

ESTHER AND ROBERT BORN PAPERS, circa 1942-1998

2018.574.1

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

Title: Esther and Robert Born papers

Dates: circa 1942-1998

Accession number: 2018.574.1

Creator: Born, Esther, 1933-2012.

Additional creator: Born, Robert, 1924-2000.

Extent: .2 linear feet (3 folders, 1 oversize folder)

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

Abstract: The collection primarily consists of a diary kept by Esther Born (née Wittlin), originally of Żółkiew, Poland (present-day Zhovkva, Ukraine), who survived the Holocaust in hiding. The diary is handwritten in Polish on loose sheets of paper, and included is a typed English language translation. It describes in detail the family's flight from Żółkiew and their experiences while in hiding. Also included in the collection is Esther's autograph book from Bytom, Poland, and the Memmingen and Wegscheid DP camps, 1945-1947; a 1953 essay about her arrival in the United States; a Wittlin family tree; and a memoir handwritten in English of her husband Robert Born, about his pre-war family life, the Warsaw ghetto, and the Majdanek concentration camp.

Languages: Polish, 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), Esther and Robert Born papers (2018.574.1), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: The collection was donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2018 by Rita Born Distenfeld and Richard Born, the children of Esther and Robert Born.

Related archival materials: The Shoah Foundation has oral histories conducted with Robert Born (VHA interview code 5025) and Esther Born's brother, Harry Wittlin (VHA interview code 1167).

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, May 2019

Biographical note

Esther Born (née Wittlin, 1933-2012) was born on 15 July 1933 in Żółkiew, Poland (present-day Zhovkva, Ukraine) to Abraham (1898-1961) and Klara (née Klein, 1903-1974) Wittlin. She had one brother, Harry (b. 1931). Esther's father was a grain dealer and her mother ran a grocery store. Her family was Orthodox.

The German army occupied Żółkiew in 1941. By November 1942 the Wittlins lost their house. A ghetto was established, but the family went into hiding. They met two men, a Polish man named Jan Łukawski and someone in the Ukrainian underground. The family split up. Esther and her mother hid with Jan and his wife Magdalena in a bunker at their farm, and Harry and his father hid with the Ukrainian in the woods. They fled right before a large Aktion occurred in Żółkiew. The family was separated for about six to eight months, but would visit every two weeks at night.

At some point Esther and Klara were caught by a neighbor and had to flee. They reunited with Esther's father Abraham. They went into hiding with them in the wood. The family was caught again by some peasants, but managed to escape. They went back to the Łukawski farm, but were unable to remain there long, and survived in the woods until they were liberated by the Russians. The Łukawskis continued to give them food when they could. In 2008 Jan and Magdalena Łukawski were named Righteous Among the Nations.

After liberation, the Wittlin family was helped by HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and lived in the Wegscheid and Memmingen displaced persons camps. They immigrated to the United States in 1949 aboard the USAT *General Henry Taylor*, arriving on 7 November. They settled in Brooklyn. Esther met Robert Born at a Purim ball in New York. After they married, they lived in Forest Hills and had two children: Rita and Richard. Esther's brother Harry served with the United States Army during the Korean War and married Lydia Scharf.

Robert Born (1924-2000, sometimes listed as being born in 1926) was born Wolf Borensztajn on 20 November 1924 in Warsaw, Poland to Abram Borensztajn (b. 1889) and Rachel Friedman (b. 1897). He had four sisters: Gitl (b. 1921), Regina (d. 1950), Faiga, and Masha. His family was Orthodox, and Abram co-owned a wine business in Warsaw. The family was wealthy and the children attended private school.

In the fall of 1940 the family had to move into the Warsaw ghetto. Abram's business was confiscated, but he was still able to work there. Robert was assigned to work in the Presidential Palace. In May 1943

Robert was deported to Majdanek, Skarzysko-Kamienna in September 1943, Tschenschow in October 1944, Buchenwald in January 1945, Flossenbürg in January 1945, and then Mauthausen in April 1945 where he was liberated.

After liberation he went to Berlin where he learned his sister Regina survived, but the rest of his family perished. In 1947 he went to the Zolsheim DP camp. Robert immigrated to the United States around 1950 and worked in real estate.

Scope and content of collection

The collection primarily consists of a diary kept by Esther Born (née Wittlin), originally of Żółkiew, Poland (present-day Zhovkva, Ukraine), who survived the Holocaust in hiding. The diary is handwritten in Polish on loose sheets of paper, and included is a typed English language translation. It describes in detail the family's flight from Żółkiew and their experiences while in hiding. Also included in the collection is Esther's autograph book from Bytom, Poland, and the Memmingen and Wegscheid DP camps, 1945-1947; a 1953 essay about her arrival in the United States; a Wittlin family tree; and a memoir handwritten in English of her husband Robert Born, about his pre-war family life, the Warsaw ghetto, and the Majdanek concentration camp.

System of arrangement

The collection is arranged as a single series.

Folders are arranged alphabetically and documents are arranged chronologically.

Indexing terms

Person:

Born, Esther, 1933-2012.
Born, Robert, 1924-2000.

Topical Subject:

Jews--Ukraine--ZHovkva.
Jews--Poland--Warsaw.
Holocaust survivors--Poland.
Hiding places--Ukraine--ZHovkva.
Jewish ghettos--Poland--Warsaw.

Geography:

Zhovkva (Ukraine).
Getto warszawskie (Warsaw, Poland)
United States--Emigration and immigration.

Genre/Form:

Diary.
Personal narratives.
Autograph albums.

CONTAINER LIST

Folder	Title
1 of 3	Born, Esther: Autograph book and essay, 1945-1947, 1953
2 of 3	Born, Esther: Diary and translation, circa 1942
3 of 3	Born, Robert: Memoir, 1992
OS 1	Family tree, 1998