A Finding Aid to the
Robert L. and Jessie S. Bloom Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 93
Collection Summary

Title: Robert L. and Jessie S. Bloom Papers
Collection Number: MS-93
Repository: The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator: Bloom, Robert L., 1878-1974
Bloom, Jessie S., 1887-1980
Extent: 5.2 linear feet (13 Hollinger boxes)
Language of the Material: English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Robert L. (1878-1974) and Jessie S. (1887-1980) Bloom were married for over sixty years. For most of those years, they lived and worked together in Alaska as twentieth century pioneers on the final frontier of the United States.

Robert L. Bloom was born in Siaulie, Lithuania on October 15, 1878. At the age of eight his family moved to Dublin, Ireland and in 1897, he came to Alaska in search of gold. Robert had little success as a prospector, so he moved to Seattle, Washington to earn enough money to be able to return to Alaska. In 1904 he did return and settled in Fairbanks. He used the supplies he had brought with him from Seattle to open a hardware and general merchandise store.

Jessie S. Bloom was born in Dublin, Ireland to Leon and Olga (Kopelansky) Spiro on December 17, 1887. She spent her childhood in Dublin but left there when she was 21 to go to London, England to work as a secretary. While in London Jessie became involved in the growing women's suffrage movement, joining the Women's Freedom League in 1909, and working for passage of a suffrage law by selling pro-suffrage newspapers and attending rallies.

Robert and Jessie met in 1910, in Dublin, when both, coincidentally, were vacationing there. In 1912, Robert and Jessie, who were also second cousins, were married in London. Shortly afterward they moved to Alaska.

The transition from England to Alaska was not unpleasant for Jessie and they soon began their pioneer life together, working on the development and settling of Alaska.

Robert was involved in many activities. He was a charter member of Igloo No. 4, Pioneers of Alaska, a fraternal organization. He was a member of an advisory group that helped establish an Air Force base in Alaska and was a founder of what was later to become the University of Alaska, serving a member of the Board of Trustees of the U.A.'s forerunner, the Alaska Agriculture College and School of Mines from 1921 to 1925.

Jessie, too, became involved in a number of activities. Two of her major accomplishments were the establishment in 1918 of the first kindergarten in the city of Fairbanks and, the formation in 1926 of the first Girl Scout Troup in Alaska. Today, the Girl Scout training center in Fairbanks is named in her honor.

Together, the Blooms were co-founders of the Fairbanks Airplane Company and in 1925 Jessie became one of the first women in Alaska ever to ride in an airplane. Robert and Jessie were also very active in conservation efforts in Alaska, supporting efforts to set aside lands for wilderness preserves and opposing efforts such as the Alaskan oil pipeline, which, they felt, posed a serious threat to Alaska's natural environment. Finally, the Blooms were very active in establishing and promoting the Jewish community in Alaska. Robert served as chairman of Alaska's Jewish Welfare Board and together, they served as unofficial chaplains for Jewish servicemen stationed in Alaska during World War II.

The Blooms also raised a family in Alaska. They had four daughters: Meta Buttnick, Dr. Olga Bloom Backer, Dr. Deborah Kaplan and Ruth Ibbetson.

Robert and Jessie moved to Seattle to retire. Robert died there in April 1974 at the age of 95. Jessie remained in Seattle, in continual close contact with the friends, activities, and causes she had left behind in Alaska, until her death in December, 1980 at the age of 92.
The papers describe the lives of Robert and Jessie Bloom, pioneers in the settling and development of Alaska. The collection consists primarily of correspondence but also includes diaries, photographs, reminiscences, clippings, and personal items.

Organized into two (2) series: A. Correspondence; B. Personal.

The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

This collection has been placed in the permanent care, custody, and control of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) by the donors of the collection. Questions concerning rights to use or publish materials from the collection should be addressed to the Executive Director of the AJA. For more information, see the American Jewish Archives copyright information webpage.

Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Robert L. and Jessie S. Bloom Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-93. Robert L. and Jessie S. Bloom Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Received from Jessie S. Bloom, Seattle, Wash., 1979-1980.

Processed by Kevin Proffitt, December 1981.

The series is divided into two (2) subseries: 1. General; 2. Family.

The correspondence in this series is arranged alphabetically by the name of the person or organization. Letters are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Consists of correspondence and some newsletters and clippings. Of particular interest is the correspondence between Jessie Bloom, Philip S. Bernstein, and Jacob R. Marcus. In these letters she recounts many of her and her husband’s experiences as pioneers in Alaska.

