

## Leo Wachenheimer

Leo Wachenheimer was born in Biebesheim on 23 March 1897 as the son of a long-established Jewish family. His father Mayer Wachenheimer ran a thriving butcher's shop and a cattle trade at Rathausgasse 4. He was also a long-time member of the board of the local Jewish community. Leo Wachenheimer also learned the butcher's trade and worked in his father's butcher's shop. When the First World War began in 1914, he was called up for military service at the age of only 17. In 1927, he married Minna Alexander and in 1929 and 1931, their children Charlotte and Siegbert were born.

In 1933, Wachenheimer came into conflict with members of the SA from Biebesheim: Since an elderly local farmer had decided to give up his small farm, his son sold the last cow to his friend Leo Wachenheimer. When he succeeded in reselling the animal at a profit, it aroused the anger of the local SA. In order to harass Wachenheimer, they put his friend under pressure to claim the profit from the sale (approx. 100 marks). But the friend refused.



Leo and Minna Wachenheimer, late 1920s. Photo: Robyn Blumenthal

In November 1933, SA and SS men from Darmstadt and Biebesheim drove up in front of Leo Wachenheimer's house. In his 1956 application for "restitution", Wachenheimer described his arrest: *"They climbed the gate, pushed in the front door and searched the house. According to my estimate, they were around 30 people. Out of fear, I jumped out of the window onto the roof of a neighboring house, and they shot at me but did not hit. I came back because I feared that something might happen to my family. Thereupon I was dragged into a car and they drove off. I was only poorly dressed. On the way I was ordered to get out. I was pushed out of the car and ordered to leave, but I did not leave because I knew what they were going to do with me. They shot a few times in the air to scare me. After a discussion with each other, they ordered me to get back in the car."*

The men took Wachenheimer to the prison in Darmstadt. On the way there, he was brutally beaten with batons in the car. He continued to be badly mistreated in the basement of the prison until a prison officer stopped the hitters. The next day he was transferred to the Osthofen Concentration Camp, where two officers from the department of public prosecution Darmstadt visited him a few days later and questioned him about the incident. *"They would have released me home then, but I was so black and blue from the beating that it was impossible because of the people in the village who shouldn't see something like that"*. He was not released until a month later. After his return to Biebesheim, SS men came to him twice and tried unsuccessfully to get him to sign that they had not mistreated him.

As a result of the boycott of Jewish shops, the Wachenheimer butcher's shop's income plummeted. After selling almost all of their property well below its value, Leo Wachenheimer and his wife and children emigrated to South Africa in December 1935. The luggage sent in advance for the emigration did not reach its destination, so that the family left the country with almost no possessions. The emigrants were soon followed by Minna Wachenheimer's

parents and several other members of the Alexander family with their families. Leo Wachenheimer's parents initially stayed behind in Biebesheim and had to live on their savings because they no longer had any income. In February 1938, they also emigrated to South Africa together with other family members.

Without knowledge of the national language, it was difficult for the trained butcher and his family to gain a foothold in South Africa. In 1936, he opened a butcher's shop in Johannesburg, but it took a few years before the family could live on the income. Since he also had to support his parents and in-laws financially, the family lived in simple circumstances. Wachenheimer later succeeded in building a factory for kosher sausage products, which gave him a good income.



Minna, Leo and Charlotte (Lottie) Wachenheimer in their butcher shop in Johannesburg, about 1960.  
Photo: Robyn Blumenthal

Around 1964, Leo Wachenheimer visited his former hometown Biebesheim twice. He died in Johannesburg on 23 January 1969 at the age of 71.

In 1934, Leo's cousin Josef Wachenheimer from Biebesheim was also deported to the Osthofen Concentration Camp on charges of "usury" and imprisoned there for a short time. After the November Pogroms in 1938, he and his family fled to the USA. Leo Wachenheimer's five siblings also managed to emigrate. His father Mayer died shortly after arriving in South Africa in 1938.