



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Bertha V. Corets Papers**

Manuscript Collection No. 307



Collection Summary

Title	Bertha V. Corets Papers
Dates	1930-1965 (bulk 1933-1940)
Collection Number	MS-307
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Corets, Bertha V.
Extent	1.2 linear feet (3 Hollinger boxes)
Abstract	Correspondence, reports, minutes, booklets, pamphlets and newsclippings pertaining to Bertha V. Corets' activities for the Anti-Nazi Boycott and as a champion of human rights.
Language of the Material	English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Bertha Vera (Levine) Corets, wife, mother, businesswoman, store-owner and advocate for social justice, was born to Ethel and Harris Levine on December 24, 1897, in Troy, New York. Her parents had immigrated to the United States from Russia in the 1880s. Bertha was the second of three children. Her older brother, Meyer, born February 7, 1895, died of tuberculosis in 1913. Her younger brother, Joseph Gabriel Levine (later Dr. Joseph Lee) was born March 20, 1899. At age 21, he graduated from the University and Bellevue Hospital Medical College (later NYU School of Medicine).

Bertha attended PS 40 in the Bronx and graduated from the 8th grade in 1910. Her formal education was put on hold for several years while she worked at her father's retail dry goods business. During World War I she worked for the United States War Production Board.

From 1918 to 1921, Bertha worked for the US Shipping Board (USSB) as a stenographer. She had risen to the position of Chief Stenographer when she resigned in 1921. Bertha met her future husband, Mark Corets, while working for the USSB.

After the war, Bertha was a local activist in the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution (granting women the right to vote). This newly won right probably compelled her to return to formal schooling.

While working full time during the day, Bertha enrolled in the Bronx Evening High School in November 1922 and completed four years of high school in just seven months, a feat covered widely in local Bronx and Yiddish newspapers. She was also valedictorian of her class. The newspapers noted that Bertha intended to study law after graduation because she saw it as a profession where she could do a great deal of good and work to root out injustice.

Over the next few years Bertha took several college extension classes including a law correspondence course. Although Bertha was never able to formally attend law school, she would soon find her voice in the pursuit of justice by advocating for the rights of Jews at home and in Nazi Europe.

Bertha married Mark Corets, a veteran of World War I and a Chief Petty Officer in the US Navy, on August 6, 1925. That same year the couple opened the Mark Corets Men's Shop, a haberdashery business in the Throggs Neck section of the Bronx. Together they had two sons, Myron L. (b. 1929) and Ellis H. (b. 1931)

Bertha and Mark were founding members of the Throggs Neck Jewish Center, a synagogue located within walking distance of their home. After the 1929 stock market crash and in the midst of the Depression, the synagogue faced hard times with the congregation unable to pay the building's mortgage and in jeopardy of losing its property. In 1933, Bertha developed a private bond issue directed towards members of the congregation. The proceeds were used to retire the mortgage and save the synagogue. Several of the bond holders, including Bertha and Mark, never redeemed their bonds and treated the principal and interest as a donation.

While working in the family business and raising a family, Bertha felt compelled to act when Hitler came to power in 1933. She joined the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights and immediately served as Secretary under Chairman Samuel Untermyer, the celebrated Jewish patriot who rose to prominence as leader in the campaign to defend Jews in Germany

In 1936, her husband Mark formed Bronx Post No. 64 of the Jewish War Veterans (JWV), and Bertha formed the Ladies Auxiliary and served as its first president. In 1937, she was appointed Boycott Chairman of the JWV New York State Department Ladies Auxiliary as well

as National Boycott Chairman of the JYW Ladies Auxiliary. In addition to her Ladies Auxiliary duties she was appointed National Boycott Chairman for the men's organization.

Members of Bertha's boycott committee checked newspaper and magazine advertisements for goods such as cameras, automobiles, drugs, china, foodstuffs, textiles and musical instruments that might be made in Nazi Germany. They visited retail stores such as R. H. Macy's and F. W. Woolworth's five-and-ten cent stores to check labels and tags to identify items made in Germany. When an item was found to be made in Germany, Bertha or other committee members wrote letters to that company requesting that the merchandise be removed from store shelves. Many stores complied with these requests. Other businesses that refused to stop selling German-made goods were then placed on a widely published boycott list. Woolworth's was one of many businesses on this list. The activities of Bertha's boycott committees raised great awareness of the prevalence of Nazi-made goods for sale in the United States and had an impact on decreasing sales and imports of this merchandise until the United States entered World War II.

In 1939 and 1940, Bertha was elected President of the New York State Department Auxiliary of the JYW. In 1940, she served on the Resolutions Committee at the Women's Patriotic Conference on National Defense held in Washington, DC. At the conference she advocated a strong Merchant Marine as an auxiliary to the Navy in time of war. Bertha was elected National Vice President of the JYW Auxiliary in 1941. In December 1941, Bronx Auxiliary Post No. 64 awarded Bertha a life membership in the JYW. Her chapter nominated her for the position of National President three times in the mid-1940s.

