

**LESSING FAMILY PAPERS, circa 1880-2017**  
**2017.642.16**

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives  
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW  
Washington, DC 20024-2126  
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**Descriptive summary**

Title: Lessing family papers

Dates: circa 1880-2017

Accession number: 2017.642.16

Creator: Lessing (Family: Delft, Netherlands)

Extent: 7.59 linear feet (1 box, 5 oversize boxes, 2 oversize folders)

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

Abstract: The collection consists of biographical material, correspondence, writings and publications, family albums, and photographs documenting the history of the Lessing family, originally from the Netherlands, including Engeline Lessing's deportation to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, her experiences at the Jeanne d'Arc refugee camp in Philippeville, Algeria (Skikda), her sons Ed, Fred, and Arthur Lessing's experiences as hidden children, Ed's time with the Dutch Resistance and hiding in the woods, and pre and post-war family history.

Languages: Dutch, 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), Lessing family papers (2017.642.16), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The collection was donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by Edward Lessing in 2017. An accretion was donated in 2018. The accessions formerly cataloged as 2017.642.1 and 2018.435.1 have been incorporated into this collection.

Separated materials: The museum has two oral history interviews conducted with Edward Lessing (1990.398.1, 1999.A.0297). Ed also donated 7 oral history interviews conducted with members of his family (RG-50.006.0001-0007), a presentation by Ed on the Holocaust (RG-50.006.0008) artwork, and the following publications: *Over leven: herinneringen aan de oorlogsjaren, 1940-1945 in Gooi, Eemland en Vechtstreek*, *Het uur "U" : drie maanden geschiedenis in en rond Delft : een foto-reportage van den Filmdienst der Binnenlandsche Strijdkrachten*, *Gewest 13, District Delft*, and *Matses met aardbeien*.

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

Processing history: Adam Fielding, June 2018; updated November 2018

### **Biographical note**

Edward Lessing (Ed, born Eliazar Lessing) was born on 8 May 1926 in Hague, Netherlands to Nardus (later Nathan, 1901-1988) Lessing and Engeline Elizabeth van Leer Lessing (nicknamed Lien, 1901-1985). He had two brother, Arthur (nicknamed Abba, b. 1934) and Alfred (Fred, b. 1936). Nardus and Engeline married in 1925 and they immigrated with their son Ed to the United States from Delft, Netherlands in 1929. They settled in Massachusetts where Engeline's sister Suze lived. Nardus was a cellist, but was unsuccessful in finding employment. The family returned to the Netherlands in 1932 and settled in Delft.

The Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, and in October 1942 the Lessings were warned not to board any trains for work placement. They went into hiding on 23 October, hours before they would have been deported. The family decided to split up. Using a false ID, Engeline traveled around the Netherlands by train in order to find hiding places for each of the boys. Fred and Arthur first lived with their grandfather Isaac Lessing and his second wife Agatha Trijntje Cornelia Jautze in Amsterdam. They then hid with multiple families, posing as Christian boys.

Ed bleached his hair and posed as a Christian. He worked on several farms near Delft before his mother arranged through a policeman for him to be placed in the woods with several men in the Dutch Resistance. They lived in a hut called "Het Duikje" (little hiding place). Ed remained there from spring 1943 through 29 December 1943. He escaped a trap set by the Germans to catch and arrest the resistance fighters, and again worked on farms under a false identity until liberation.

Engeline and Nardus hid together. In May 1944, she was arrested while she was coming back from visiting Fred. She was sent to Westerbork and then deported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. In January 1945, Engeline was released from Bergen-Belsen through a prisoner exchange by convincing the Germans she was a U.S. citizen (she knew some English). After liberation she was sent to the UNRAA refugee camp Jeanne d'Arc in Philippeville, Algeria (Skikda). She returned to Delft to be reunited with her family in August 1945.

The Lessings lost many relatives during the Holocaust. After liberation, Ed returned to the trade school that he had attended until 1941. In 1947, Nardus and Ed immigrated to the United States and settled Springfield, Massachusetts. Engeline's sister lived nearby in Holyoke. Nardus became a piano and cello teacher. Engeline, Fred, and Arthur arrived in the U.S. in 1948.

Ed took a course in scientific/medical instrument-making and got a job with General Electric. He later worked professionally as a graphic designer. He married Carla Heymans (b. 1929 in Rotterdam), also a hidden child from the Netherlands, in 1949, and their daughter Noa was born in 1951. Ed and Carla immigrated to Israel in 1950 and lived on a kibbutz, but returned to the U.S. in 1957. Arthur and Fred both obtained doctorates and taught philosophy.

### **Scope and content of collection**

The collection consists of biographical material, correspondence, writings and publications, family albums, and photographs documenting the history of the Lessing family, originally from the Netherlands, including Engeline Lessing's deportation to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, her experiences at the Jeanne d'Arc refugee camp in Philippeville, Algeria (Skikda), her sons Ed, Fred, and Arthur Lessing's experiences as hidden children, Ed's time with the Dutch Resistance and hiding in the woods, and pre and post-war family history.

Biographical material includes material related Ed, his wife Carla Heymans, Nardus, Engeline, Nardus's father Isaac and his second wife Agatha Trijntje Cornelia Jautze, and several other early family members. Material consists of report cards, identification cards, marriage documents, and a family book. Other material includes documents related to the Bergen-Belsen prisoner exchange and false identity cards for Ed, Nardus, and Carla's mother Herta Heymans.

Correspondence primarily consists of correspondence between Engeline and Nardus after her arrest and deportations to Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen, and her time in the Jeanne d'Arc refugee camp. Other correspondence includes letters to Engeline in the refugee camp from her sister Suze van Leer in Massachusetts.

