

BLAKE AND ANNA SCHIFF PAPERS, circa 1910-1999
2018.407.1

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

Title: Blake and Anna Schiff papers

Dates: circa 1910-1999

Accession number: 2018.407.1

Creator: Schiff, Blake, 1920-2006.

Additional creator: Schiff, Anna, 1918-2009.

Extent: .5 linear feet (1 box, 1 oversize folder)

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

Abstract: Documents, correspondence, identification papers, and photographs regarding the Holocaust-era experiences of Blake and Anna Schiff in the Warsaw Ghetto, Grodno, and in hiding in Novosiolki. Biographical material includes documents regarding Blake's education and employment in the United States, Blake's false identity card under the name Stephan Podolski used in post-war Poland, and social security cards. Correspondence includes letters sent by Blake to Mary and Helene Daily, his aunt and cousin in the United States, regarding his efforts to immigrate to the U.S. in 1939 as a student, and scattered post-war letters. Subject files consist of documents related to the trial of Kurt Wiese and Heinz Errelis, two perpetrators of the liquidation of the Grodno ghetto, where Blake and Anna were witnesses; documents related to efforts by Blake and Anna to get Pawel Charmuszko named "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem; and clippings. Photographs include pre-war and post-war family photographs.

Languages: German, English, Polish

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), Blake and Anna Schiff papers (2018.407.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The collection was donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by Irene Weiner in 2018. Irene is the daughter of Blake and Anna Schiff.

Related materials: The USC Shoah Foundation conducted oral history interviews with Blake and Anna Schiff.

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, October 2018

Biographical note

Blake Schiff (born Borys Szyff, 1920-2006) was born on 10 October 1920 in Warsaw, Poland to Nikodem (d. 1929) and Salomea (née Zajfen). He had one sister, Halinka. Nikodem was an industrialist and a prominent member of the Jewish community in Warsaw. Salomea was a dentist. In 1939 Blake corresponded with his paternal aunt Mary Daily and her daughter Helen while he was attempting to secure a student visa to immigrate to the United States, but was not successful. He left Warsaw for Grodno in October 1939 where his sister lived. He returned to Warsaw in 1940, and he and his mother and sister were deported to the Warsaw Ghetto in November. Blake worked in the ghetto hospital and in 1942 he and his sister Halinka got involved with Emanuel Ringelblum's underground efforts to document life in the ghetto. In March 1943, Blake and Halinka escaped from the ghetto and were hidden in a barn in Novosiolki by Pawel Charmuszek and Josef and Stefania Gawronik. They remained there until the region was liberated by Soviet troops in June 1944. Their mother Salomea perished in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Anna Schiff (born Chaya Klempner, 1918-2009) was born on 15 July 1918 in Grodno, Poland (Grodno, Belarus) to Yitzhak and Ida Klempner. She had four older sisters and one younger one: Luba, Cyla, Liza, Pola, and Fania. Her father owned a hardware store. Anna's mother died when she was about three years old, and her sister Fania died before World War II. Anna graduated school in 1936 and attended university in Wilno, Poland (Vilnius, Lithuania), but returned after a year. She married Ephraim Lubitz in 1938 and they had one son, Isidore, in 1939.

After the German occupation of Grodno in November 1941, Anna and her family moved into the ghetto. Her sister Luba died soon after moving in. In March 1943 Anna escaped from the ghetto to see if Mrs. Koslowska, a woman they used to rent a summer cottage from, would help them. Mrs. Koslowska agreed to help her and her family. By the time Anna returned to Grodno to retrieve her husband and son, the ghetto had been liquidated and she realized her family had likely perished.

She lived in hiding with Mrs. Koslowska, and contemplated going to Białystok where other family resided in the ghetto. Mrs. Koslowska began to worry about Anna being discovered, and Anna learned through an acquaintance Halinka Szyff about another hiding place owned by Pawel Charmuszek and Josef and

Stefania Gawronik. She spoke with Pawel and he agreed to hide her. He hid her in a barn in Novosiolki and remained there for the duration of the war.

While hidden in the barn, Anna met Blake. Assuming her husband Ephraim had perished, she fell in love with him. After Soviet troops liberated the region in June 1944, they married and left the barn to return to Grodno. Their friend Dr. Woroshylsky performed the marriage. They later had a rabbi perform the ceremony later. They would get married two more times, once in a civil ceremony, and again in Łódź, Poland in 1947. After Anna returned to Grodno she learned her family had been killed.

Their daughter Irene was born in 1946. Due to ongoing pogroms and anti-Semitism in Poland, they lived as non-Jews under the false identities of Stephan and Anna Podolski. In 1947 they moved to Sweden for two years, and then Mexico until they were able to immigrate to the United States in 1953. They settled in Houston, Texas and moved to California in 1960. Blake had a successful career as a chemical and petroleum engineer, eventually starting his own consulting company.

Scope and content of collection

Documents, correspondence, identification papers, and photographs regarding the Holocaust-era experiences of Blake and Anna Schiff in the Warsaw Ghetto, Grodno, and in hiding in Novosiolki. Biographical material includes documents regarding Blake's education and employment in the United States, Blake's false identity card under the name Stephan Podolski used in post-war Poland, and social security cards. Correspondence includes letters sent by Blake to Mary and Helene Daily, his aunt and cousin in the United States, regarding his efforts to immigrate to the U.S. in 1939 as a student, and scattered post-war letters. Subject files consist of documents related to the trial of Kurt Wiese and Heinz Errelis, two perpetrators of the liquidation of the Grodno ghetto, where Blake and Anna were witnesses; documents related to efforts by Blake and Anna to get Pawel Charmuszko named "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem; and clippings. Photographs include pre-war and post-war family photographs.

System of arrangement

The collection is arranged as four series.

Series 1. Biographical materials, 1929-1968

Series 2. Correspondence, 1939-1968

Series 3. Subject files, 1966-1999

Series 4. Photographs, circa 1910-1956 and undated

Folders are arranged alphabetically and documents are arranged chronologically.

Indexing terms

Person:

Schiff, Blake, 1920-2006.

Schiff, Anna, 1918-2009.

Ringelblum, Emanuel, 1900-1944.

Corporate:

Yad VaShem Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Topical Subject:

Hidden family.

Trials (Crimes against humanity)--Germany--History--20th century.
Identification cards--Forgeries--Poland.

Geography:
Warsaw (Poland)
Hrodna (Belarus)

Genre/Form:
Photographs.
Correspondence.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1. Biographical materials, 1929-1968

Box/Folder	Title
1.1	Schiff, Anna, circa 1955 and undated
1.2	Schiff, Blake: False identity card, circa 1945
1.3	Schiff, Blake, 1929-1968

Series 2. Correspondence, 1939-1968

Box/Folder	Title
1.4	Schiff, Blake: Daily, Mary and Helene, 1939
1.5	Schiff, Blake, 1939-1968

Series 3. Subject files, 1966-1999

Box/Folder	Title
1.6	Clippings, 1966-1996
1.7	Trial of Kurt Wiese and Heinz Errelis, 1966-1999
OS 1	Trial of Kurt Wiese and Heinz Errelis clippings, 1968
1.8	Yad Vashem, 1968-1995 and undated

Series 4. Photographs, circa 1910-1956 and undated

Box/Folder	Title
1.9	Photographs, circa 1910-1956 and undated