

**KURT SCHWARZ PAPERS, 1938-2001, and undated
(Bulk, 1938-1941)
2015.580.1**

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

Title: Kurt Schwarz papers

Dates: 1939-2001 and undated (bulk, 1938-1941)

Accession number: 2015.580.1

Creator: Schwarz, Kurt.

Extent: 1 box.

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

Abstract: Correspondence, photographs, telegrams, and documents related to the immigration of Kurt Schwarz, originally of Vienna, Austria, to the United States by way of Italy and Cuba, 1938-1940; as well as extensive correspondence from his mother, Helene Schwarz, in Vienna, 1938-1941. Includes telegrams from the American theatrical producer, Billy Rose, as he sought to help Kurt Schwarz immigrate to the United States, 1938-1939. Also includes later correspondence with Idy Sherer, the daughter of Kurt Schwarz, as she researched the fate of her grandmother, Helene Schwarz.

Languages: German, English, Spanish

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), Kurt Schwarz papers (2015.580.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: Gift of Idy Sherer, daughter of Kurt and Elsie Schwarz, with assistance of Marc Cohen, 2015.

Related archival materials: The Pilpel Family papers, 2015.546.1, document the immigration history of the family of Helene Schwarz's niece, and Kurt Schwarz's cousin, Marion Stern Pilpel and her family. In addition, the editions of *Jüdische Rundschau* that came with the donation of the Kurt Schwarz papers, which include one bound volume presented to Schwarz, and several loose issues, have been transferred to the USHMM Library for cataloging and access.

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, November – December 2015.

Biographical note

Kurt Schwarz (1917-1985) was born in Vienna, Austria on 19 May 1917, to Ludwig Schwarz (1886-1963) and Helene (née Klemperer) Schwarz (1893-1942). He was an only child, and his parents divorced in November 1936. His father subsequently remarried, and his second wife, Margo, and stepson, Fritz Thieberger, left Austria, initially for Denmark and England, before immigrating to the United States, where they settled in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

At the time of the German annexation of Austria, Kurt Schwarz had been working as a clerk at the Hotel Bristol in Vienna, but he quit his job there in February 1938 and left for Rome, where he worked at the Hotel Majestic. Eventually, when the Fascist government in Italy began pressuring Jewish refugees to leave that country, Schwarz began to look for another country he could immigrate to.

At this time, he sought to persuade his mother to join him, and to leave Vienna, but she was unable to do so. In late 1938, the American theatrical producer, Billy Rose, learned of Schwarz's plight, perhaps through another American entertainer who had met Schwarz while he was employed at the Hotel Majestic. Rose cabled that Schwarz would have a job waiting for him if he could get to New York, and he offered to pay for Schwarz's journey there. Schwarz left Italy for New York on 16 March 1939, but was not allowed to disembark, since he only possessed a transit visa. Rose was apparently unable to help him at this point, and sent Schwarz a telegram explaining that he was unable to come to Ellis Island, where Schwarz was detained, due to his busy rehearsal schedule. As a result, Schwarz sailed to Cuba, where he lived for the following year and a half, working on the staff of a German-Jewish newspaper published there, the *Jüdische Rundschau*. In December 1939, he married an American Jewish woman he had met in Cuba, Elsie Geduld, and following her return to New York, he set about obtaining a visa to the United States, which he subsequently did, joining his wife in New York in August 1940, when they were married in a Jewish ceremony in Elsie's home town of Franklin Square, Long Island. The couple settled in New York and subsequently, Fair Lawn, New Jersey. During World War II, Schwarz, who was unable to join the United States armed forces, registered to serve in Civil Defense, which he did for many years, up to the 1960s. With a degree in business administration from an Austrian vocational school, he initially held supervisory and management positions in a number of retail stores in the New York area, and was later employed by the Surpradur Corporation in New York, a maker of cement and asbestos building materials, where he worked for over 30 years. Kurt Schwarz died in Fair Lawn, New Jersey on 7 March 1985. Some scholars, including Billy Rose's biographer, Mark Cohen, assert that Saul Bellow's 1989

novel, *The Bellarosa Connection*, which involves Billy Rose's rescue of European Jews, was inspired by Kurt Schwarz's story.

As to Schwarz's immediate family, his mother, Helene, remained in Vienna until her deportation in 1942. There is conflicting documentation that states she was either deported to Theresienstadt at that time, or to the Riga ghetto, and is presumed to have died on 3 November 1942. Her sister, Gisela, had married Moritz Stern, and had three children, Fritz, Marion, and Gerda. Fritz immigrated to Palestine, but his sister Marion had married Franz Josef Pilpel, and with their daughter Nina, left Austria for India in 1939, and subsequently immigrated to the United States. The remaining sibling, Gerda, remained with her parents in Vienna, and all three perished during the Holocaust [Source: Information collected from donor by curator Fred Wasserman, and adapted from his notes].

