

The National Fund publishes the "Findbuch for Victims of National Socialism"

24 Jan 2013

Within the scope of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January – the day of the liberation of the concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz – the National Fund of the Republic of Austria presents the Findbuch for Victims of National Socialism (www.findbuch.at). This new online portal makes it possible to search the holdings of several Austrian archives for material on National Socialist property seizures and Austrian restitution and compensation measures.

The Findbuch currently contains around 130,000 records from the Austrian State Archives and the Provincial Archives of Burgenland, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia and Tyrol. New records are being added continually. It is possible to call up information such as the "property notices" Jewish people had to submit after the "Anschluss" of Austria in 1938 as well as the files of the Restitution Commissions which were established after the war. In addition, the Findbuch provides in digital form historical address books and official handbooks on public offices and institutions which facilitate research on private individuals, companies or the authorities which were responsible for the National Socialist seizures of property or restitution post-1945. As such, the Findbuch is one of the most comprehensive collections of personal data on National Socialist property seizures and Austrian restitution and compensation measures after 1945.

National Socialism as family history

The Findbuch was presented in Parliament on 15 January 2013, followed by a panel discussion on the subject "Family stories. Restitution and compensation in generational memory". In the discussion, hosted by Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund, Katja Sturm-Schnabl, professor at the Institute for Slavic Studies at the University of Vienna, actor and author Miguel Herz-Kestranek, Albertina provenance researcher Pia Schölnberger and university professor emeritus at the Institute of Contemporary History of the University of Vienna Gerhard Botz discussed the impact the National Socialist era had had on the families' memory and the meaning of restitution and compensation for the victims of National Socialism.

The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the National Fund, President of the National Council Barbara Prammer, believes that the Findbuch has come at the right time. The General Settlement Fund – established on the basis of the Washington Agreement –, whose work provides the foundation for the Findbuch, had almost completed its tasks. In the run-up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, an important source of information had been made accessible, which not only benefited victims of National Socialism from Austria and their descendents but also historians, schools, universities and commemorative projects. "Undertaking research in the Findbuch is also a form of remembrance and commemoration and, as such, also forms part of the Austrian culture of remembrance", continued Prammer.

Austrian archives, libraries and other institutions support the Findbuch for Victims of National Socialism. The Director General of the Austrian State Archives, Wolfgang Maderthaner, states: "The Austrian State Archives are proud to have been able to contribute towards the successful realization of this necessary and long-overdue project through the extensive provision of fundamental historical source material." Johanna Rachinger, Director General of the Austrian National Library: "We were very pleased to have been able to support the initiative of the National Fund in establishing the online Findbuch. It is still very difficult for the descendents of many victims to receive that to which they are entitled or even just to be able to shed light on the tragic fates of their relatives. I am convinced that an important tool has been created in this respect, in the form of the Findbuch for Victims of National Socialism." For the Director of the Vienna University Library, Maria Seissl, "the Findbuch constitutes a vital step regarding digital access to information, which benefits both the victims of National Socialism and their descendents as well as those undertaking academic and remembrance work."

The main goal hoped to be achieved by publishing the Findbuch – also available in English – is to facilitate the search for "family traces" in Austrian archive holdings, not only for the victims of National Socialism from Austria and their descendents but also for academics and provenance or family researchers. It is intended to encourage people to come to terms with National Socialism and its aftermath in Austria, both in terms of family history research and at an academic, educational and societal level. "By publishing the Findbuch, the National Fund is further building on its dedication in expressing Austria's special responsibility towards the victims of National Socialism and their descendents", summed up Lessing.

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