

DR. ARTHUR KESSLER PAPERS, circa 1890-2007
2019.183.16

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

Title: Dr. Arthur Kessler papers

Dates: circa 1890-2007 (bulk 1922-1947)

Accession number: 2019.183.16

Creator: Kessler, Arthur, 1903-2000.

Extent: .5 linear feet (1 box, 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 experiences of Dr. Arthur Kessler, originally of Czernowitz (Chernivtsi, Ukraine), including his imprisonment in the Vapniarka concentration camp in Transnistria and his efforts to treat and manage an outbreak of paralysis of fellow prisoners due to consumption of *Lathyrus sativus*. Included are biographical materials, correspondence, research notes on Lathyrism, written testimony, writings, and a small amount of photographs. Also included is his unpublished memoir *Ein Arzt im Lager* (A Camp Physician).

Languages: German, Hebrew, English, Romanian

Administrative Information

Access: There are no known restrictions on access to this material.

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Preferred citation: (Identification of item), Dr. Arthur Kessler papers (2019.183.16), United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC

Acquisition information: David Kessler donated the Dr. Arthur Kessler papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2019 and 2020. The accessions numbered 2019.183.1, 2019.580.1, and 2020.290.1 have been incorporated into this collection. David is the son of Arthur Kessler.

Separated material: Please see the Dr. Arthur Kessler Collection for related objects.

The following publications were also donated and transferred to the USHMM library:

Baruch, Beno. "Vapniarka" Biblioteca Politica: September, 1968

Wapniarca, Buletinul Organizatiei Fostilor Deportati Si Internati Politici – Luptatori Evrei Antifascisti in Lagarul, Vapniarca, 1972-1979 (23 issues)

Processing history: Adam Fielding, June 2019; updated by Adam Fielding, January 2023

Biographical note

Arthur Kessler (1903-2000) was born on October 11, 1903 in Gewitsch, Moravia (Jevíčko, Czech Republic) to David (1866-1945) and Anna (née Gottfried, 1875-1947) Kessler. He had three brothers: Joseph (b. 1902), Julius, and Leo. The family moved to Czernowitz (Chernivtsi, Ukraine) in 1913 where David worked as a theology professor and rabbi. During World War I the family moved back to Gewitsch, but returned after the war to what was now part of Romania. Arthur studied medicine and graduated from the University of Vienna in 1929. He served as a doctor in the Romanian army from 1930-1933. He married Chaia Schulsinger (b. 1911) on May 6, 1937 in Czernowitz. Their first child, Vera, was born in 1940.

After the Russians occupied Czernowitz in June 1940, Arthur became the manager of the hospital. After the Germans reestablished Romanian rule in the city in July 1941, Arthur was arrested as a Communist/Soviet agent and imprisoned from December 30, 1941 to February 7, 1942. He was released after paying a bribe. In September of that year, Arthur was rounded up and deported to the Vapniarka concentration camp in Transnistria, where he was both a prisoner and head doctor of a 30-person medical department. In late 1942, he treated the prisoners who had gone on a hunger strike because of reactions that they had to eating a toxic fodder pea (lathyrism). Arthur and other prisoners were transferred out of Vapniarka and sent to the ghetto in Olgopol on May 1, 1943.

A year later he escaped, returned to Romania, and reunited with his wife Chaia and their daughter, Vera. Chaia and Vera were blond and passed as Aryans. They had survived by going to Bucharest and moving from one place to another. The Kessler family went to Palestine in 1944 where Arthur published several articles on lathyrism and became the director of the Allergy Department of the Zamenhof Clinic in Tel Aviv. His son David was born in 1948. Arthur continued to give lectures and publish articles, and was considered a leader in the field of lathyrism. He also continued to treat the victims of Vapniarka who survived and immigrated to Israel without compensation.

Arthur's parents survived the war in Czernowitz. All three of his brothers survived the Holocaust. Joseph immigrated to Peru after the war, Julius immigrated to the United States after the war, and Leo died in Bucharest.

Scope and content of collection

The collection documents the Holocaust experiences of Dr. Arthur Kessler, originally of Czernowitz (Chernivtsi, Ukraine), including his imprisonment in the Vapniarka concentration camp in Transnistria and his efforts to treat and manage an outbreak of paralysis of fellow prisoners due to consumption of *Lathyrus sativus*. Included are biographical materials, correspondence, research notes on Lathyrism,

written testimony, writings, and a small amount of photographs. Also included is his unpublished memoir *Ein Arzt im Lager* (A Camp Physician).

