

RATAFIA FAMILY PAPERS, 1871-2011
2005.198.1

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

Title: Ratafia family papers

Dates: 1871-2011 (bulk circa 1930s-1964)

Accession number: 2005.198.1

Creator: Ratafia, Tema (Vilnius :Lithuania)

Additional creator: Ratafia, Lazarz (Warsaw :Poland)

Extent: 1 linear foot (3 boxes)

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

Abstract: The Ratafia family papers primarily relate to the post-war experiences of Tema, Lazarz, George, and Helene Ratafia in Poland and France. The collection includes biographical papers, immigration documents, publications, and photographs. There is some material related to relatives the Ratafia family of Warsaw, Poland as well as Tema's family, the Ginzburgs of Wilno, Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania).

Languages: Polish, French, English, Russian, German

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), Ratafia family papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The Ratafia family papers were donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by George de Ratafia in 2005, with an accretion in 2015. George de Ratafia is the son of Tema and Lazarz Ratafia.

Related archival materials: There is one artifact related to this collection: Wrist watch with a brown band and engraved initials saved from the Wilno ghetto, 2005.198.2, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

Processing history: Adam Fielding, January 2016

Biographical note

Tema Ratafia (1925-2013, later Tema de Ratafia) was born in Wilno, Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania) to Moise Ginzburg (b. 1886) and Rachel Rubenstein Ginzburg (b. 1899). Her father was a coal and wood merchant and her mother was a teacher. She had an older brother Benjamin (b. 1922) and a twin sister Eta (b. 1925, later Eda Golde). During the interwar years as life became difficult for Jews in Wilno, her father began to lose business and struggle financially.

Shortly after the German occupation of Wilno in 1941, the Germans began issuing anti-Jewish decrees. By the end of August 1941, Tema's grandmother and uncle had been shot in the Ponary forest along with around 35,000 other Jews. On September 6, 1941, the Germans established two ghettos in Wilno. Tema and her family were placed in the larger one. Tema's father received a work permit, but her mother did not. To assist the family Tema and her siblings found work within the ghetto, including cleaning the latrines. The ghetto was liquidated in 1943, and Tema's mother and brother were sent to Stutthof concentration camp where they were killed. Her father was sent to Chelmno death camp and killed. During the liquidation, Tema and her friend Esther fled to the home of an acquaintance of her mother, Josefa Mackiewicz (b. 1871). She was willing to hide one child. Esther could not come with her to Josefa's house, and Tema did not want to leave her behind, so they left together and lived in the woods for a few days. They were caught and Esther was killed, but Tema managed to escape and return to Josefa's home. After a few weeks, an antisemitic neighbor discovered Tema and threatened to denounce Josefa. Both women fled to the home of Joseph Raugiewicz, a factory owner in Kalisz. Joseph provided Tema with false Christian papers claiming her name was Leokadia Rynkiewicz, and Josefa had her baptized with the name Teresa. The Gestapo later arrested Joseph for harboring Jews, but his friend Piotr Piewcewicz warned Tema in time for her to escape. After a few weeks, the Gestapo released Joseph, and Tema returned to his home. Joseph sent Tema back to Josefa who at that time was also harboring a teacher, a lawyer, and a doctor, but he helped the women out financially. Josefa sheltered Tema until liberation.

Lazarz Ludwig Ratafia (1915-1984) was born in Warsaw, Poland to Kopel and Elka Ratafia. He had one brother, Gaston, and one sister, Zosia. Lazarz's experiences during the war are unknown. Gaston fled Poland wearing a swastika armband and carrying a copy of *Deutschland Erwacht* for cover. Zosia survived the war, but was killed in a post-war pogrom in Poland.

After the war, Tema continued to use her false identity of Leokadia Rynkiewicz for many years. She moved to Warsaw where she met Lazarz Ratafia. They married in 1948, and had two children, Helene (b.

1948) and George (b. 1950, later George de Ratafia). Tema insisted that Josefa live with them in gratitude for having saved her, and she stayed with them for the next ten years. Tema and Lazarz moved to Paris, France around 1956, and their children George and Helene spent some time in an orphanage. In 1953, an acquaintance of Tema's told her that she had met someone who looked just like her. In that way, Tema discovered that her twin sister Eta had survived and immigrated to the United States. In 1957, Tema immigrated to the United States to live with Eta. Her husband and children joined her two years later.

Scope and content of collection

The Ratafia family papers primarily relate to the post-war experiences of Tema, Lazarz, George, and Helene Ratafia in Poland and France. The collection includes biographical papers, immigration documents, publications, and photographs. There is some material related to relatives the Ratafia family of Warsaw, Poland as well as Tema's family, the Ginzburgs of Wilno, Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania).

