

ERNST BERL PAPERS
1915-1954 (bulk, 1933-1946)
2013.392.1

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

Title: Ernst Berl papers

Dates: 1915-1954 (bulk, 1933-1946)

Accession number: 2013.392.1

Creator: Berl, Ernst, 1877-1946

Extent: 1 box (0.5 linear feet)

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

Abstract: Correspondence, documents, printed articles, news clippings, documenting the experiences of chemical engineer Ernst Berl, following his removal from the faculty of the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt, and his immigration to the United States in 1933. Included is correspondence with other émigré academics from Austria and Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, correspondence concerning attempts to help others immigrate from Austria and Germany and obtain academic positions in the United States, as well as materials documenting Berl's efforts to help persecuted Jews in Darmstadt with scholarship funds he had collected there.

Languages: German, 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), Ernst Berl papers, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Gift of Herbert Berl, 2013.

Custodial history: Papers were kept by Berl's widow, Margarete Berl, in her home in Washington, DC, and then with her son and daughter-in-law, and subsequently, her grandson, Herbert E. Berl, who donated them.

Related archival materials: Addition papers of Ernst Berl have been donated to the Othmer Library of Chemical History at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These materials relate primarily to Berl's career as a professor and chemical engineer, including patents of inventions created by Berl, correspondence pertaining to the licensing and marketing of such products, Berl's work on developing weapons for the Austrian government in World War I and the United States government in World War II, and his work on developing synthetic fabrics prior to World War I. In order to learn more about this collection, contact: Chemical Heritage Foundation, 315 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106, telephone: 215-873-8265, web: chemheritage.org.

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

Processing history: Processed by Brad Bauer, 2013.

Biographical note

Ernst Berl (1877-1946) was born in Freudenthal, in a part of Upper Silesia that then belonged to Austria (present-day Czech Republic). In 1894, he began studies at the Technische Hochschule in Vienna, and graduated in 1898 as a chemical engineer. Following military service, he returned to academia, earning a doctorate at the University of Zurich in 1901. Initially he served as a lecturer in chemical technology at that same university, but then began working in industry, helping develop synthetic fabrics. At the outbreak of World War I, he returned to Austria and worked for the government, developing explosives and chemical weapons. Following the war, he took an appointment as a professor of chemical engineering at the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt, Germany, where he remained on the faculty until 1933, when the Nazis gained power in Germany, and Jewish faculty members were forced out of their positions. Berl and his family moved to the United States that same year, when he was offered a position on the faculty of the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh, where he remained until his retirement in 1945. During those decades, however, he was active as an inventor, patenting dozens of products for use in the chemical engineering, such as the Berl saddle, used in distillation devices.

Scope and content of collection

Correspondence, documents, printed articles, news clippings, documenting the experiences of chemical engineer Ernst Berl, following his removal from the faculty of the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt, and his immigration to the United States in 1933. Included is correspondence with other émigré academics from Austria and Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, correspondence concerning attempts to help others immigrate from Austria and Germany and obtain academic positions in the United States, as well as materials documenting Berl's efforts to help persecuted Jews in Darmstadt with scholarship funds he had collected there.

Much of the correspondence in Berl's papers is from fellow scientists in exile from Germany or Austria, with whom Berl stayed in contact during the decade and a half after leaving Germany. Berl often exchanged news about Germany with them, and in the latter years, sought information about what had happened to family members who had remained in Austria or Czechoslovakia after German occupation. An extensive file of correspondence with longtime friend Max Isler contains many comments about the state of Germany and Europe during the war and in its immediate aftermath. A small file of correspondence with James Conant is mostly social, and pertains to the attendance of Berl's son, Herbert, at Harvard University, but also concerns the controversy surrounding an alumni honor being presented to Hitler aide Ernst "Putzi" Hanfstaengl in 1934. Several files of correspondence relate to attempts of German and Austrian scientists to emigrate from Europe, in particular after the annexation of Austria, Bohemia, and Moravia by the Germans in 1938, when several sought Berl's help in finding a faculty position at a university in the United States. Several files from Berl's son, Herbert, are also included, as the younger Berl was an attorney who although primarily active in the area of patent law, also tried to help would-be émigrés, as is documented in these files.

Biographical materials include several articles written by or about Berl, as well as obituaries after his death in 1946. Financial records include files on German taxes paid by Berl, primarily on royalties from a chemistry textbook that the Springer Verlag had published in Germany in the 1920s, and from which German authorities continued to demand tax payments in the years following Berl's exile from Germany. In addition, a file on the "Berl Fond" documents how a scholarship fund that Berl had established at the Technische Hochschule in Darmstadt was later used to aid local Jews who were being persecuted by the Nazis in the mid-1930s, and especially those whose businesses were seized by the Nazis.

