

SELMA ENGEL PAPERS, approximately 1926-1946
1999.A.0201

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
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Descriptive summary

Title: Selma Engel papers

Dates: approximately 1926-1946

Accession number: 1999.A.0201

Creator: Engel, Selma, 1922-2018

Extent: 0.3 linear foot (3 folders)

Repository: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW,
Washington, DC 20024-2126

Abstract: The Selma Engel papers consist of Selma's diary, biographical materials, and photographs. The diary (1943-1944), written while in hiding in German occupied Poland, describes Selma's arrival at the Sobibór concentration camp, the Sobibór uprising and her escape with her husband Chaim, the farming couple who hid them in Plisków, and Chaim and Selma's health issues. Biographical materials include repatriation cards for Selma and Chaim under assumed names, a 1946 letter documenting the deaths of Chaim's family members in the Holocaust, and Chaim's prisoner of war work card. Photographs depict Selma's family members in the Netherlands and Selma and Chaim with their baby in Odessa.

Languages: Dutch, German, Polish, French

Administrative Information

Access: Collection is open for use, but is stored offsite. Please contact the Reference Desk more than seven days prior to visit in order to request access.

Reproduction and use: Collection is available for use. Material may be protected by copyright. Please contact reference staff for further information.

Preferred citation: (Identification of item), Selma Engel papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Selma Engel donated the Selma Engel papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1999 and 2007. The accession formerly cataloged as 2007.69 has been incorporated into this collection.

Accruals: Accruals may have been received since this collection was first processed, see archives catalog at collections.ushmm.org for further information.

Processing history: Julie Schweitzer, September 2014

Biographical note

Selma Engel (1922-2018) was born Saartje Wijnberg in Groningen, Netherlands, to Samuel Wijnberg and Alida (Nathan) Wijnberg. She moved with her parents and three older siblings, Abraham, Maurits and Marthyn, to Zwolle in 1929, where her parents ran a kosher hotel. The family initially remained in Zwolle following the German occupation, and Selma's father died of natural causes in 1941. Her brother Abraham married and moved to Utrecht, where his family survived the war in hiding. Alida, Marthyn, Maurits, and his wife Betje all perished at Auschwitz. Selma avoided deportation to Auschwitz by hiding, but her group was denounced, and Selma was arrested, imprisoned in Amsterdam, transferred to Vught and Westerbork and deported to Sobibór in April 1943. At Sobibór she met her future husband, Chaim Engel (1916-2003), who was born in Brudzew, Poland, and raised in Łódź. He was captured by the Germans while serving in the Polish Army and was sent to Germany for forced labor before being transferred to Sobibór. Selma and Chaim participated in the Sobibór revolt and escaped on October 14, 1943. They were hidden by Polish Christians Adam and Stefka Novak on a farm in Plisków until liberation by the Soviets, and Selma gave birth to a baby boy named Emiltje. They stayed briefly in Chełm before finding their way to Zwolle via Odessa, but their baby died en route. They moved to Israel in 1951 and immigrated to the United States in 1957.

Scope and content of collection

The Selma Engel papers consist of a diary, biographical materials, and photographs. The diary (1943-1944) was written by Selma while hiding on a farm in German occupied Poland. It describes Selma's arrival at Sobibór, the uprising and her escape with Chaim, the farming couple hiding them (Adam and Stefka Nowak), conditions of the farm, and Chaim and Selma's health issues and Selma's pregnancy. The diary also includes handwritten dictionary pages translating German into Polish, messages to Selma from Chaim, and sketches of the Hotel Wijnberg in Zwolle. Biographical materials include repatriation cards for Selma and Chaim Engel under assumed names Selma and Herman Kriseck, a 1946 letter documenting the deaths of Chaim's family members, and Chaim's prisoner of war work card. Photographs depict Selma's family members in the Netherlands and Selma and Chaim Engel with their baby in Odessa.

System of arrangement

The Selma Engel papers are arranged as a single series:

- Series 1: Selma Engel papers, approximately 1926-1946

Indexing terms

Engel, Chaim, 1916-2003

Sobibór (Concentration camp)

Jews--Poland--Łódź.

Jews--Netherlands--Zwolle--Diaries.

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Poland--Personal narratives.

Hiding places--Poland.

Chełm (Lublin, Poland : Powiat)

Zwolle (Netherlands)

Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Selma Engel papers, approximately 1926-1946

Folder	Title
1	Diaries, 1943-1944
2	Biographical materials, 1942-1946
3	Photographs, approximately 1926-1945