

HERBERT A. FIERST PAPERS, 1922-2004
2006.8.1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW
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Descriptive summary

Title: Herbert A. Fierst papers

Dates: 1922-2004

Accession number: 2006.8.1

Creator: Fierst, Herbert A., 1914-2005.

Extent: 3.0 linear feet (6 boxes)

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

Abstract: The Herbert A. Fierst papers consist of biographical materials, displaced persons files, photographs, subject files, writings, speeches, and interviews primarily documenting Fierst's work on displaced persons issues at the Pentagon and State Department in the 1940s and the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 signed by Harry S. Truman. The collection also includes a diary Herbert kept while traveling in Germany in 1935 and 1936, writings and speeches about Nazi Germany and postwar displaced persons issues, McCarthy-era investigations into Fierst and his colleagues, and materials relating to Herbert's family.

Languages: English

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), Herbert A. Fierst papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Herbert Fierst donated a copy of his 1972 memoir *A View of the Jewish Problem from the Pentagon and State Department, 1945-1948* to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1996. Edith Fierst donated the remainder of the Herbert Fierst papers, including a second copy of the memoir, to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2006. The accession formerly cataloged as 1996.A.0294 has been incorporated into this collection.

Related materials: Edith Fierst also donated an oral history interview with Sam Perlman and Sophy Perlman about Herbert Fierst to the United States Holocaust Museum (2006.8.2).

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, January 2014

Biographical note

Herbert A. Fierst (1914-2005) was born in New York City to Harry P. and Miriam Fierst. He traveled in Europe on a Harvard scholarship following college and spent some time in Nazi Germany before returning to the States to study law and join the army. He worked in the legal department of the Supreme Headquarters for the Allied Expeditionary Forces in London until he was recalled to the United States at the end of 1944 to serve in the Civil Affairs Division at the Pentagon. He became Special Assistant to General John H. Hilldring, Assistant Secretary of State for Occupied Areas, in 1946 and worked on the issue of displaced persons through 1949. In 1946 he received an Army Commendation Ribbon from General Eisenhower and a Legion of Merit Award from General Hilldring.

Scope and content of collection

The Herbert A. Fierst papers consist of biographical materials, displaced persons files, photographs, subject files, writings, speeches, and interviews primarily documenting Fierst's work on displaced persons issues at the Pentagon and State Department in the 1940s and the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 signed by Harry S. Truman. The collection also includes a diary Herbert kept while traveling in Germany in 1935 and 1936, writings and speeches about Nazi Germany and postwar displaced persons issues, McCarthy-era investigations into Fierst and his colleagues, and materials relating to Herbert's family.

Biographical materials include biographical statements and resumes documenting the careers of Herbert and Edith Fierst, a family history by Herbert's mother, and records documenting Herbert's time at Camp Modin and at Mount Vernon High School, the Fierst family's trips to Palestine/Israel in 1927 and 1970 for Herbert's Bar-Mitzvah and later to volunteer on a kibbutz, and Herbert's award of the Sheldon Prize Fellowship that allowed him to travel to Germany in the mid-1930s.

Displaced persons files consist of correspondence, reports, and clippings documenting the Pentagon's and the State Department's handling of issues regarding displaced persons in Europe following World War II. This series includes files on six of the seven advisers on Jewish affairs to the US military (Judge Simon Rifkind, Rabbi Philip Bernstein, Judge Louis E. Levinthal, William Haber, Harry Greenstein, and Abraham Hyman), governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations also working with displaced persons, and the visa cases of Izak and Mania Kenig, family members of a friend of Herbert.

Photographs depict Herbert Fierst visiting Palestine as a child, as a young man in the military, in government service at the Pentagon and at the State Department, and in the oval office during a bill signing by Harry S. Truman, presumably the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. This folder also includes a signed photograph of Chaim Weizman, a copy print of Herbert's parents, and a photocopy of a photograph of a little boy.

