

The Museum for Contraception and Abortion - Collection and Documentation:

Focus Austria

In addition to Hermann Knaus, Sigmund Freud and Carl Djerassi, a number of Austrian individuals have had an impact upon research, development, education and communication in relation to birth control and the termination of unwanted pregnancies.

Hermann Knaus' (1892-1970) groundbreaking work, 'Periodic Fertility and Sterility in Woman - A Natural Method of Birth Control', appeared in German as of 1934 in innumerable editions and was published in several languages. We have obtained a collection of these texts through purchases as well as contributions. It includes the first calculator to determine days of fertility as well as a menstruation calendar. Of especial significance to medical history are revisions to the original as well as an official statement made by the Catholic Church and added to the text in the 1950's. Knaus' discovery laid the basis for the development of two disc calculators labelled 'Konzip' from 1931 and 1932, published by Senefelder in Graz and 'patented in various developed countries'. Days of fertility in a given year are calculated based upon the first day of the first period of menstruation. Although these disc calculators found broad distribution, only a few have survived and are consequently difficult to locate in scientific literature.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) is another big name among Austrian 'celebrities' in the field. 'Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses' ('Die Sexualität in der Ätiologie der Neurosen' Wiener Klinische Rundschau, Nr. 2, 1898) includes the following statement "It would be one of the greatest triumphs of humanity...if the procreative act, laden with responsibility, could be raised to the level of voluntary and intentional behaviour, separated from the imperative to satisfy a natural urge."

Incidentally, Freud himself had a vasectomy - a procedure that became socially

acceptable at the beginning of the 20th century due to the efforts of Austrian surgeon Eugen Steinach (1861-1944).

Other individuals deserving honorable mention include Adolf Schmid, who developed the internationally patented 'Indicator' - a mechanical calculating device used to determine fertile and infertile days; Ludwig Haberlandt, a chemist at the Innsbruck University specializing in the foundation of hormone research; and Christoph Tietze, a sociologist and demographer primarily acknowledged and honored abroad.

The pioneering work of **Ludwig Haberlandt** (1885-1932), specializing in hormonal anti-conception illuminated via a comprehensive omnibus of works. This material was donated to our collection by grandson and former university professor Dr. Walter Haberlandt and has yet to be processed. It includes portraits and work photos from the years 1921-1928, conference programs, lecture announcements and summaries, lists of publications, monographs from magazine essays, textbook contributions, correspondences, honors and diary entries. This material is an invaluable supplement to Haberlandt's 'Die hormonale Sterilisierung des weiblichen Organismus' (The Hormonal Sterilization of the Female Organism), published in 1931 and included in our collection.

Patent number 123 610 was issued to the aforementioned Viennese inventor **Adolf Schmid** on July 10, 1931 to safeguard an apparatus used to determine the number of days that lie between two calendar dates. This calculator was especially designed and intended for women to ascertain days of fertility and infertility based upon individual menstrual fluctuations. It was internationally patented under the name 'C.D. Indicator' and sold in the millions. We have reconstructed an enlarged model of this apparatus that enables our visitors to gain first hand experience of its utility.

The advertising prospectus excerpt entitled, 'Die Mittel zur Verhütung Ungewollter Empfängnis und Schwangerschaft' (The Means of Preventing Unwanted Conception and Pregnancy), originated on or shortly before 1913 and measures 23 cm x 30 cm. The title page of the four-sided brochure carries a stamp from the 'Internationaler Bund für Kontingentierung der Bevölkerung, Österreich, Gruppe Wien. The brochure

recommends Speton pills. A charcoal drawing by [acclaimed] German artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) depicts a mother with two children and is accompanied by a sentence that reads, "Why do you need so many children?"

The relevance of this brochure to Austria is twofold. On the one hand, it provides evidence of the '**Internationaler Bund für Kontingentierung der Bevölkerung, Österreich, Gruppe Wien**' (International Alliance for the Population Allocation of Austria, Vienna Group), an institution that has largely been neglected in terms of research. On the other hand, it substantiates the fact of contraceptive methods offered and available in Austria at the time.

One of the most remarkable works belonging to Austrian literature concerned with the termination of pregnancy is a textbook of juridical medicine from 1878 with special regard to Austrian and German legislation ('Lehrbuch der Gerichtlichen Medizin mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der österreichischen und deutschen Gesetzgebung'). It was written by Austrian physician and pioneer of modern forensic pathology, **Eduard Ritter von Hofmann** (1837-1897), and provides exhaustive insight into methods of traditional and mainstream medical practice. This work was repeatedly reprinted and it was translated into several languages. It is significant not only because of its focus upon relevant German and Austrian law, but also because of the information it provides regarding forbidden methods of intervention entirely missing from gynecological literature of the day.

