footnote 318. It is referred to a publication by: Alfred Konieczny: Rozwiazanie i zbrodniami hitlerowskimi 18 [1995], pp. 235-260 [Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis No. 1715].

¹⁰ LABO, Reg.No.11.830, M14

¹¹ LABO, Reg.No.11.830, Nr.600.903

¹² LABO, Reg.No.12.138, Georg Lenhard