Biographical materials include birth certificates, a marriage certificate, identification cards, Romanian passports, restitution claims paperwork for Arthur and his wife Chaia, and papers related to Arthur's medical career. Also included is a document regarding Arthur's release from jail in Czernowitz in 1942 and an exemption certificate from deportation from Czernowitz in 1942.

Correspondence primarily consists of wartime letters written to his cousin Jacob Granirer in Bucharest, possibly regarding his work with Lathyrism in Vapniarka. There is also a 1946 letter to Arthur from the Bezalel National Museum regarding the exhibition of gifts given to him by fellow prisoners of Vapniarka.

Vapniarka related documents include a list of survivors of the camp living in Israel, notebooks and loose notes regarding Arthur's work with Lathyrism while in Vapniarka, typed testimony in German about his experiences there that was likely submitted to Yad Vashem, and restitution claims paperwork for survivors of Vapniarka.

Writings consist of articles written by Arthur regarding Lathyrism as well as his unpublished memoir. The articles include a 1963 article in German and an English translation entitled "Vascular diseases by consumption of *Lathyrus Sativa*" that was never published. Arthur's unpublished memoir, *Ein Arzt im Lager* (A Camp Physician) was likely written in the 1960s. In it, he describes his arrest and deportation to Vapniarka, his involvement and observations about the disease afflicting the prisoners, the experiences of Arthur and other prisoners transferred from Vapniarka to the Olgopol ghetto (Olgopol, Ukraine), his return to Romania, reunification with his family, and flight from Romania. The manuscript is typed in German with some handwritten edits. It is split into three chapters: I. Im Lager, II. Im Ghetto, and III. Der Weg Zurück. Chapter II contains some hand illustrations and there are two hand drawn maps after Chapter III.

Photographs consist of pre-war, wartime, and postwar depictions of Arthur and his family. Included is a photograph of Arthur's parents, Anna and David Kessler; depictions Arthur as a doctor in the Romanian army and in Zwickau, Germany, a 1943 photograph of Arthur in Olgopol with Dr. Moritz, Polia, Dubs, and three other unknown individuals, and an undated photograph with Arthur, Polia Dubs, "Engineer Berkovitz," Dr. Moritz, and "Engineer Davidovitz." There are also four post-war photographs of an exhibit on Vapniarka at the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel.

System of arrangement

The collection is arranged as five series.

- Series 1. Biographical material, 1922-1990
- Series 2. Correspondence, circa 1943-1946
- Series 3. Vapniarka papers, circa 1943-2007
- Series 4. Writings, 1946-1982
- Series 5. Photographs, circa 1890-1973

Indexing terms

Person:

Kessler, Arthur, 1903-2000.

Corporate:
Vapniarka (Concentration camp)

Topical Subject:
Medical care.
Jews--Ukraine--Chernivtsi.
Jewish physicians--Ukraine--History.
Concentration camp inmates--Ukraine.
Concentration camps--Ukraine.
Physicians--Ukraine.
Lathyrism.
Holocaust survivors.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Reparations.

Geography:
Chernivtsi (Ukraine)
Vapniarka (Concentration camp)
Palestine.
Transnistria (Ukraine : Territory under German and Romanian occupation, 1941-1944)

Genre/Form:
Photographs.
Personal narratives.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1. Biographical material, 1922-1990

Box/Folder	Title
1.1	Czernowitz papers, 1942
1.2	Identification papers, 1922-1938
1.3, OS 1	Medical career, 1923-1942
1.4	Passports, Romanian, 1937-1939
1.18	Restitution claims of Arthur Kessler, 1957-1990
1.19	Restitution claims of Chaia Kessler, 1960-1978

Series 2. Correspondence, circa 1943-1946

Box/Folder	Title
1.5	Correspondence, circa 1943-1944
1.6	Letter from the Bezalel National Museum, 1946

Series 3. Vapniarka papers, circa 1943-2007

Box/Folder	Title
1.7	List of Vapniarka survivors in Israel, undated
1.8	Research notes, circa 1943
1.9	Testimony, 1979

1.20-1.21	Restitution claims for Vapniarka survivors, 1957-2007 (2 folders)
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Series 4. Writings, 1946-1982

Box/Folder	Title
1.10	Articles in Hebrew, 1946
1.11	<i>Ein Arzt im Lager</i> : chapter I. Im Lager
1.12	<i>Ein Arzt im Lager</i> : chapter II. Im Ghetto
1.13	<i>Ein Arzt im Lager</i> : chapter III. Der Weg Zurück
1.14	"Lathyrismus," 1947
1.15, OS 2	Various notes, 1981-1982
1.16	"Vascular diseases by consumption of Lathyrus Sativa," 1963

Series 5. Photographs, circa 1890-1973

Box/Folder	Title
1.17	Photographs, circa 1890-1973