Hofman earned high honors at the Vienna University for continuing the tradition of the 'Vienna School of Forensic Medicine'. He directed an open and modern institute that attracted individuals from all over the empire. He introduced microscopy and animal experimentation to forensic medicine. He was also renowned for identifying the casualties of Vienna's Ring Theater fire, as well as his autopsy of Crown Prince Rudolf. He was decorated with innumerable medals for his accomplishments, achieved knighthood, and was laid to rest in an honorary grave in Vienna's Central Cemetery.

Among Austrian literary figures, those concerned with pertinent themes include writer and dramatist Arthur Schnitzler (**Professor Bernhardt**, 1912), Ödön von Horváth (**Tales from the Vienna Woods**, 1931) and writer, translator Peter Handke (**Wunschloses**

Unglück, 1972). Ödon von Hovath's portrait of a female abortionist corresponds with a series of documents and allusions to the situation of unwanted pregnancies and children who were deposited in orphanages or left to the care of foster families. These include the **Geschichte des Wiener Gebär- und Findelhauses**, 1784 - 1910 (a history of the Vienna Home for Child-Birthing and Foundlings), which treats of an institution opposite the General Hospital on Alser Street. Of the 730,130 children admitted, 68% did not survive the period of their care. Women had to be gleaned from all over the empire and as far away as Silesia to serve as "baby-farmers" for the 20,000 children admitted each year. As preconditions, they had to be members of the Roman Catholic Church and present official documentation proving a stable financial background as well as a certificate testifying to a morally unblemished record (Sittlichkeitszeugnis). For many impoverished families in Styria, Lower Austria, Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary, the care of orphans provided an additional and desperately needed source of income. However, the children did not survive their care for long, nor were they perhaps supposed: If the children died early, their parents could save their money. The "baby-farmer" could take in a new child, which was economically safer for them since the parents kept contact and paid regularly for the first couple of weeks/months.

One of the many regions where the care of foster children provided an important source of income was the city of Jennersdorf in Burgenland. An analysis of the local parish register reveals this well-established practice in detail: Foster children died quickly.

"In Hungary and Austria, the expulsion of semen after the sexual act is...customary. The woman sits upright immediately upon termination of the act. Spreading her legs and wriggling her behind, she seeks to powerfully expel the male seed from out of her body." This interesting, contraceptive method is described by reformer and naturopath Friedrich Eduard Bilz (1842 - 1922) in his work, *Das neue Naturheilverfahren – Lehr- und Nachschlagebuch der naturgemäßen Heilweise und Gesundheitspflege* (The New Naturopathic Textbook and Reference for Natural Healing and Healthcare), from ca. 1900. Other authors also report **specifically** on **Austrian or Alpine contraceptive methods**. We have gathered such descriptions in a collection that juxtaposes them to experiences reported by women.

The **birth control chain** offered by the Austrian aid organization 'Aktion Regen' does not present a safe method of family planning according to European standards, but it is suitable as a basic calendar of menstrual cycles for women in developing countries. It is primarily intended as an educational tool to teach fundamentals to the illiterate.

The birth control chain consists of 30 beads and a rubber ring. The number of beads corresponds to the average number of days in a female cycle. The adjustable rubber ring is moved forward by one bead per day, the color of the bead indicating the degree of fertility.

Several posters from the period prior to the liberalization of abortion in Austria are worthy of mention. ‚Abtreibungsbefürworter an den Hochschulen‘ ('Abortion Advocates In The Academy'); ‚Ob Kinder oder keine bestimmen wir alleine‘ ('Children or none, we determine alone'); ‚Komitee "Selbstbestimmung der Frau"‘ ('Committee for the Self-Determination of Women'); Freitag 9. November Demonstration; 'Für das Selbstbestimmungsrecht....' ('For the Right of Self-Determination...'). These placards from our collection document political debate and the active agents of initiatives. Questions in debate included determining who would cover the insurance costs for contraception and abortion; improved psychological support for women wanting an abortion; more and better information regarding termination of pregnancies; research for safe and secure contraceptive methods for men and women.

Our collection of posters is complemented by leaflets, activist newspapers, proclamations, open letters, political surveys, as well as other thematically specific materials from Austria.

A further focus of the Museum's mission includes the investigation and publication of Austrian police reports, court files, and legal materials in regard to contraception and so-called 'forbidden interventions'. We record personal interviews with contemporary witnesses, politicians, doctors, advocates and other health care practitioners and have a primary interest in records of how women and their families are directly impacted by the methods, politics and social repercussions of contraception and abortion.