A Finding Aid to the
Abraham Zygielbaum Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 768
Collection Summary

Title
Abraham Zygielbaum Papers

Dates
1919-1986

Collection Number
MS-768

Repository
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

Creator
Zygielbaum, Abraham, 1912-1989

Extent
3.2 linear feet (8 Hollinger boxes)

Language of the Material
English, Polish, and Yiddish

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch
Abraham Zygielbaum (1914-1989) was born in Poland, where he attended a Jewish Secular Grammar School in Chelm Lubelski. He also attended a Yeshiva in Warsaw. After the Holocaust, but before emigrating to the United States, Zygielbaum acted as the director of Jewish Schools and Theater at the Freed Camps in Germany. On his vita, he describes his areas of interest as Holocaust literature, drama, talmudic lore, folklore, and Hebrew and Yiddish literature.

Zygielbaum pursued his higher education after arriving in the States. He obtained a bachelor’s degree from Jewish Theological Seminary, a master’s degree from Hebrew Union College (HUC), and his Ph.D. from HUC. He also studied at the University of Judaism, and University of California-Los Angeles.

Somehow, Zygielbaum managed to continue pursuing all of his “areas of interest” throughout his life. As can be seen from his many teaching and speaking engagements, he loved sharing his knowledge of Eastern European Jewish life with any and all audiences. Students at HUC likewise benefited from his gift for presentation. His talent in making this bygone way of life come alive for his classes can be appreciated best by reading his correspondence. Excerpts taken from letters written by grateful listeners to his inspirational storytelling and style of teaching follow:

"You are now a part of my history - a very special, gentle part. I won't forget you. Your class was very moving for me ... May God keep you as beautiful as you are - Love from your Christian friend ... “

"There are few words which can express how beautiful and meaningful was your participation in our conference on The Shtetl [here] in Oakland. You transmitted a spirit and life such as our kids have never felt. Indeed, I hope you gained a little for you gave so much truly - by being so wonderful and taking a little time to be with us and share a spirit that so few have.

"I loved your class - as you sparked life in a vital part of our Jewish soul - Thank you so much for sharing a part of your soul with us - I loved seeing or catching a glimpse of your wisdom through your soft, knowing eyes - I know I’ll see you again - It's always such a joy.”

Plainly here was a teacher who had his students reaching for superlatives.

Abraham Zygielbaum was married to Tema. He died in 1989 of unknown causes.

Scope and Content
Consists of documents written in English, Yiddish, and Polish. Certainly the motif of his papers would be Zygielbaum’s deep love of the east European shtetl coupled with the way of life described as yiddishkeit. His desire to share what he knew about that way of life through performance art imbued everything he did. The impression derived from his papers is that his higher education served merely as a means toward that all-important end. As an interesting aside, eighteen different ways of spelling “Zygielbaum” were encountered while processing the collection.

Arrangement
The collection has been arranged into three (3) series: A. Correspondence; B. Subject Files; C. Audio Tapes.

Terms of Access
The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Preferred Citation
Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Abraham Zygielbaum Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-768. Abraham Zygielbaum Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance
Received from the Frances Henry Library, Los Angeles, Calif., 28 November 1990.
Processing Information  Processed by Vicki Lipski, March 2009.

Index Terms

Subjects  Holocaust survivors / Theater, Yiddish / Yiddish actors / Yiddish language / Yiddish poetry
Personal Names  Zygielbaum, Abraham, 1912-1989 / Zygielbaum, Arthur
Corporate Names  Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring / Yiddish Culture Club (Los Angeles, Calif.) / Yivo Institute for Jewish Research

Series A. Correspondence, 1900-1986

Extent  0.8 linear feet (2 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note  Consists of letters written in English, Polish, and Yiddish. The bulk of the English correspondence has to do with presentation dates, thank you’s for presentations, and professional correspondence having to do with his tenure at HUC in Los Angeles.

Arrangement  The series is arranged chronologically.

Box and Folder Listing

- Box 1. Folder 1. Correspondence [English], 1960s
- Box 1. Folder 2. Correspondence [English], 1970-1973
- Box 1. Folder 3. Correspondence [English], 1974-1975
- Box 1. Folder 4. Correspondence [English], 1976-1977 June
- Box 1. Folder 5. Correspondence [English], 1977 July-1979
- Box 1. Folder 6. Correspondence [English], 1980-1981
- Box 1. Folder 7. Correspondence [English], 1982-1986
- Box 1. Folder 8. Correspondence [English], undated
- Box 2. Folder 1. Correspondence [Polish], 1953-1966, undated
- Box 2. Folder 2. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1940s, 1950s
- Box 2. Folder 3. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1960-1961
- Box 2. Folder 4. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1962
- Box 2. Folder 5. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1963
- Box 2. Folder 6. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1964-1965
- Box 2. Folder 7. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1966
- Box 2. Folder 8. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1967-1968
- Box 2. Folder 9. Correspondence [Yiddish], 1970s, 1985
- Box 2. Folder 10. Correspondence of unknown origin [Yiddish, translated into English], 1900, 1901
- Box 2. Folder 11. Correspondence [Yiddish], undated
- Box 2. Folder 12. Correspondence [Yiddish], undated
Series B. Subject Files, 1919-1984

