

ALBERSHEIM FAMILY PAPERS, 1933-2003
2007.18.1

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

Title: Albersheim family papers

Dates: 1933-2003

Accession number: 2007.18.1

Creator: Albersheim (Family : Billerbeck, Germany)

Extent: 0.6 linear foot (3 boxes, 2 book enclosures, 1 oversize folder)

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

Abstract: The Albersheim family papers consist of biographical, photographic, and printed materials documenting Walter Albersheim from Billerbeck, Germany before World War II, his photography studios in Barcelona and Amsterdam during the Nazi years, his efforts to avoid deportation during the Holocaust, the liberation of Amsterdam, and Albersheim's immigration to the United States with his wife and daughter after the war.

Languages: German, English, Dutch, Spanish, Catalan

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), Albersheim family papers (2007.18.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Edith Chutkow donated the Albersheim family papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1996 and 2016.

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, August 2017

Biographical note

Walter Werner Albershiem (1912-1988) was born in Billerbeck, Germany to Josef and Selma Albershiem. Walter had two siblings: Herbert (b. 1908) and Ruth (b. 1915). Josef ran the family's clothing and textile business in Billerbeck, which had been founded by his father Heimann. The business expanded and was successful, but in 1929 business began to decline, and Walter was the first of the children to leave home in 1933. He moved to Münster to train as a salesman. He joined the Communist Party and would attend Nazi Party meetings to spy on them. As anti-Semitism increased and it became more difficult for him to be in Germany, Walter moved to Barcelona and was joined six months later by his cousin Paul. Walter began a photo business in Barcelona, and met and fell in love with Susanne Elizabeth Wagen (d. 1974), a non-Jewish woman from Switzerland. The couple returned to Switzerland to be married, but were not allowed to remain in the country because Walter was Jewish. The couple moved to Amsterdam, where their daughter Edith was born in 1937. The family was very poor, and Walter started another photo studio, Foto Hejo, where he took portraits and sold cameras. While Walter was not actively practicing Judaism, he would fast on Yom Kippur, and he reported and registered as Jewish. Edith was baptized purely for protection purposes and not raised Jewish. When it became mandatory that all citizens needed passports, Foto Hejo was the only photo studio, so people were lined up around the block to have Walter take their identification photos. In November 1942, Walter was forced to sign the studio over to his wife because he could no longer own the business as a Jewish man. He was able to avoid arrest by Nazis one night by escaping through a window and hiding at a second apartment the couple secretly owned. Walter was forced to wear the mandatory Star of David badge but was able to hide it under the lab coat he wore while processing negatives. He was picked up for forced labor breaking up the runways at Schiphol airport for a time, and Susanne took over running the photo studio. She had assistance from a Jewish woman named Mitzi who was originally from Prague. Another time when Walter was arrested, Susanne called on a German officer she was friendly with named Schellenberg who was able to get Walter released. He was soon arrested again and sent to the Zand camp. Susanne and Edith were able to visit him in the camp, and Walter was given furlough passes to return home and visit his family. During one of these visits, the Dutch underground was able to disrupt rail lines across the country. Walter took advantage of this and did not return to the camp. Instead, he went into hiding. Edith was sent to a children's home in the country for a year for her protection where Susanne could visit her. Edith remembers watching from the open door to the underground air raid shelter as an airplane plummeted to earth after it was shot down during. During the "Hunger Winter" in 1944, the family survived by trading cameras for food. People all around the vicinity were dying of starvation, and Edith remembers passing a house where a corpse left dead for six weeks was carried out. Susanne had a single potbelly stove in their apartment for heat and to cook food. As the Nazis cut off all electricity in Amsterdam during the winter of 1944 Walter engaged an inventor to build a foot peddled generator that produced light through an automobile head lamp as long as one person was peddling. The family survived due to Walter's craftiness in bargaining for coal for heating, some sugar, flour for baking bread and many kilos of split pea soup mix that kept the family from starving. Their apartment was at 191 Rozenstraat, which was only 600 meters from where the Frank family was in hiding. Walter and Susanne kept information secret from Edith, such as the second apartment, so that she wouldn't accidentally tell anyone. Amsterdam was liberated by the First Canadian Army on May 5, 1945. Walter

documented the celebrations, parade, and the aftermath. In 1947, the family obtained United States visas under the Swedish quota and sailed from Stockholm aboard the MS Gripsholm to New York, arriving in February. They continued to Baltimore and eventually settled in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Scope and content of collection