Subject files consist of materials related to loans and donations by Herbert to historical societies and museums; Nazi propaganda Herbert collected during the Nazi period; materials related to Chaim Weizman, President Truman, and David McCullough's biography of Truman; a copy of David Bernard Sachar's thesis about David K. Niles; a file on the United Nations; and Herbert's answers to McCarthy and House Un-American Activities Committee security charges. Materials include correspondence, transcripts, printed materials, and legal agreements.

Writings, speeches, and interviews include a copy of the diary Herbert kept while traveling in Germany in 1935 and 1936; a transcript of an interview with Fierst about displaced persons broadcast on NBC in the 1940s; transcripts of oral history interviews with Herbert; and drafts and copies of Herbert's book, *A View of the Jewish Problem from the Pentagon and State Department, 1945-1948*, about his work with displaced persons issues in the 1940s, the effect of the Harrison report on his work, issues regarding border controls in the American occupied zones, and his work with Civil Affairs division Chief of State General John Hilldring at the State Department. The series also includes correspondence, programs, and drafts of speeches by Herbert related to various speaking engagements; the first page of a play Herbert wrote in high school; other writings by Herbert about Europe, Israel, and the American economy; and drafts of Herbert's family history book, *A Special Bond: True Story of an American Jewish Family in Times of Crisis, Drawn from the Letters and Diaries of Miriam Fierst, Harry P. Fierst, and Herbert A. Fierst*. This series further includes an audiocassette recording of an interview in which Sam and Sophy Perlman discuss the childhood of Herbert's father, Harry P. Fierst.

System of arrangement

The Herbert A. Fierst papers are arranged as five series:

- Series 1: Biographical materials, 1922-1998
- Series 2: Displaced persons files, 1946-1996
- Series 3: Photographs, approximately 1927-1948
- Series 4: Subject files, 1935-2004
- Series 5: Writings, speeches, and interviews, 1930-2002

Indexing terms

Fierst, Herbert A., 1914-2005.

Fierst, Edith.

Fierst, Harry P.

Fierst, Miriam.

Hilldring, John H. (John Henry), 1895-1974.

Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972

McCarthy, Joseph, 1908-1957.

United States. Department of Defense.

United States. Department of State.

United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Government Operations. Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

United States. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities.

Refugees – Government policy – United States.

Refugees – Legal status, laws, etc. – United States.

Jewish refugees – Europe.

World War, 1939-1945 – Refugees.

Germany – History – 1933-1945.

Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Biographical materials, 1922-1998

Box	Folder	Title
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1	2	Camp Modin, approximately 1922-1929, 1959, 1971, 1986, 1996
1	3	Fierst, Edith, Resume and biographical statement, approximately 1987
1	4-5	Fierst family trip to Israel for Herbert's Bar-Mitzvah, 1927, 1977, 1991-1992 (2 folders)
1	6	Fierst family volunteers at Kfar Blum, 1970
1	7-8	Fierst, Herbert, Biographical statements, approximately 1955-1998 (2 folders)
1	9	Fierst, Herbert, Resumes, approximately 1950-1975
1	10	Mount Vernon High School, approximately 1929-1930
1	11	Outdated file list, approximately 1998
1	12	Sheldon Prize Fellowship, 1935

Series 2: Displaced persons files, 1946-1996

Box	Folder	Title
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1	14	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1946-1948, 1991
1	15-21	Bernstein, Rabbi Phillip, 1946-1980, 1986, 1996 (7 folders)
1	22-23	Collins, Henry A., Jr., 1946-1947 (2 folders)
1	24	Displaced Persons Act of 1948, 1947-1949
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2	7	Displaced persons and the US military, 1946-1950, 1990-1996
2	8-12	Displaced persons problems and the State Department, 1946-1950, 1996 (5 folders)
2	13	The forty eight Estonian refugees, 1946-1947
2	14	Greenstein, Harry, 1949
2	15	Haber, William, 1947-1949
2	16	Harrison, Earl G., 1947