Extent 2.4 linear feet (6 Hollinger boxes)

Scope and Content Note Subjects of particular interest or relevance in the collection include Affiliations, Hillel, HUC/LA, Music, Pedagogical Materials, Speaking Engagements, Teaching Engagements, Workmen's Circle, and Arthur Zygielbaum. This last subject is of special note. Arthur Zygielbaum was one of Abraham's nine brothers and sisters. He endured the horror of the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. This, along with his despair regarding the fates of his siblings, and his disbelief at the world's seeming disregard for the Jews of Warsaw, caused him to take his own life in 1943. Arthur Zygielbaum was instantly declared a martyr of the Holocaust, and is, to this day, an object of international reverence.

Arrangement The series is arranged alphabetically.

Box and Folder Listing

Box 3. Folder 1. Activism, Jewish, 1970
Box 3. Folder 2. Activism, Student Jewish, 1965-1970
Box 3. Folder 5. Anniversaries, 24th, 25th, and 29th, of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and/or the Holocaust [English and Yiddish].
Box 3. Folder 6. Anniversaries, 30th, 33rd, and 34th, of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and/or the Holocaust [English and Yiddish].
Box 3. Folder 7. Arab propaganda, 1966-1972
Box 3. Folder 9. Camps, Jewish Children's, 1969-1975, undated
Box 3. Folder 10. Certificates [English, Yiddish], 1964, 1983, undated
Box 3. Folder 12. Conventions [English and Yiddish], 1976, 1979
Box 4. Folder 1. Family history [Yiddish, Polish], 1919, 1945
Box 5. Folder 1. HUC, Los Angeles, 1961-1969
Box 5. Folder 2. HUC, Los Angeles, 1970
Box 5. Folder 3. HUC, Los Angeles, 1971-1977
Box 5. Folder 5. Jewish Free University, 1969
Box 5. Folder 6. Jewish State Theatre of Rumania [English and Yiddish], 1972, undated
Box 5. Folder 7. Jewish survivors of concentration camps, 1949, 1952
Box 5. Folder 8. Jews in Eastern Europe, 1969
Box 5. Folder 9. Jews in Western Europe, 1975
Box 5. Folder 10. Library Light, 1972
Box 5. Folder 11. Library, Samuel J. Borowsky.
Box 6. Folder 2. Notebooks [English, Yiddish].
Box 6. Folder 3. Notebooks [English, Yiddish].
Box 6. Folder 4. Notes [English, Yiddish].
Box 6. Folder 5. The Pharisees and Sadducees. Paper by Zygielbaum while student at HUC, 1963
Box 6. Folder 7. Pedagogical materials. Children's education [Yiddish], undated
Box 7. Folder 1. Photographs [labeled in Yiddish].
Box 7. Folder 2. Poetry, 1979, 1984, undated
Box 7. Folder 3. Poetry [Yiddish], 1979, undated
Box 7. Folder 4. Postcards [Yiddish], undated
Box 7. Folder 5. Poster of Nelson Glueck, undated
Box 7. Folder 6. World Over Playhouse. WNBC.
Box 7. Folder 11. Teaching Yiddish. World Council for Yiddish and Jewish Culture, 1980
Box 7. Folder 13. Temple, Early [English, Yiddish], undated
Box 7. Folder 14. Temple Judea, 1979, undated
Box 7. Folder 15. Temple Sinai, 1972
Box 7. Folder 18. Valley Cities Jewish Community Center, 1963
Box 7. Folder 19. Vita, 1970
Box 8. Folder 1. Westward from Skopishok. Compiled by Lennard Thal.
Box 8. Folder 2. Workmen's Circle [English, Yiddish], undated, 1947-1954
Box 8. Folder 4. Writings in Yiddish, 1967, undated
Box 8. Folder 5. Yiddish organizations [Yiddish], undated
Box 8. Folder 6. Yiddish Stories from A to Z. By Abraham Zygielbaum [English and Yiddish], undated
Series C. Audio Tapes, 1967-1973

Scope and Content Note: There is one audiocassette and two reel-to-reel tapes in this small series. The audiocassette is a recording of a presentation made by Zygielbaum at the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles in 1973.

Box and Folder Listing

Item C-4563. An Afternoon of Yiddish Folklore. Skirball Museum, 1976 May 6
Item TR-3738. Camp Swig (Saratoga, Calif.), 1969 Summer
Item TR-3739. Interview with Pauline Rose, 1967