

ELKHANAN ELKES COLLECTION, CIRCA 1900-1954
2011.419.8

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

Title: Elkhanan Elkes collection

Dates: circa 1900-1954

Accession number: 2011.419.8

Creator: Elkes, Elkhanan, 1879-1944.

Extent: 1 linear foot (1 box, 2 book enclosures)

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

Abstract: Consists of pre-war and post-war family photographs, correspondence, and documents related to Dr. Elkhanan Elkes, his wife Miriam, and children Joel and Sarah. Includes Sarah Elkes' diary (1935-1937), correspondence between the members of the family and with Avraham and Pnina Golub (later Tory), pre-war power of attorney document and letter regarding the health of one of Dr. Elkes's patients, and photographs and a letter regarding the location of Elkes' graveside. Photographs include pre-war and post-war depictions of the Elkes family and Dr. Elkes in the Kovno ghetto.

Languages: English, Hebrew, French, 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), Elkhanan Elkes collection (2011.419.8), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The collection was purchased by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum from Kedem Public Auction House Ltd. In 2011.

Related materials: Elkhannan Elkes son Joel Elkes donated the Joel Elkes collection to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1999.86) containing documents and a drawing related to Elkhannan as well as his uniform from the Dachau concentration camp. Joel also published a memoir, *Values, belief and survival : Dr Elkhannan Elkes and the Kovno Ghetto : a memoir* (DS135.L52 K3829 1997)

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, December 2017

Biographical note

Dr. Elkhannan Elkes (1879-1944) was a Jewish physician who, during the German occupation of Lithuania, assumed the leadership of the Jewish community in the Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto. Born in Kalvarija, Lithuania, Elkes received his medical degree in 1903 in neurology and internal medicine. In 1912, he married Miriam Albin. After serving as a physician in the Russian army, he opened a private practice and eventually became one of Kovno's leading physicians. In 1923, he was appointed head of the department of internal medicine at the Bikur Holim hospital in Kovno. His numerous private patients included the Lithuanian prime minister, the German ambassador, and other members of the diplomatic community.

In August 1941 the SS ordered Kovno's leading Jewish citizens to select a leader to head the new Jewish Council. No one wanted to assume this role. Finally the community prevailed upon Elkes, citing his connections and moral integrity. He remained in this position for all three years of the ghetto's existence. Despite his own failing health, he provided moral leadership, helped the ghetto's medical community, and provided tacit support to the underground. Much of the day to day running of the ghetto was entrusted to his deputy, Leib Garfunkel, an attorney and former Jewish delegate to the Lithuanian parliament. Elkes acted principally as an intercessor with the German authorities to ameliorate the severity of their orders. In one famous anecdote, shortly before the ghetto's liquidation, Elkes made a personal appeal to SS Captain Wilhelm Goecke. Elkes promised to write Goecke a personal testimonial if he spared the ghetto; Goecke refused. Elkes was deported to Dachau in July 1944. There, he continued to offer medical care to fellow Jews until he succumbed to starvation brought on by a hunger strike. He died on October 17, 1944 at the age of 65. Due to his stature, he was allowed a public burial in a marked grave. Elkes was survived by his wife Miriam, who had been deported to Stutthof, and his two children Sarah and Joel, who were studying in England during the war.

Biography by Judith Cohen

Scope and content of collection

Consists of pre-war and post-war family photographs, correspondence, and documents related to Dr. Elkhannan Elkes, his wife Miriam, and children Joel and Sarah. Includes Sarah Elkes' diary (1935-1937), correspondence between the members of the family and with Avraham and Pnina Golub (later Tory), pre-war power of attorney document and letter regarding the health of one of Dr. Elkes' patients, and photographs and a letter regarding the location of Elkes' graveside. Photographs include pre-war and post-war depictions of the Elkes family and Dr. Elkes in the Kovno ghetto.

System of arrangement

The collection is arranged as three series.

Series 1: Biographical material, 1935-1947

Series 2: Correspondence, 1923-1954

Series 3: Photographs, circa 1900-1949

Folders are arranged alphabetically and documents chronologically.

Indexing terms

Person:

Elkes, Elkhanan.

Elkes, Joel.

Elkes, Miriam.

Elkes, Sarah.

Tory, Avraham.

Tory, Pnina, 1930-

Corporate:

Dachau (Concentration camp)

Topical Subject:

Medical personnel--Lithuania--Kaunas--1940-1950.

Jews--Lithuania--Kaunas.

Geography:

Kaunas (Lithuania)--History--German occupation, 1941-1944.

Genre/Form:

Diaries.

Photographs.

Photograph albums.

Correspondence.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Biographical material, 1935-1947

Box/Folder	Title
1.1	Elkes, Elkhanan: Burial, 1947
1.2	Elkes, Elkhanan: Documents, 1937, 1940
BE 1	Elkes, Sarah: Diary, 1935-1937

Series 2: Correspondence, 1923-1954

Box/Folder	Title
1.3	Astrue, Victoria, 1923-1954
1.4	Family correspondence, 1945-1946
1.5	Golub, Avraham and Pnina, 1945-1950

1.6	Schachter, Cecilia, 1941-1950
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Series 3: Photographs, circa 1900-1949

Box/Folder	Title
1.7	Elkes, Elkhanan, circa 1925-1941
1.8	Elkes family, 1920-1946
1.9	Elkes, Hirsch (Tzvi), 1927-1949
1.10	Family and friends, circa 1900-1945
1.11	Malkorn, Hans, 1945-1949
BE 2	Photograph album, 1945 and undated