The biographical material includes birth certificates, passports, marriage certificates, and immigration and naturalization papers. Tema's papers include documents regarding her false name and Christian identity, Leokadia Rynkiewicz, used during and after the war to hide her Jewish background. George's papers contain a copy of a baptism certificate also used while Tema continued to use her false identity. Also included are orphanage papers of George and Helene's, and a birth certificate of Josefa Mackiewicz.

The printed materials contain three publications. Included is a copy of Dov Katzovich's self-published memoir. Katzovich was related to Tema's mother's family. There is also a copy of *Deutschland erwacht: Werden, Kampf und Sieg der NSDAP*, often referred to as a cigarette album, which Gaston Ratafia carried with him as a cover while he fled Nazi-occupied Poland.

The photographs chiefly contain photos of the Ratafia family in post-war Poland and France, along with relatives of the Ratafia and Ginzburg families. Included are photographs of Tema's mother, brother, and sister; Lazarz's father, brother, sister, and pre-war girlfriend; and Josefa Mackiewicz. There is also a photograph Tema's sister, Eta Golde, at what is probably Feldafing displaced person's camp in Feldafing, Germany. Additionally, there is a photograph album for the wedding of Samuel Lavner and Eveline Steinmiller in 1957.

System of arrangement

The Ratafia family papers are arranged as three series:

Series 1: Biographical material, 1871-1964 (bulk 1940-1964)

Series 2: Printed material, 1933-2011

Series 3: Photographs, circa 1920s-1958

All series arranged alphabetically.

Indexing terms

Person:

Ratafia, Tema de.

Ratafia, Lazarz

Ratafia, George

Ratafia, Helene

Topical Subject:

Twins--1930-1940.
 School children--Lithuania--Vilnius.
 Jews--Lithuania--Vilnius.
 Jews--Poland--Warsaw.
 Emigration & immigration--United States.
 Holocaust Jewish (1939-1945)--Poland.

Geography:
 Vilnius (Lithuania)
 Warsaw (Poland)
 Paris (France)

Genre/Form:
 Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Biographical material, 1871-1964 (bulk 1940-1964)

Box	Folder	Title
1	1	Golde, Wolf: Driver's license, 1946
1	2	Mackiewicz, Josefa: Birth certificate, 1871
1	3	Ratafia, George: Birth and baptism certificates, 1956-1958
1	4	Ratafia, George: French orphanage papers, 1958
1	5	Ratafia, George: Letter to Lazarz Ratafia, 1958
1	6	Ratafia, Helene: French orphanage and school papers, 1958
1	7	Ratafia, Lazarz: Identification papers, 1940-circa 1958
1	8	Ratafia, Lazarz: Immigration and naturalization papers, 1957-1964
1	9	Ratafia, Tema: Identification papers, 1957-1997
1	10	Ratafia, Tema: Immigration and naturalization papers, 1957-1964
1	11	Ratafia, Tema: Marriage certificates, 1957

Series 2: Printed material, 1933-2011

Box	Folder	Title
2		Bade, Wilfrid: <i>Deutschland erwacht: Werden, Kampf und Sieg der NSDAP</i> , 1933
1	12	Katzovich, Dov: <i>The Story of My Life</i> , 2003
1	13	Newsletter article on Eda Golde, 2011

Series 3: Photographs, circa 1920s-1958

Box	Folder	Title
1	14	Friends and family, circa 1930s
1	15	Ginzburg, Benjamin, circa 1926
1	16	Ginzburg, Rachel, 1928
1	17	Golde, Eta: circa 1940s
1	18	Golde, Eta: [probably] Feldafing displaced persons camp, Feldafing, Germany, circa 1946
1	19	Golde, M., Brooklyn, New York, 1952
1	20	Mackiewicz, Josefa, circa 1955
1	21	Maria, P.L., circa 1940s
1	22	Ratafia family: Paris, France, circa 1956-1958
1	23	Ratafia family: Poland, 1954-circa 1956
1	24	Ratafia, Gaston, circa 1953
1	25	Ratafia, George, circa 1954-circa 1960
1	26	Ratafia, Kopel, circa 1920s-circa 1930s
1	27	Ratafia, Kopel and Gaston, Paris, France, circa 1940s
1	28	Ratafia, Lazarz: Palestine, 1949
1	29	Ratafia, Lazarz: Warsaw, Poland, 1945
1	30	Ratafia, Lazarz: With communist party members, Poland, circa 1930s
1	31	Ratafia, Lazarz: With girlfriend, Warsaw, Poland, circa 1930s
1	32	Ratafia, Tema, 1948-1949
1	33	Ratafia, Tema and Lazarz, 1952
1	34	Ratafia, Tema and Eda Golde: First grade class in Jewish gymnasium, Wilno, Poland, 1938
1	35	Ratafia, Zosia, 1938-circa 1940s
3		Steinmiller-Lavner family wedding album, 1957