

## Manhunt in Liechtenstein

Today a cover from the Principality of Liechtenstein: It is a domestic card sent from Malbun - more precisely from the "tourist station" Sareiser Joch - to a lady in the Kurhaus Gaflei. The card is cancelled with a very clear LBK No. 1 a, postal deposit box cancel \*MALBUN\* as secondary cancel and the postmark Vaduz with the date July 4, 1914. Due to this dating of the postmark, the stamp is probably the 5-Heller stamp of the first stamp series of the Principality of Liechtenstein with the image of Prince Johann II, which was issued on chalk paper. In 1915 the stamp was issued on ordinary paper. More details about the first stamps of Liechtenstein and the history of Gaflei can be found at: <https://www.oesvlph.at/april-2021-erstaussgabe-liechtensteinischer-briefmarken/>.



What is not described there, however, is what role the then owner of the Gaflei Kurhaus played in the death and hunt for Alfred and Fritz Rotter, who were probably the most colorful figures on the Berlin theater scene at the time, in 1933.

Anyone who is concerned with the cultural life of Berlin in the first third of the 20th century will be familiar with the brothers Alfred and Fritz Rotter (formerly Schaie). Starting before the First World War, they managed to build up a theater empire with which they earned merits, for example, when they created worldwide successes with operettas by Lehár and Abraham. However, due to bad speculations as a result of the Great Depression and accounting negligence, they lost everything. They had mortgage debts, rent arrears and were attacked daily - including anti-Semitically - in the right-wing conservative press. All reasons why the two brothers came to Liechtenstein in January 1933, having already obtained citizenship there in 1931. The German press accused the Rotter brothers, who had been in Liechtenstein since the beginning of 1933, of fraudulent bankruptcy and demanded their extradition, unlike the German judiciary, whose investigation of the Rotter brothers was practically fruitless. In doing so, she also attacked Liechtenstein and its naturalization law. Their Jewishness and Fritz Rotter's homosexuality may also have played a role in this.

Spurred on by this press campaign, which also attacked Liechtenstein and its right of naturalization, in March 1933 the four Liechtenstein National Socialists R. Schädler (the owner of the Kurhaus Gaflei), F. Roeckle, P. Rheinberger and E. Frommelt, to kidnap Alfred and Fritz Rotter to Germany and hand them over to the justice there. On April 5, 1933, Schädler lured the couple Alfred and Gertrud Rotter as well as Fritz Rotter and his companion Julia Wolf to the alpine spa house "Gaflei", where the assassins, who included five Germans hired by Rheinberger, tried to overpower them. The attack failed, but Alfred and Gertrud Rotter, who were fleeing on foot, fell to their deaths in a nearby ravine, and Julia Wolf was seriously injured. Fritz Rotter was able to notify the Liechtenstein government and escaped by jumping out of a car. Rheinberger and the five Germans were caught on the run in Götzis (Vorarlberg), the other three perpetrators were arrested in Liechtenstein.

On June 8, 1933, in a highly publicized criminal trial, the four Liechtenstein perpetrators were sentenced to lenient prison terms ranging from four months to one year for attempted kidnapping. The lawyer Vladimir Rosenbaum, who represented the civil suit, was not allowed to read his plea, in which he criticized the Nazi system of violence. Friends and acquaintances of the Rotter assassins had previously collected more than 700 signatures in the country for a pardon, since they "only" wanted to protect the Fatherland. In Constance, four of the German accomplices were sentenced to three months in prison. In October 1933, at the request of the Liechtenstein government, a debate was held with representatives of the German authorities. It achieved an end to the German press attacks, but had to agree to the early release of Schädler and Rheinberger, who were still imprisoned. Another consequence was also a brief halt to financial naturalizations and the inclusion of a residency requirement of three years in Liechtenstein's citizenship law.