

Karl Anton Weiss (later Charles Anthony Wills)

Karl (also Carl) Anton Weiss was born on 5 January 1919 in the health center for women of the Jewish doctor Dr Anton Loew at Pelikangasse 15 (9th district of Vienna), which was founded in 1906. He was the son of Richard Karl (also Carl) Weiss (born 16 February 1878 in Vienna as one of nine children of Abraham and Rosalie Weiss, née Bauer) and his wife Gisela Valerie Weiss (born 20 July 1891 in Vienna as the daughter of Gustav Propper, a merchant and factory director from Páleč/Groß Paletsch, and Elisabeth or Elise, maiden name Fanta). The parents had married on 14 February 1918 in the Lutheran City Church (Dorotheergasse 18, 1st district of Vienna). Karl Anton was baptised in the same church on 20 January 1919 according to the Protestant Augsburg Confession. His father was finance director at the *Neue Freie Presse*, which was the leading liberal-bourgeois daily newspaper in Austria until the 'Anschluss' of Austria to the 'Third Reich' (March 1938).

After attending the Realgymnasium (secondary school) in Vienna's 4th district, Karl Anton served as an officer candidate in the mounted artillery from 1 September 1936 in the Erzherzog-Wilhelm-Kaserne, which was located not far from today's WU campus'. After completing his service as a so-called one-year volunteer, he enrolled at the Vienna University of World Trade to train as a business graduate. In the winter semester of 1937/38 and summer semester of 1938, he took part in the courses of the six-semester diploma programme.

After the Anschluss, however, Karl Anton Weiss was forced to drop out of university without a degree due to the racist persecution of the Nazi regime. Although his parents had converted from the Jewish to the Protestant faith in 1913 and 1917 respectively, the family was considered "Jewish" by the National Socialists in accordance with the Reich Citizenship Act of 1935.

One of the consequences of this was that Karl Anton's father had to disclose his assets in accordance with a decree issued by the Reich Commissioner for the Four-Year Plan, Hermann Göring, and the Reich Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick on 26 April 1938. The Nazi regime used the property declarations to appropriate the property of Jews in a pseudo-legal manner.

In the end, the parents became victims of the Shoah. At the beginning of December 1940, Richard and Gisela Weiss were forced to leave their flat at Paulanergasse 9/19 (4th district of Vienna), in which they had been registered since August 1918. For some time they lived at Gärtnergasse 8/9 (3rd district), but were deported on 12 May 1942 together with 999 other victims of National Socialist persecution from a collective apartment in Vienna's second district to the Izbica ghetto, south-east of Lublin. Some sources give Zirkusgasse 3 as the last residential address in Vienna, but according to a handwritten note in Karl Anton's personal papers, which was probably sent to him via his parents' housekeeper, Rosina Steurer, Richard and Gisela were moved from here to Kleine Sperlgasse 2a on 9 May and deported from here to the General Government three days later. According to this note, Gisela and Richard Weiss were transported in lorries from this building, which had been a municipal school before the Anschluss but was converted by the National Socialists into a collection point for

deportations from Vienna to the Eastern European concentration camps (Hecht/Raggam-Blech/Uhl 2019, pp. 239-241), at midday on 12 May 1942. The lorries took them to Vienna Aspang Station. Then they were forced to travel on by train to Izbica under inhuman conditions. Here Richard and Gisela Weiss perished at an unknown time.

Gisela's mother Elise (born 26 February 1864) also died in the Holocaust. While her husband Gustav Propper had already died on 10 October 1936 and did not live to see the Nazi regime, she was deported from her home in Vienna's Skodagasse 9 (8th district) to the Łódź ghetto on 28 October 1941. The 78-year-old was murdered there by the National Socialists on 15 April 1942.