2	17	Heller, Rabbi J. G., 1947
2	18	Hyman, Abraham S., 1950
2	19	Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, 1946-1947
2	20	International Refugee Committee, 1946-1949
3	1	Jewish displaced persons in Italy, 1946
3	2	Jewish displaced persons in Shanghai, 1949
3	3	Levinthal, Judge Louis E., 1947
3	4	May 8, 1946 conference among the State Department, War Department, and Jewish leaders on the question of closing the borders to the American zones of Germany and Austria, 1945-1947, 1996
3	5	Rifkind, Judge Simon, 1946-1947, 1957, 1990-1995
3	6	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 1946
3	7	Visa case for Izak and Mania Kenig, 1947-1948

Series 3: Photographs, approximately 1927-1948

Box	Folder	Title
3	8	Photographs, approximately 1927-1948

Series 4: Subject files, 1935-2004

Box	Folder	Title
3	9	Chevy Chase Historical Society, 2004
3	10	Griffiths, Gordon, 1946
3	11	Hearing before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, 1953, 1975, 1995
3	12	Hearings before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, 1948
3	13-14	Jewish Historical Society, 1997-2005 (2 folders)
3	15	McCullough, David, 1992-1997
3	16	National Museum of American Jewish Military History, 1994-1995
3	17	Nazi propaganda received by Herbert Fierst, approximately 1935-1940
4	1-5	Statement in answer to 1952 security charges, 1952 (5 folders)
4	6	Thesis: <i>David K. Niles and United States Policy Toward Palestine: A Case Study in American Foreign Policy</i> , by David Bernard Sachar, 1959
4	7	Truman, Harry S., 1949-1951
4	8	United Nations, 1950-1952
4	9	Weizman, Chaim, 1948, 1992-1995

Series 5: Writings, speeches, and interviews, 1930-2002

Box	Folder	Title
4	10	Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection: An Interview with Herbert A. Fierst, Correspondence, 1996-2002

4	11	Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection: An Interview with Herbert A. Fierst, Distribution lists, 2002
4	12-13	Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection: An Interview with Herbert A. Fierst, Transcripts, 1996 (2 folders)
4	14	German diary, 1935-1936
5	1	"Nazi Germany 'Coordinates' its Tourists," 1936, 1990
5	2	<i>Our Foreign Policy: A Presentation of the NBC University of the Air</i> , Program 92, "Why Should Americans Worry about Displaced Persons?," 1946
5	3	<i>This Petty Place</i> , A play by Herbert Fierst, page 1, approximately 1930
5	4	<i>The Record</i> , "Herbert A. Fierst: A Personal Memoir on the Establishment of Israel," 1999
5	5	<i>The Record</i> , "Herbert A. Fierst: A Personal Memoir on the Establishment of Israel," Correspondence, 1999
5	6	"Sam and Sophy Perlman Reminisce about Youth of Harry P. Fierst," Cassette, 1975
5	7-9	Speaking engagements, 1936-1955, 1973-1979, 1990-1998 (3 folders)
5	10-13	<i>A Special Bond: True Story of an American Jewish Family in Times of Crisis, Drawn from the Letters and Diaries of Miriam Fierst, Harry P. Fierst, and Herbert A. Fierst</i> , Correspondence, 1978-1984 (4 folders)
5	14	<i>A Special Bond: True Story of an American Jewish Family in Times of Crisis, Drawn from the Letters and Diaries of Miriam Fierst, Harry Pl. Fierst, and Herbert A. Fierst</i> , Drafts, 1979
5	15	Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, Correspondence, 1980, 1987
5	16-17	<i>A View of the Jewish Problem from the Pentagon and State Department, 1945-1948</i> , Correspondence, 1971-1979, 1987, 1993 (2 folders)
5	18-19	<i>A View of the Jewish Problem from the Pentagon and State Department, 1945-1948</i> , Excerpts, 1972 (2 folders)
6	1-2	<i>A View of the Jewish Problem from the Pentagon and State Department, 1945-1948</i> , Transcription of memoirs taped by Herbert A. Fierst, 1972 (2 folders)
6	3	Writings, approximately 1936-1990