System of arrangement

The collection is arranged in four series: Biographical, Correspondence, Correspondence from Herbert Berl, and Financial, and files are arranged alphabetically by file folder within these series.

Indexing terms

Chemists--United States.

Chemists--Germany.

Jews--Persecutions--Germany--Darmstadt.

Hesse (Germany)--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.

Jewish refugees--United States--History--20th century

Germany--Emigration and immigration--History--20th century.

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Economic aspects

CONTAINER LIST

Box Folder

Biographical

Articles

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | 1 | Untitled autobiographical text, 12 pages, Darmstadt, 1932 |
| 1 | 2 | "German Genius Comes to America: Tech Faculty Acquires Three Great Scientists," by Thomas Stockham Baker, <i>The Carnegie Magazine</i> , Vol. VII, No. 4, September 1933 |
| 1 | 3 | "Wie Erdöl gebildet wird," by Ernst Berl, <i>Illustrierter Unterhaltungsblatt, Freudenthaler Zeitung</i> , Vol. 33, No. 39, 1936. |
| 1 | 4 | "A Distinguished Chemist Retires," speech given by Berl at retirement dinner, 8 June 1945, and reprinted under this title, <i>The Carnegie Magazine</i> , Vol. XIX, No. 3, June 1945 |
| 1 | 5 | Certificates of Naturalization, United States of America, for Ernst Berl and Margarete Berl, 1938 |
| 1 | 6 | Death certificate of Ernst Berl, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1954 |
| 1 | 7 | Last will and testament, drafts, 1935-1946 |
| 1 | 8 | Letter to Margarete Berl and sons, 1935 |
| 1 | 9 | Obituaries of various Berl family members, in Troppau, Freudenthal, 1929-1934 |
| 1 | 10 | Obituary of Ernst Berl, written by Max Isler, published in <i>Schweizerische Bauzeitung</i> , Band 128, No. 20, 16 November 1946, page 261. |
| 1 | 11 | Postcards of Troppau, undated |

Correspondence

- | | | |
|---|----|---|
| 1 | 12 | Baerwald, H., 1934 |
| 1 | 13 | Berl, Edwin, 1938 |
| 1 | 14 | Conant, James B., 1934-1941 |
| 1 | 15 | Dede, Professor (Berlin), 1935 |
| 1 | 16 | Egger, Friedrich, 1934-1946 |
| 1 | 17 | Einstein, Albert, 1940-1946 |
| 1 | 18 | Eisler family, London (Kurt, Doris, Bertha), 1946 |
| 1 | 19 | Emich, F., 1935 |
| 1 | 20 | Feigl, Fritz, 1937-1938 |
| 1 | 21 | Fodor, A., 1945 |
| 1 | 22 | Frees, Otto, 1946 |
| 1 | 23 | Hevesy, George de, 1934-1945 |
| 1 | 24 | Höber, Rudolf, 1945 |
| 1 | 25 | Husserl, Erich, 1938-1948 [cousin] |
| 1 | 26 | Isler, Max, 1915-1945 |
| 1 | 27 | Jantsch, Gustav, 1946 |
| 1 | 28 | Johnson, Alvin, 1940-1942 |
| 1 | 29 | Karplus, Walter, 1940 |
| | | Refugee correspondence, 1938-1939 |
| 1 | 30 | Abel, Emil, 1938 March |

1	31	Bauer, Felix
1	32	Böhm, Max
1	33	Defris, Paula
1	34	Feigl, Ernst
1	35	Leiser, Heinrich
1	36	Margosches, C.G.
1	37	Nachod, Frederick
1	38	Nachod, Georg
1	39	Sander, A.
1	40	Schulhof, Hans
1	41	Steiger, Benno
1	42	Toldi, Edmund
1	43	Ziegler, R., 1945-1946
1	44	Ziffer, Frederick, 1944-1946

Correspondence: Herbert Berl

1	45	Groag, Friedrich (Troppau), 1938
1	46	Karplus, Alfred, 1939-1940
1	47	Sonnenschein, Helene, 1938
1	48	Steinreich, Angela, 1938

Financial

1	49	Berl Fond, 1924-1937 Taxes
1	50	1922-1932
1	51	1933-1934
1	52	1936-1938