Karl Anton, in contrast, managed to emigrate. As his registration book impressively demonstrates, he had already observed at the University of World Trade that a number of courses taught by professors who were perceived as opponents by the National Socialists due to their closeness to Austrofascism and who had initially been suspended and then dismissed after the 'Anschluss' of Austria, were cancelled during the summer semester of 1938 or taken over by lecturers who conformed to the regime. He was aware that also his life was in danger in the 'Greater German Reich', as the German Reich had called itself since the 'Anschluss'. After several attempts to leave Germany, he arrived in Sweden on 16 June 1939 with nothing more than a small suitcase and the clothes he was wearing. Thanks to the mediation of the Swedish Israel Mission (*Svenska Israelmissionen*) in Stockholm, which had also maintained a branch at Seegasse 16 in Vienna since the 1920s and enabled around 3,000 Jews and Christians with a Jewish family background to emigrate to neutral Sweden between 1938 and 1941, Weiss was granted a work and residence permit that was extended several times. The state social welfare authorities linked their permission to the requirement that Weiss and other men who had fled Germany were preparing to "emigrate to another country". Until then, Weiss worked on a farm in Sanåkra near Sösdala in southern Sweden. This is where he received his agricultural training, even though he was registered as an electrical engineer.

It is not known whether Karl Anton Weiss moved to the Swedish Israel Mission refugee camp in Tostarp as planned in December 1939. He insisted on taking part in the armed struggle against the Nazi state. To this end, he travelled via Copenhagen to Great Britain, which, unlike neutral Sweden, was fighting on the side of the Allies against the 'Greater German Reich' in the Second World War. Here Karl Anton Weiss joined the British army. As his son Richard testifies, he was deployed in Europe and the Middle East. He initially belonged to the Pioneer Corps from May 1940 before serving with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the unit responsible for the maintenance and repair of military equipment from October 1942. The former student of the Viennese 'World Trade' also served with the Intelligence Corps. He probably left the British army in September 1946.

In British exile, Karl Anton Weiss anglicised his name to Charles Anthony Wills. According to his son, he wanted a name "that sounded very English" and based his surname on the popular British cigarette company W.D. & H.O. Wills. He was granted British citizenship in the spring of 1947.

Charles Anthony earned his living as a sales manager for a plastics company. He was also a talented amateur painter, particularly in the field of portraiture. His first marriage was to Mildred Ruth Bailey (born 4 December 1920, died 2 April 2021) on 11 March 1946. The marriage produced Angela Gregory (b. 1949) and the aforementioned Richard Wills (b. 1951); the family lived in the London borough of Sutton. Charles Anthony and Mildred Ruth divorced in 1976. In the last quarter of the same year, Charles Anthony married Christine P. Boynes in the London Burrough of Bromley, and on 3 March 1982 he married Margaret Bateman (b. 17 August 1933). He moved to Wales with his third wife in 2000.

Despite the painful experiences he had with Austria, Charles Anthony Wills travelled to this country several times in the post-war period. His last trip took him to Vienna in 2005 to celebrate the 100th birthday of his aunt Leopoldine Propper (10 April 1905 to 3 January 2009, called Poldi, maiden name Kaufmann), who had been married to the well-known Protestant theologian of Jewish descent Felix Propper (1 March 1894 to 24 November 1962). On 1 February 1939, the couple had managed to bring their three children (Gerold, Gerta and Gertrud) to safety in Sweden along with 62 other children from Austria. Leopoldine also arrived in Sweden on the very day that the Second World War broke out (1 September 1939). Her hopes of emigrating to the USA with Felix and her children were thwarted by the war and her husband's temporary internment in France. After the end of the war, the family reunited in liberated Vienna.

Karl Anton's uncle Ernst Hans Propper (born 19 November 1885 in Prague) also made it into exile. While his sister Gisela and their mother Elise – as reported above – was killed by the National Socialist regime in the General Government, he managed to reach safety in the United Kingdom in 1939. He settled in Nottingham, where he died on 19 January 1973 and was cremated a week later. It is uncertain whether Karl Anton Weiss had any contact with Ernst Propper, regardless of their common country of exile, Great Britain; in any case, he never mentioned Ernst Propper to his son Richard.

Karl Anton Weiss respectively Charles Anthony Wills died in Pembrokeshire, Wales, on 7 February 2007 at the age of 88.

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For internet links, historical sources and source references please refer to the German version.