

RICHARD WEILHEIMER PAPERS, 1908-1998
2007.336.1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126
Tel. (202) 479-9717
e-mail: reference@ushmm.org

Descriptive summary

Title: Richard Weilheimer papers

Dates: 1908-1998

Accession number: 2007.336.1

Creator: Weilheimer, Richard, 1931-2009

Extent: 2.0 linear foot (1 box, 2 oversize boxes, 1 book enclosure)

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

Abstract: The Richard Weilheimer papers include biographical materials, correspondence, a watercolor booklet hand-made in Gurs, and photographic materials documenting the Weilheimer, Wetzler, and Stern families from Ludwigshafen and Mannheim, Germany. Documents reflect the families' prewar lives in Germany, their deportation to the Gurs concentration camp in southern France in 1940, Richard and Ernst Weilheimer's relocation to a children's home and immigration to the United States in 1942, Kurt and Nelly Stern's earlier immigration to the United States in 1937, and the memorialization of their family members killed in the Holocaust.

Languages: German, French, 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.

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Preferred citation: Richard Weilheimer papers (2007.336.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Richard Weilheimer donated the Richard Weilheimer papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2007.

Separated materials: Richard Weilheimer also donated a prayer book, *Das Gebetbuch de Israeliten*, 1926, inscribed to Nelly Wetzler in 1934, to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2007.

Processing History: Julie Schweitzer, July 2019

Biographical note

Richard Weilheimer (1931-2009) was born November 21, 1931 in Ludwigshafen, Germany, to Maximilian (Max) Weilheimer (1887-1943) and Lilly Weilheimer (née Wetzler, 1902-1941). Max was secretary of the Jewish Community, and Lilly was a former kindergarten teacher and accomplished violinist. Both came from large families, and they married in 1930. Richard's younger brother Ernst was born in Mannheim on December 11, 1935.

Richard's family was considered upper middle class and active in the Jewish community. They observed Shabbat and the Jewish holidays. When the German schools were closed to Jewish students, Richard attended the Jewish school, where his maternal uncle Edgar taught. He was also home schooled by his maternal grandfather Salomon Wetzler (1874-1941).

The evening of Kristallnacht, the Weilheimers were woken by loud noises. A group of thugs entered the courtyard of their building and then their apartment. They arrested Max, who was sent to the Dachau concentration camp the next day. Lilly took Richard and Ernst to the nearby apartment of Max's brothers Sigmund and Ludwig, only to discover that they too had been arrested. She then headed to the synagogue where her father was the Cantor, but they found it up in flames. They returned to their apartment to discover it had been looted. They packed some clothing and went to Lilly's parents' apartment. Lilly's father Salomon had also been arrested and sent to Dachau. The Wetzlers' neighbor, a Catholic woman, hid Lilly and the boys in her attic, providing them with food and shelter. A week later, Salomon returned home, and Lilly felt it was safe to come out of hiding. Five weeks later, Max returned home as well, having been released in part for his service in the German Army during WWI.

After the British and French declared war on Germany, Allied bombers frequently targeted Ludwigshafen's industrial production for the German war effort. The family would seek refuge in the cellar during the bombings, but were restricted to a steel storage cage designated for Jews only. During one bombing raid, the family was locked in the cage for three days.

On October 22, 1940, the family was rounded up with the other Jews living in Ludwigshafen, each being able to take just one suitcase. Salomon stayed behind, because he was in the hospital with bladder cancer, but Lilly's mother Lina Wetzler (née Frank, 1877-1947) went with them. They were first taken to Mannheim, where they were reunited with other extended family members. After a three day train ride, they arrived in Vichy France, where they were met by members of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, Quakers), who provided them with food and water. The Weilheimers and others were then taken to Camp de Gurs. Conditions in the camp were poor, and Lilly wrote to her siblings in the United States, continuing her attempts to get visas to join them in the U.S. The Quakers in Toulouse sent social workers to the camp and provided the internees with food and warm clothing. The Quakers made arrangements in conjunction with the Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants (OSE) to transfer 50 children from the camp to an orphanage in Aspet (Haute-Garonne). Lilly was sick, and conditions in the camp were

poor, so Lilly and Max lobbied for their children to be placed on the list. Eventually Richard and Ernst were sent to La Maison des Pupilles with other children from the camp. It was the last time that any of the children would see their parents.

Upon arrival at the orphanage, the children were quarantined for 30 days. Due to language barriers between the German Jewish children and French administration of the orphanage, the Quakers sent Alice Resch to be their translator and advocate. Richard, 9½ years old, was assigned the responsibility of shepherding the orphanage's flock of sheep. The children were in contact with their parents via letters and packages. They attended school, and Jewish teachers from neighboring villages led religious classes and conducted Friday night Shabbat services.

Richard and Ernst immigrated to the United States in 1942, sailing from Marseille in June and then from Lisbon to Baltimore aboard the SS *Nyassa*, arriving in July.

Lilly Weilheimer died in Gurs in 1941. Max Weilheimer was transferred to Rivesaltes, back to Gurs, and then via Drancy to Majdanek where he was killed in March 1943. Salomon Wetzler died in Mannheim in 1941. Lina Wetzler survived Gurs, immigrated to the United States, and died in 1947.

Lilly's sister Nelly Wetzler (1909-1985) married Kurt Stern (1907-1983) in February 1937 and the couple immigrated to the United States three months later. Like the Weilheimers, Kurt's parents Adolf Stern (1874-1942) and Johanna Stern (née Oberlaender, 1882-1942) were deported to Gurs in October 1940. Adolf was transferred to Rebecedou and Les Milles and died in Aix en Provence in 1942. Johanna was deported via Drancy to Auschwitz and killed in 1942.

