

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

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## Wittgenstein and World War I: some additional online sources

On January 20, 1913 Ludwig Wittgenstein's father Karl died in Vienna, leaving his wife Leopoldine and his six living children (Hermine, Kurt, Margarethe, Helene, Paul and Ludwig) an enormous fortune. In 1910, the Austrian Finance Minister Robert Mayer created an interesting document: a confidential list of the richest inhabitants of Vienna and Lower Austria, including all persons with an annual income of more than 100,000 crowns (Sandgruber 2013). For comparison, a college professor at the time earned about 10,000 crowns a year, a school teacher about 3,000, and a servant around 300. The name of Ludwig Wittgenstein, profession "technician", appears on this list of in all 929 people in the 254<sup>th</sup> place, with a taxed annual income of 237,308 crowns. His father Karl is ranked 38<sup>th</sup> with 807,209 crowns yearly and Ludwig's brother Paul with 251,522 crowns is found in the 220<sup>th</sup> place. Immediately after his return from war captivity in August 1919 Ludwig gave away his paternal inheritance to his siblings Hermine, Helene and Paul, but in the six years from 1913 to 1919 he was probably one of the richest men in Austria.

His donation of 100,000 crowns, distributed via Ludwig von Ficker to needy artists just before the outbreak of WW1 in 1914, is well known in the Wittgenstein literature. In her *Familienerinnerungen*

Hermine Wittgenstein accounts for a donation by Ludwig of one million crowns for the construction of a 30 cm mortar, a donation which, however, never reached its aim (McGuinness 1988: 207; Monk 1990: 106f).

Additional interesting information on Ludwig Wittgenstein can be found in the daily press of the war years 1914-18. Through the recently created full text search function in the Austrian Newspapers Online, Anno portal [[anno.onb.ac.at](http://anno.onb.ac.at)], created and upheld by the Austrian National Library, research of this kind is much easier today. In August 1914, he donates 10,000 crowns to the Red Cross (cf. *Fremdenblatt*, August 6, 1914, p.10). In the following years the newspapers regularly report large subscriptions of governmental war bonds. The name “Ludwig Wittgenstein jun.” appears regularly on these lists (not to be confused with his uncle Ludwig/Louis (1845-1925), who is represented with war bond subscriptions in millions as well):

- 250,000 crowns (*Fremdenblatt*, May 28, 1915, p.14)
- 250,000 crowns (*Neue Freie Presse*, May 7, 1916, p.10)
- 100,000 crowns (*Neue Freie Presse*, December 3, 1916, p.20; the same amount by his brother Paul, sister Hermine and his mother Leopoldine Wittgenstein.)
- 1 million crowns subscribed together by Leopoldine, Hermine, Ludwig jun., Paul jun. and Konrad (Kurt) Wittgenstein (*Neue Freie Presse*, May 17, 1917, p.16)
- 225,000 crowns each by Hermine, Konrad (Kurt), Paul jun. and Ludwig jun. (*Neue Freie Presse*, December 2, 1917, p.14)
- 200,000 crowns each by Hermine and Ludwig Wittgenstein jun. (*Fremdenblatt*, June 9, 1918, p.13)<sup>1</sup>

One can assume that these war bonds subscriptions were made on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s behalf by members of the family, as Ludwig spent most of the time not in Vienna, but at the front. An

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<sup>1</sup> See Austrian Newspapers Online, <[anno.onb.ac.at](http://anno.onb.ac.at)> [Accessed November 2, 2014].



Poster of the “*Sechste Österreichische Kriegsanleihe*” (Sixth Austrian War Bonds), Austrian National Library/Picture Archives and Graphics Department: KS 16305135.

indication of this is found in a letter from his mother Leopoldine Wittgenstein to Ludwig from May 20, 1915:

Eine Frage: Denkst Du daran Dich an der Kriegs-Anleihe abermals zu beteiligen? Ich frage nur im Namen Trenklers. Wir haben zwar wieder gezeichnet aber gar nicht dabei an Dich gedacht. (Wittgenstein 2011)

[One question: Are you thinking about participating in the war bonds again? I'm just asking on behalf of Trenkler. We have in fact subscribed again, but were not thinking about you.]

During WW1 war bonds were the central means of war funding in the German Empire and Austria-Hungary. The subscription of war bonds was declared a patriotic duty, accompanied by extensive propaganda. In the Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire (Cisleithanien) altogether eight war bonds were issued at a total value of over 35 billion crowns.<sup>2</sup> In the disastrous economic situation after the end of the WW1, these bonds were virtually worthless. In a new online collection and exhibition, *100 Jahre Erster Weltkrieg*, the Austrian State Archives has made WW1-related documents available online in which details of funding can be found [[wk1.staatsarchiv.at](http://wk1.staatsarchiv.at)].

On November 3, 1918 Ludwig Wittgenstein was captured on the Italian front. For some weeks the family in Vienna had no message from him. His mother Leopoldine wrote in a letter to Ludwig from December 27 that they got his card dated November 6 only on December 6, 1918 and that they had been in deep sorrow until then. The following announcement by Ludwig's brother Paul Wittgenstein appeared in the *Fremdenblatt* from November 19, 1918, and on November 23, and with almost the same text again in the *Neue Freie Presse* from Dec. 6:

(Bitte an heimkehrende Offiziere und Soldaten.) Offiziere und Soldaten, welche über Verbleib und Befinden des Leutnants Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gebirgs-Artillerie- Regiment Nr.11, Batterie 8, zuletzt Batteriekommandant in Como bei Gallio di Miletta etwas näheres wissen, werden gebeten ihre Nachrichten an Paul Wittgenstein, Wien, 4. Bezirk, Alleegasse16 gelangen zu lassen. (ANNO)

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv: 1914-2014. 100 Jahre Erster Weltkrieg. [online] <<http://wk1.staatsarchiv.at/kriegsfinanzierung/kriegsanleihen/>> [Accessed November 2, 2014]

[(Request to returning officers and soldiers.) Officers and soldiers[,] who know something about the whereabouts and condition of lieutenant Ludwig Wittgenstein, Mountain Artillery Regiment No.11, battery 8, last acting as Batteriekommandant in Como at Gallio di Miletta, are requested to give any [messages] information to Paul Wittgenstein, Vienna, 4th District, Alleegasse16.]

**\* (Bitte an heimkehrende Offiziere und Soldaten.) Heimkehrende Offiziere und Soldaten, welche über Verbleib und Verfinden des Leutnants Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment Nr. 11, Batterie 8, zuletzt Batteriekommandant in Como bei Gallio di Miletta, etwas näheres wissen, werden gebeten ihr: Nachrichten an Paul Wittgenstein, Wien, 4. Bezirk, Alleegasse 16, gelangen zu lassen.**

*Fremdenblatt*, 23.11.1918, p. 10

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### ***Biographical note***

Alfred Schmidt has studied philosophy at the University of Vienna and is now working at the Austrian National Library as scientific assistant to the director general. He is the consultant for the Wittgenstein collection at the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Austrian National Library. His publications treat Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* as well as his philosophy and other topics.