

**ETTELSON FAMILY PAPERS, circa 1890s-1941
2016.381.2**

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: Ettelson family papers

Dates: circa 1890s-1941 (bulk 1934-1941)

Catalog number: 2016.381.2

Creator: Ettelson (Family : Vilkaviškis, Lithuania)

Extent: 1.30 linear feet (3 boxes, 1 oversize box, 1 book enclosure, 2 oversize folders)

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

Abstract: The collection documents the Holocaust-era experiences of the Ettelson family of Vilkaviškis, Lithuania, including Ralph Ettelson's immigration to the Dominican Republic in 1927 and later immigration to the United States in the late 1930s, and his mother Itta Schimensky's wartime experiences in Vilkaviškis before she and her daughter Rivka perished in 1941. Included is a small amount of biographical material, correspondence, printed material and ephemera, and photographs.

Languages: English, Yiddish, Hebrew, 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.

Physical access: Negatives are stored separately and are unavailable to researchers.

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), Ettelson family papers (2016.381.2), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The collection was donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by Richard Ettelson in 2016. An accretion was donated in 2019. Richard is the son of Ralph Ettelson. The collections previously cataloged as 2016.381.1 and 2019.107.1 have been incorporated into this collection.

Separated material: A suitcase carried by Ralph Ettelson was also donated (2019.107.2). Three issues of *Diario Sabado*, a wartime Jewish newspaper published in the Dominican Republic in German and English, were also donated and transferred to the USHMM library.

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, September 2019; updated February 2022

Biographical note

Ralph Ettelson (1911-2000) was born in Vilkaviškis, Lithuania to Michael and Itta (née Ettelson) Schimensky. Ralph had at least two siblings: Rivka and Max (d. 1938). Ralph's father died as a young man leaving Itta to support the family as the proprietor of a shop that sold needles, thread, and other sundries. After Ralph completed gymnasium in 1927 he left Lithuania for the Dominican Republic where he joined a network of extended relatives, including an uncle Jule Schimensky and the Paiewonsky family, who had arrived to the Caribbean in the 19th century. During this period Ralph began to adopt his mother's surname and remained in regular contact with her and his siblings who sent letters, photographs, and goods from Lithuania. In the mid-1930s Ralph relocated for a time to New York where he met Anita Albam (1915-2002), the American-born daughter of immigrants from Vilkaviškis.

In 1938 Ralph and Anita married in New York, however due to his work, as well as naturalization difficulties, Ralph returned frequently to the Dominican Republic where he remained involved in the growing Jewish refugee population. Due to his immigration status, Ralph was not able to directly aid his loved ones in coming to the United States after the start of World War II. He continued to receive letters from family and friends until the German invasion of Vilkaviškis in June 1941.

Ralph's brother Max died in 1938. His mother and sister likely perished in September 1941 after German soldiers and Lithuanian police shot the remainder of Jews still in the Vilkaviškis ghetto.

Ralph and Anita had three sons: Michael (1942-2011), Joel (1946-2010), and Richard (b. 1949).

Biography by Cassandra LaPrade Seuthe and Adam Fielding

Scope and content of collection

The collection documents the Holocaust-era experiences of the Ettelson family of Vilkaviškis, Lithuania, including Ralph Ettelson's immigration to the Dominican Republic in 1927 and later immigration to the United States in the late 1930s, and his mother Itta Schimensky's wartime experiences in Vilkaviškis before she and her daughter Rivka perished in 1941. Included is a small amount of biographical material, correspondence, printed material and ephemera, and photographs.

Biographical material consists of documents related to Ralph after he moved to New York. Included are various address books, financial records, notebooks, and a poesie book. Also included is an affidavit

regarding the transfer of ownership of property in Vilkaviškis to his sister Rivka Schimensky (referred to here as Rebecca), and documents related to his marriage to Anita Albam in 1938.