The Albersheim family papers consist of biographical, photographic, and printed materials documenting Walter Albersheim from Billerbeck, Germany before World War II, his photography studios in Barcelona and Amsterdam during the Nazi years, his efforts to avoid deportation during the Holocaust, the liberation of Amsterdam, and Albersheim's immigration to the United States with his wife and daughter after the war.

Biographical materials include birth, registration, marriage, and business records related to Walter Albersheim, a photocopy of his personal narrative in German and an English translation of it, an English translation of a book chapter about the Albersheim family, and English and German versions of the history of Walter's nephew and niece, Rolf-Dieter and Eva Eichenwald, during the Holocaust, written by a high school class in Billerbeck. Walter's narrative details his childhood in Billerbeck, his business ventures and his adventures spying on Nazis for the communists in Münster, his business ventures in Barcelona and meeting his wife there, and their first years in Amsterdam. The book chapter comes from Veronika Meyer-Ravenstein's *Zersplitterte Sterne*, which the Museum's library holds in its collection. The Eichenwald story traces the lives and fates of the Eichenwald children, who were deported to Riga in 1941 and to Auschwitz in 1943, where they perished.

Photographic materials includes an Albersheim family album, an Eichenwald family album, and two albums documenting the Liberation of Amsterdam. The Albersheim family album includes photographs of the family, Walter's photo studio, Edith's visit to her father in the Zand camp, and their postwar life in the Netherlands with the family dog. This series also includes loose photographs documenting the Albersheim family and their immigration to the United States

Printed materials include a magazine containing reproductions of 1944 news articles about the Netherlands; four copies of the underground wartime newspaper *Metro*; and an issue of *Het Parool*, an issue of *Algemeen Handelsblad*, bulletins, and proclamations documenting the liberation of Amsterdam.

System of arrangement

The Albersheim family papers are arranged as three series:

- Series 1: Biographical materials, 1933-2003
- Series 2: Photographs, 1937-1961
- Series 3: Printed materials, 1944-1945

Indexing terms

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Personal narratives.
Jews--Germany--Billerbeck (North Rhine-Westphalia)
Jews-- Netherlands--Amsterdam.

Amsterdam (Netherlands)
Barcelona (Spain)
Billerbeck (North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany)

Münster (Hesse, Germany)

Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Biographical materials, 1933-2003

Box/Folder	
1.1	Birth, registration, and marriage records, 1933-1948
1.2	Business records, 1936, 1942
1.3	Personal narrative, photocopy, approximately 1988
1.4	Personal narrative, translation, approximately 1988
1.5	"The Albersheims of Bilerbeck," from <i>Splintered Stars: Recollections of Jewish Families in Bilerbeck and their Time</i> , 2002
1.6	<i>In Memory of Rolf-Dieter and Eva Eichenwald</i> , 2003
1.7	<i>Zum Gedenken an Rolf-Dieter und Eva Eichenwald</i> , 2003

Series 2: Photographs, 1937-1961

Box/Folder	
1.8	Family, liberation, and immigration, approximately 1940-1961
2.1	Albersheim family album, 1943-1947
1.9	Albersheim family album, loose photographs, 1943-1947
BE 1	Eichenwald family album, 1937-1941
3.1	Liberation album 1, 1945
BE 2	Liberation album 2, 1945

Series 3: Printed material, 1944-1945

Box/Folder	
1.10	<i>Algemeen Handelsblad</i> , 4 May 1945
OS 1	<i>Het Parool</i> , 8 May 1945
1.11	<i>Metro</i> , 15 November 1944, 19 January 1945, 14 March 1945, 10 May 1945
1.12	<i>Nederland in den Oorlog: Historisch Document</i> , January-March 1944
1.13	Liberation bulletins and proclamations, May 1945