The correspondence in this series is arranged alphabetically by the name of the person or organization. Letters are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 1. Folder 1. A, General.
Box 1. Folder 3. Adams, Brock, 1966-1976, undated
Box 1. Folder 4. Alaska [University of], 1946, 1961-1969
Box 1. Folder 5. Alaska [University of], 1970-1973
Box 1. Folder 6. Alaska [University of], 1974-1979, undated
Box 1. Folder 10. Aminsky, Albert and Laura, 1944-1952
Box 1. Folder 11. August, Michael, 1953-1980
Box 2. Folder 1. B, General.
Box 2. Folder 8. Blakeney, Lily, 1937-1957
Box 3. Folder 2. Carter, Bill, 1960, undated
Box 3. Folder 4. CBS, Inc. ["Invitation to Learning"].
Box 3. Folder 5. Charney, Charles and Gertrude, 1933-1979, undated
Box 3. Folder 7. Cohen, Samuel I., 1984
Box 3. Folder 11. Delaney, Caroline, 1974-1980
Box 3. Folder 12. Dover, Barbara (Cohn), 1977-1979, undated
Box 3. Folder 15. Ervin, Sam J., 1972-1973
Box 4. Folder 2. Fox, Beatrice, 1943-1944
Box 4. Folder 3. Fraser, Helen A., 1972-1978
Box 4. Folder 6. Gravel, Mike, 1969-1978
Box 4. Folder 13. Hotykay, Charles and Edith, 1974-1978
Box 4. Folder 15. Hyman, Louis, 1933-1971
Box 4. Folder 17. Interior Department, 1919-1978
Box 4. Folder 21. Jewish Consumptives' Relief Society, 1933-1957
Box 4. Folder 22. The Jewish Transcript, 1974-1979
Box 5. Folder 1. L, General.
Box 5. Folder 3. Lebeson, Anita, 1971-1977, undated
Box 5. Folder 5. Lowell, Ted and Babe, 1960-1973
Box 5. Folder 7. Lowell, Ted and Babe, 1977-1979, undated
Box 5. Folder 10. Marcus, Jacob R., 1975-1976
Box 6. Folder 1. McCall's, 1965-1974
Box 7. Folder 2. Rabinowitz, Jay and Anne, 1965-1980
Box 7. Folder 4. Rogge, Pat, 1973-1979
Box 7. Folder 8. Sa-Se, General.
Box 7. Folder 12. Schlentner, Carol, 1976-1979, undated
Box 7. Folder 15. Sh-Sw, General.
Box 7. Folder 17. Simon, Ida, 1944-1945, undated
Box 8. Folder 2. Stevens, Ted, 1974-1979, undated
Subseries 2. Family, 1897-1980, undated

Extent 0.6 linear feet (1.5 Hollinger boxes)

Arrangement The letters are arranged alphabetically by correspondent and chronologically within each folder.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 9. Folder 10. Ibbetson, Ruth [daughter], 1956-1965
Box 10. Folder 2. Kaplan, Deborah [daughter], 1933-1968
Box 10. Folder 10. Richardson, Bay [niece], 1973-1979
Series B. Personal, 1897-1979

Extent 1.4 linear feet (3.5 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Consists of personal items, diaries, financial papers, notes and photographs. Many of the photographs are dated and labeled and portray personal events and acquaintances of Robert and Jessie Bloom.

Arrangement The material in this series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 10. Folder 15. Biographical material [Robert Bloom], 1952-1974, undated
Box 11. Folder 1. Diary [Jessie Bloom], 1964-1966
Box 11. Folder 2. Diary [Jessie Bloom], 1973
Box 11. Folder 3. Diary [Jessie Bloom], 1973-1975
Box 11. Folder 4-5. Documents, 1905-1972
Box 11. Folder 7. Financial papers, 1909-1920
Box 11. Folder 10. Last will and testament [Robert Bloom], 1970
Box 11. Folder 11. Letters of condolence (written at the time of the death of Robert Bloom) [A-W, unidentified], 1974
Box 12. Folder 1. Notebook [Jessie Bloom], undated
Box 12. Folder 3. Passports, 1928-1952
Box 12. Folder 4-5. Photographs, 1902-1979, undated
Box 13. Folder 1. Reminiscences [Jessie Bloom], undated
Box 13. Folder 2-3. Reminiscences [Jessie Bloom - Dublin, Ireland], undated
Box 13. Folder 5. Personal miscellaneous, 1897-1978, undated