Correspondence primarily consists of letters sent to Ralph in the United States from his mother Itta in Vilkaviškis. The bulk of the letters were sent in 1938-1939. The last letter in the collection is dated 10 April 1941 and likely the last one received by Ralph. Topics in the letter include her economic situation due to her child dying in 1938, Ralph not writing to her enough, her dead husband Michael, and not receiving a United States visa. The last page of the letter is addressed to Ralph's wife Anna. A donor-provided translation is included with the letter. Other correspondence includes letters exchanged by Ralph and Anita, letters from his cousin David Paiewonsky and his uncle Jule Schimensky. Additionally, there is a small amount of correspondence, primarily with the National Council of Jewish Women, regarding Ralph's efforts to become a naturalized citizen.

Printed material and ephemera primarily consists of business cards, clippings, receipts, recipes, and stamps.

Photographs include pre-war depictions of the Schimensky family in Vilkaviškis, Ralph in Lithuania and the United States, his wife Anita, and various family and friends. Also included is a photograph album likely of the Schimensky family in Vilkaviškis. This collection includes negatives.

System of arrangement

This collection is arranged as four series.

Series 1. Biographical material, 1927-1940 and undated

Series 2. Correspondence, 1932-1941 and undated

Series 3. Printed material and ephemera, 1938-1941 and undated

Series 4. Photographs, circa 1890s-1938

Folders are arranged alphabetically and documents are arranged chronologically.

Indexing terms

Person:

Ettelson, Ralph, 1911-2000.

Ettelson, Anita, 1915-2002.

Schimensky, Itta.

Schimensky, Rivka.

Schimensky, Jule.

Paiewonsky, David.

Corporate:

National Council of Jewish Women.

Topical Subject:

Jews--Lithuania--Vilkaviskis.

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Lithuania.

Geography:

Vilkaviškis (Lithuania)

Dominican Republic--Emigration and immigration.
United States--Emigration and immigration.

Genre/Form:
Letters.
Photographs.
Photograph albums.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1. Biographical material, 1927-1940 and undated

Box/Folder	Title
1.1	Address books, circa 1940
1.2	Affidavit regarding property in Vilkaviškis, 1939
1.3	Financial papers, 1938-1939
1.4	Marriage documents, 1938
1.5	Miscellaneous personal papers, 1938-1940
1.6-1.7	Notebooks, circa 1940 (2 folders)
1.8	Notes, undated
BE 1	Poesie book, 1927

Series 2. Correspondence, 1932-1941 and undated

Box/Folder	Title
1.9	Albam family, 1940-1941
1.10	Ettelson, Anita, 1939-1940
1.11	Paiewonsky, David, 1933-1940
1.12-1.13, 2.1	Schimensky, Itta, 1937-1938 (3 folders)
2.2-2.4	Schimensky, Itta, 1939 (3 folders)
2.5	Schimensky, Itta, 1940-1941
2.6	Schimensky, Itta, undated
2.7	Schimensky, Jule, 1938-1941
2.8	Business correspondence, 1939-1940
2.9	Empty envelopes, 1939-1940
2.10	General correspondence, 1932-1941 and undated
2.11	Immigration correspondence, 1934-1940
3.1	Invitations and greeting cards, 1938-1940 and undated

Series 3. Printed material and ephemera, 1938-1941 and undated

Box/Folder	Title
3.2	Business cards, undated
3.3	Clippings, 1941 and undated
3.4	Ephemera, 1939-1941 and undated
3.5	Receipts, 1938-1941 and undated
3.6	Recipes, circa 1940
3.7	Stamps, 1939

Series 4. Photographs, circa 1890s-1938

Box/Folder	Title
3.8	Ettelson, Anita, circa 1930s
3.9	Ettelson, Ralph, circa 1930-circa 1938
3.10	Ettelson, Ralph: class portraits, 1926-1927
3.11	Ettelson, Ralph: with others, circa 1930s
3.12	Family and friends, circa 1920-1938
3.13	Mohegan Children's Camp, 1937
3.14, OS 2	Schimensky family, circa 1890s-1938
3.15	Vilkaviškis, Lithuania postcards, 1928-circa 1930
OS 1	Workman's Circle Camp, 1935
4	Photograph album, circa 1920s-circa 1930s