Scope and content of collection

The Richard Weilheimer papers include biographical materials, correspondence, a watercolor booklet hand-made in Gurs, and photographic materials documenting the Weilheimer, Wetzler, and Stern families from Ludwigshafen and Mannheim, Germany. Documents reflect the families' prewar lives in Germany, their deportation to the Gurs concentration camp in southern France in 1940, Richard and Ernst Weilheimer's relocation to a children's home and immigration to the United States in 1942, Kurt and Nelly Stern's earlier immigration to the United States in 1937, and the memorialization of their family members killed in the Holocaust.

Biographical materials include identification papers and birth, vaccination, marriage, registration, and death certificates documenting the Weilheimer family as well as memorials and funeral speeches created upon Lilly's death at Gurs. Some of the documents are accompanied by notes or labels created by Richard Weilheimer.

Correspondence primarily consists of letters and postcards exchanged among Weilheimer, Wetzler, and Stern family members and their friends. Early correspondence documents Kurt and Nelly Stern's courtship and marriage in Germany. Wartime correspondence documents life in Germany, southern France, and the internment camps at Gurs, Les Milles, and Rebecedou. Alice Resch Synnstedt's 1997 and 1998 letters retrace her memories of the German children in Aspet.

The handmade watercolor booklet was created by Eva Liebhold (1921-1942). Eva was born September 12, 1921 in Mannheim to Michael and Fanny Liebhold. She was evacuated with her family to Gurs in

October 1940, deported via Drancy to Auschwitz in August 1942, and killed. Her booklet depicts scenes of daily life in the camp at Gurs.

Photographic materials include loose family photographs; copy prints of liberated concentration camp prisoners; a baby book containing photographs of Richard Weilheimer and information about his childhood; a Weilheimer family album containing prewar pictures of the family; and a Weilheimer, Wetzler, and Stern memorial album containing family photographs, original wartime tracing documents, and memorials to lost family members. Many of the loose family photographs are accompanied by captions created by Richard Weilheimer.

System of arrangement

The Richard Weilheimer papers are arranged in four series:

- Series 1: Biographical materials, 1908-1942
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1931-1998 (bulk 1931-1942)
- Series 3: Handmade watercolor booklet, circa 1940
- Series 4: Photographic materials, circa 1910-1980

Indexing terms

Personal Names

Stern, Adolf, 1874-1942.
Stern, Johanna, 1882-1942.
Stern, Kurt, 1907-1983.
Stern, Nelly, 1909-1985.
Synnestvedt, Alice Resch, 1908-
Weilheimer, Ernst, 1935-
Weilheimer, Lilly, 1902-1941.
Weilheimer, Maximilian, 1887-1943.
Weilheimer, Richard, 1931-2009.
Wetzler, Lina, 1877-1947.
Wetzler, Salomon, 1874-1941.

Corporate Names

Gurs (Concentration camp)
Les Milles (Concentration camp)
Récébédou (Concentration camp)
United States Committee for the Care of European Children.

Topical Terms

Jews--Germany--Ludwigshafen.
Jewish refugees--France.
Jewish refugees--United States.
Concentration camp inmates--France--Correspondence.
World War, 1939-1945--Jews--Rescue--France.
Concentration camp inmates as artists--France--Gurs.
Concentration camps--Pictorial works.

Geographic Names

France--History--German occupation, 1940-1945.
Ludwigshafen (Germany)
Mannheim (Germany)

Genre Terms

Correspondence.
Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Biographical material, 1908-1942

Box/Folder	
1.1	Weilheimer, Ernst, 1935
1.2	Weilheimer, Lilly, 1908-1914, 1930, 1939-1941
1.3	Weilheimer, Lilly, memorialization, 1941
1.4	Weilheimer, Maximilian, 1930, 1938-1939
1.5	Weilheimer, Maximilian, Familienstammbuch, 1930
1.6	Weilheimer, Richard, 1931-1937, 1942
1.7	Weilheimer, Richard, address book, 1942

Series 2: Correspondence, 1931-1998 (bulk 1931-1942)

Box/Folder	
1.8	Stern, Kurt and Nelly, courtship, 1931-1935
1.9	Stern, Kurt and Nelly, marriage congratulations, 1937
1.10	Synnstedt, Alice Resch, 1997-1998
1.11	Weilheimer, Max and Lilly, to Weilheimer, Richard and Ernst, 1940-1942
1.12	Weilheimer, Richard and Ernst, 1939-1942
1.13	Prewar correspondence, 1937-1939
1.14	Wartime correspondence, 1940
1.15-1.17	Wartime correspondence, 1941 (3 folders)
1.18	Wartime correspondence, 1942
1.19-1.20	Wartime correspondence, circa 1940s (2 folders)

Series 3: Handmade watercolor booklet, circa 1940

Box/Folder	
1.21	Erinnerungen an Camp de Gurs Bilderbuch gezeichnet von Eva Liebhold, circa 1940

Series 4: Photographic materials, circa 1910-1980

Box/Folder	
1.22	Family and friends, 1910, 1931-1941, 1955, undated
1.23	Liberated concentration camp inmates on train cars (copy prints), circa 1945
BE 1	Richard Weilheimer baby book, 1931-1938
Box 2	Weilheimer family album, 1933-1938
Box 3	Weilheimer, Wetzler, and Stern memorial album, circa 1910-1980