In 1948, Bertha proudly represented the JYW at the dedication ceremonies for the Four Chaplains Memorial Swimming Pool at the U.S. Veterans Hospital in the Bronx. She was instrumental in the fundraising efforts to build the pool when there was no money available in the Veterans Administration budget. The four chaplains represented four denominations (Dutch Reformed, Jewish, Roman Catholic and Methodist) on the S.S. DORCHESTER, a troop ship that was torpedoed in the Atlantic on February 3, 1943. The chaplains remained calm, rallied the men, gave away their own life jackets to soldiers who had none and then linked arms on the deck of the sinking ship as they prayed for the safety of the troops.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Bertha's husband Mark re-enlisted in the Navy and served in the Pacific. At home, Bertha ran the family store assisted by her two sons.

With the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Bertha was a member of the Israel Maritime League. In 1949, Bertha raised money for equipment for a maritime academy in Haifa, Israel. She was also a life member of Hadassah and raised funds for the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem.

At the conclusion of World War II, Bertha affiliated with the Women's Division of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). She served as President of the Abraham Herman Chapter in the Bronx from 1954-1955. In 1956 Bertha was elected Honorary President and a member of the Board of Directors of the Chapter and Vice President of the Board of Directors of the International Organization.

In the late 1950s, Bertha's heart condition and asthma limited her active participation in organizations, but she continued writing letters to high public officials and prominent people attacking television advertisements that encouraged young people to smoke. Bertha's health compelled her and Mark to spend much of their time in the mild climate of Arizona and Hot Springs, Arkansas. With their sons pursuing engineering degrees and embarking on their own careers, the couple retired from business when they sold the store in 1956.

After a short struggle with pancreatic cancer, Bertha died on July 9, 1973 in New York City. Her family legacy includes two sons, six granddaughters and 10 great-grandchildren.

In honor of Bertha Corets, a woman of valor and our beloved mother. Ellis H. Corets and Myron L. Corets.

Scope and Content

Bertha Vera Corets (1897-1973) was a wife, mother, businesswoman, and store-owner who became an energetic and effective advocate for social justice. Her papers contain correspondence concerning her social justice activities, particularly in opposition to the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, together with publications and brochures of and pertaining to the many organizations and causes that she supported and led.

The Bertha Vera Corets papers are important for many reasons. First, they document the anti-Nazi movement through her work in the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights. Much of the material in Box 1 pertains to these activities.

Second, the Corets papers reveal the challenges of her life as an American woman who stood out and made her voice heard for the rights of women in the U.S. and Germany. For example are materials related to the American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, the forerunner of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, whose stated purpose was "to acquaint the ladies with the conditions which confront all the Jewish people as well as all the women in Hitler's Germany today."

Third, the Corets papers contain two boxes of pamphlets, brochures and publications of numerous anti-Nazi groups together with other social justice issues and causes such as Zionism, anti-Semitism, and support of the Allied effort in World War II. These publications provide contemporary looks at the international Jewish scene in the 1930s and 1940s and show the extent of Bertha Corets' involvement in pursuit of peace and justice during this time.

The Bertha Corets papers provide an important, and rare, glimpse of the life of an active and committed American Jewish woman during one of the most important decades of the 20th century. It is a valuable resource for scholars and students of Jewish, military, social and women's history — and for anyone interested in studying this time period.

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Preferred Citation

Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Bertha V. Corets Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-307. Bertha V. Corets Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance

Received from Bertha V. Corets, New York, N.Y., 1966.

Processing Information

Processed by American Jewish Archives staff, 2007.

Index Terms

- Subjects** Anti-Nazi movement / Human rights advocacy
- Personal Names** Corets, Bertha V.
- Corporate Names** American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights / Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America / Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights, Inc. (New York, N.Y.) / Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights, Inc. (New York, N.Y.). Ladies Auxiliary
- Media** Digitized / Minutes

Series A. Papers, 1930-1965

Box and Folder Listing

- Box 1. Folder 1. Correspondence, 1930-1936
- Box 1. Folder 2. Correspondence, 1937
- Box 1. Folder 3. Correspondence, 1938 January-June
- Box 1. Folder 4. Correspondence, 1938 July-October
- Box 1. Folder 5. Correspondence, 1938 November-December
- Box 1. Folder 6. Correspondence, 1939 January-February

Box 1. Folder 7. Correspondence, 1939 March-April

Box 1. Folder 8. Correspondence, 1939 May-December

Box 1. Folder 9. Correspondence, 1940-1942

Box 1. Folder 10. Correspondence, 1943-1958

Box 1. Folder 11. Correspondence, 1962-1965, undated

Box 1. Folder 12. American League for the Defense of Jewish Rights, 1933-1936

Box 1. Folder 13. Publications, 1838-1943, undated

Box 1. Folder 14. Photograph. Jews welcome Samuel Untermyer, 1933

Box 1. Folder 15. Pamphlets. Anti-Nazi, 1933-1943

Box 2. Folder 1-2. Booklets, undated

Box 2. Folder 3. Clippings, undated

Box 2. Folder 4-5. Pamphlets, undated

Box 3. Folder 1-5. Pamphlets, undated