Scope and content of collection

The Kurt Schwarz papers consist of correspondence, photographs, telegrams, and documents related to the immigration of Kurt Schwarz, originally of Vienna, Austria, to the United States by way of Italy and Cuba, 1938-1940; as well as extensive correspondence from his mother, Helene Schwarz, in Vienna, 1938-1941. Includes telegrams from the American theatrical producer, Billy Rose, as he sought to help Kurt Schwarz immigrate to the United States, 1938-1939. Also includes later correspondence with Idy Sherer, the daughter of Kurt Schwarz, as she researched the fate of her grandmother, Helene Schwarz.

The Biographical series contains documents that primarily relate to Kurt Schwarz's immigration to the United States by way of Cuba, as well as his marriage to Elsie Geduld. Included are travel documents, marriage certificates, a press pass, and a resume, all dated from 1939-1946. Also included are copies supplied to researcher Mark Cohen of Schwarz's restitution case file, obtained from the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv in 2015, and documenting Schwarz's case against the Austrian government, dating from 1962 to 1965.

The Correspondence series consists largely of letters sent by Helene Schwarz to her son, following his departure from Austria in 1938, up until November 1941, which may have been the time of her deportation to Theresienstadt. The letters begin with discussions of Kurt's emigration, Helene's own desire and plans to do the same, and often contain descriptions of conditions for Jews in Vienna—such as new regulations regarding the addition of “Israel” and “Sara” to names, increasingly difficult economic circumstances, or the articles being published in the one remaining Jewish newspaper—as well as news about various family members, often with discussion of their own plans or attempts to emigrate. Included are descriptions of meetings with the family of her sister, Gisela, at the time when the latter's daughter, Marion Stern Pilpel, was planning to immigrate with her family to India. Occasionally notes and greetings from other family members were included with Helene's letters to her son, and many of Helene's letters contain references to news mentioned in Kurt's letters, in particular regarding his activities in Cuba and attempts to immigrate to the United States from there.

Additional correspondence includes a file of material related to Billy Rose, including telegrams from Rose related to his efforts to assist with Schwarz's immigration to the United States, and a letter from Helene Schwarz sent to Rose, and thanking him for his assistance to her son. Remaining correspondence includes letters that Kurt and Elsie Schwarz intended to send to Helene Schwarz in December 1941, and Kurt Schwarz's efforts to locate his mother's whereabouts and fate from late 1941 until 1945, including a letter addressed to the Red Cross in December 1941, and one received from an American acquaintance who had tried to help, in 1945. Later correspondence to Schwarz's daughter,

Idy Sherer, include letters from Yad Vashem, the Viennese magistrate's office, and the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde Wien, all related to Sherer's attempts to trace the fate of her grandmother, 1998-2001.

The Photographs series includes images of Kurt Schwarz, as a boy and young man with his mother and other relatives, as well as after his immigration, en route to and in Cuba. A photo of Helene Schwarz's brother, Leo Klemperer, is included, as well as a photo of prints of Hitler and Mussolini in Rome, including one noted to have been taken at the Hotel Majestic, where Kurt Schwarz worked.

The Research Files series consists of documents copied from other archival repositories, and obtained by Mark Cohen during the research and writing of Cohen's book about the activities of Billy Rose in rescuing European Jews. Includes is a copy of the restitution file for Kurt Schwarz, obtained from the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv.

System of arrangement

The Kurt Schwarz papers are arranged in the following series, in alphabetic order by folder title: I. Biographical, II. Correspondence, III. Photographs, IV. Published materials. The correspondence is arranged in alphabetic order by correspondent, and then in chronological order.

Indexing terms

Schwarz, Helene (1893-1942)

Jews--Austria--Vienna--Correspondence.

Jewish refugees--Cuba.

Austria--Emigration and immigration.

Jewish newspapers--Cuba.

CONTAINER LIST

I. Biographical, 1938-1946

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | Immigration and naturalization, United States, 1940-1944 |
| 1 | 2 | Marriage certificates and letter, Cuba and United States, 1939-1940 |
| 1 | 3 | Passport, German, issued by German embassy in Rome, 1938 |
| 1 | 4 | Press pass, Cuba, 1940 |
| 1 | 5 | Restitution, 1962-1965 |
| 1 | 6 | Resume, circa 1946 |

II. Correspondence

- | | | |
|---|----|-------------------------------|
| 1 | 7 | Rose, Billy
Helene Schwarz |
| 1 | 8 | 1938
1939 |
| 1 | 9 | January – March |
| 1 | 10 | April – May |
| 1 | 11 | June |
| 1 | 12 | July |
| 1 | 13 | August – September |

1	14	October – December
		1940
1	15	January – March
1	16	April – May
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1	18	September – October
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1	20	January – March
1	21	April – May
1	22	June – July
1	23	August – September
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1	25	Schwarz, Kurt and Elsie, 1941
1	26	Tracing, related to fate of Helene Schwarz, 1941-2001

III. Photographs, 1938-1939 and undated

1	27	Hitler, Adolf, with Benito Mussolini. One photo is identified as being at the Hotel Majestic, where Kurt Schwarz worked, circa 1938-1939.
1	28	Klemperer, Leo (uncle of Kurt Schwarz), 1938
1	29	Schwarz, Helene, images of her include those with son and other relatives, 1938 and undated
1	30	Schwarz, Kurt, images of him from time of immigration, on ship and in Havana, 1939