Writings include Engeline's diary from Bergen-Belsen and a personal narrative describing her experiences, writings from Ed and Fred about their Holocaust experiences, and a photocopy of a diary of Herman Munninghoff, who was in the hut with Ed in 1943. Clippings include articles on the Hollandia Kattenburg Factory where Joseph and Isaac Lessing both worked, the Dutch Resistance hut, and related Dutch Holocaust topics. Publications include reprints of Dutch newspapers from 1942, publications regarding hidden children, a photo postcard of the German invasion of the Netherlands, and a pamphlet dropped by the U.S. Air Force. Also included is a book of the transcriptions of family interviews conducted by Fred regarding their Holocaust experiences (please see related material for more information on the audio of these interviews).

The family albums consist of four albums assembled by Ed entitled "An Informal History of the Lessing Family." The albums are annotated and contain original photographs, facsimiles of documents, artwork, translations of letters, poetry, and modern documentation chronicling the history of the Lessing family. The books cover pre-war family history, their Holocaust experiences, and their post-war lives through 2015.

Photographs consists of pre-war images of Ed with his Jewish scout group and wartime images of him with the Dutch Resistance in their hut in the woods.

### **System of arrangement**

The collection is arranged as five series.

- Series 1. Biographical material, 1928-2009 and undated
- Series 2. Correspondence, circa 1938-2007
- Series 3. Writings and publications, circa 1943-2014 and undated
- Series 4. Family albums, circa 1880-2015
- Series 5. Photograph of Ed Lessing, circa 1937-1943

Folders are arranged alphabetically and documents are arranged chronologically.

### **Indexing terms**

#### Person:

Lessing, Alfred, 1936-  
Lessing, Edward, 1926-  
Lessing, Carla Heijmans, 1929-  
Lessing, Arthur.  
Lessing, Nardus.  
Lessing, Engeline.

#### Corporate:

Bergen-Belsen (Concentration camp)

#### Topical Subject:

Identification cards--Forgeries.  
Jews--Netherlands--Delft.  
Hidden children (Holocaust)--Netherlands.  
Holocaust (1939-1945)--Personal narratives.  
World War, 1939-1945--Underground movements--Netherlands.

#### Geography:

Delft (Netherlands)  
Skikdah (Algeria)

#### Genre/Form:

Photographs.  
Diaries.  
Personal narratives.

## **CONTAINER LIST**

### **Series 1. Biographical material, 1928-2009 and undated**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Title</b>
1.1	Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, 1945 and undated
1.2	False identification cards for Ed Lessing, Nardus Lessing, and Herta Heymans, 1939, 1943
1.3	Lessing, Carla, 1945-1949
1.4	Lessing, Ed, 1946-1954
1.5	Lessing, Engeline: Jeanne d'Arc refugee camp, 1945
1.6	Lessing, Engeline, 1945, 2009

1.7	Lessing, Isaac and Agatha Trijntje Cornelia Jautze, 1928-1943
1.8	Lessing, Nardus, 1930-2009
1.9	Lessing family, 1943 and undated

### Series 2. Correspondence, circa 1938-2007

Box/Folder	Title
1.10	Lessing, Ed, 1992-2007
1.11	Lessing, Engeline: Lessing, Nardus, 1945
1.12	Lessing, Engeline: van Leer, Suze and David, 1945
1.13	Lessing, Engeline: van Leer, Suze and David, 1946, 1960-1962 and undated
1.14	Lessing, Engeline, 1945
1.15	Lessing, Nardus: Lessing, Engeline, circa 1942-circa 1944
1.16	Lessing, Nardus: Lessing, Engeline, 1945
1.17	Other correspondence, circa 1938-1973

### Series 3. Writings and publications, circa 1943-2014 and undated

Box/Folder	Title
1.18	Clippings: Hollandia Kattenburg Factory, 1992-2009
OS 1-2	Clippings: Resistance Hut (Het Duikje), 1945, 1995, and undated (2 folders)
1.19	Clippings, 1946-2000
1.20	Dutch newspaper reprints, 1942, 1994
1.21	Hidden child publications, 2008, 2014
1.22	Lessing, Ed: "I had put all that behind me years ago," 2010
1.23	Lessing, Engeline: Diary and personal narrative about Bergen-Belsen, circa 1944 and undated
1.24	Lessing, Fred, 1998-2007
1.25	Munninghoff, Herman: Diary (photocopy), undated
2.1	<i>Onderduik: Our Story, A Family's Recollections of the Holocaust Years</i> , compiled and transcribed by Fred Lessing, 1992
1.26	Pamphlet and postcard, 1940-circa 1943

### Series 4. Family albums, circa 1880-2015

Box/Folder	Title
3.1	<i>Part 1: The First Lessing, Born in 1781 in Latvia until World War 2 A Holocaust Catastrophe in 1944</i> , circa 1880-circa 1993
4.1	<i>Part 2: May 9, 1944 until October 8, 1956, Arrival of Eliazar, Carla and Noa Lessing in the United States of America</i> , circa 1944-circa 1956
5.1	<i>Part 3: Getting settled in America, Ed, At &amp; Fred until College &amp; Work, Marriages, Children, Death of Parents, Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Grandchildren</i> , circa 1945-2013
6.1	<i>Part 4: In this final album you'll find portraits selected more or less at random, of family members and others appearing in the three previous albums. This album ends with a useful chart of Lessing family descendants up to the year 2015</i> , circa 1914-2015
1.27	Part 4 genealogy chart

### Series 5. Photograph of Ed Lessing, circa 1937-1943

Box/Folder	Title
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1.28	Jewish scout group, circa 1937-circa 1939
1.29	Resistance Hut (Het Duikje), 1943