

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Kohlbach-Bickel Family Papers
1860-1952
Mss Col 6305

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Summary

Main entry:	Kohlbach-Bickel family
Title:	Kohlbach-Bickel family papers, 1860-1952
Size:	5.5 linear feet (11 boxes)
Source:	Donated as part of the Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection.
Abstract:	The Kohlbach-Bickels were a Hungarian and Swiss family that contained a rabbi, professor, engineers, and the first female Hungarian architect. The first generations originated in Hungary and Switzerland, with later branches moving to Germany, Romania, Norway and Israel. This collection documents three generations, covering the period from the 1880s through World War II.
Access:	Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
Preferred citation:	Kohlbach-Bickel Family Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
Special formats	Photographs

Provenance note

The Kohlbach-Bickel family papers were donated to The New York Public Library and processed as part of Series Q of the Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection. In 2006 they were reprocessed, and while administratively remain part of the collection, they are physically arranged as a separate collection.

Related materials note

Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library.

Leopold Katscher Papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library.

Biographical note

The Kohlbach-Bickel Family comprised three generations of individuals who lived in Hungary, Germany and Switzerland. The first generation of the family consisted of Bertalan Kohlbach (1866-1941?), rabbi and gymnasium professor, and his wife Helen (Ila, or Ilona) Katscher, the youngest aunt of Rosika Schwimmer. Together they had two children: Emil (1902-?) and Ella (1906-?). Ella married Erich Bickel (1895-?), a Swiss engineer, and they had three children: Werner, Edith (called Mitzi) and Hans.

Bertalan and Helen Kohlbach lived in Temesvár, Hungary (now Timișoara, Romania) and Budapest. Bertalan held a doctorate in Semitic Philology from the Scientific University of Hungary and was rabbi to a wealthy congregation. At some point, however, he was dismissed from this position and resumed his studies with the intent of securing a professorship. He concluded these studies in Berlin in 1896 and eventually attained a position at a gymnasium in Budapest. Throughout his career, Bertalan wrote articles for various papers in Hungary and Germany, often under the Germanized name Berthold Kohlbach.

Bertalan's wife Helen was a member of the Katscher family. Her stepbrother, Leopold Katscher, was an author and noted pacifist, and her niece, Rosika Schwimmer, organized the Ford Peace Expedition during World War I.

Bertalan and Helen's son Emil served as a lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian military during World War I. After the war, he pursued a career in engineering and technology. He married, left Hungary during World War II, and did not return after the war, remaining in Romania. Details of his later life can be found in Ella's letters to Rosika and Franciska Schwimmer in Series I.

Ella Kohlbach, Bertalan's daughter, graduated from the Königliche Technische Hochschule in Berlin in 1917, becoming the first female Hungarian architect. On June 19, 1919, she married Erich Bickel, whom she had met in Berlin. Bickel's father, Wilhelm, had businesses based in Stuttgart and India, and was the Swiss Consul to both Sweden and Germany at different periods. Erich Bickel was born in Berlin while his father was Consul to Germany.

Ella worked as an architect for only a brief period, spending most of her life as a housewife. She and Erich lived in various cities in Germany, and in England during the year 1931-1932. In 1932, they and their children moved to Zurich, where Erich continued his work as an engineer. Beginning in 1936, he became an instructor at the Technische Hochschule. In 1943, Ella's mother Helen Kohlbach escaped from Admiral Horthy's Hungary and joined them in Switzerland.

Ella and Erich's daughter Edith (Mitzi) Bickel and her husband had several children, and moved to Israel in 1947. In Israel, they divorced and Mitzi married a Scandinavian farmer temporarily living there. Together Mitzi and her new husband moved to Norway, where they settled on a farm and had several children. Both the Israeli-born and Norwegian-born children lived with Mitzi.

Related families found in this collection include the Katschers, the Oblaths, and the Schwimmers.

Scope and content note

The Kohlbach-Bickel Papers span the years 1860 to 1952, and consist of correspondence, professional and official documents, family photographs, original artwork, printed publications, and other miscellaneous papers.

The collection is organized into five series. A fair amount of the papers, in particular Emil's postcards to his parents from the front during World War I, and several family documents, are in Hungarian. The majority of Helen and Bertalan Kohlbach's correspondence with their children is in German. Bertalan Kohlbach's professional materials are predominantly in Hungarian, with German and a small amount of Hebrew present.

Ella and Erich's letters to Bertalan and Helen represent the largest series in the collection. In these letters, they discuss personal and family matters, sometimes including comments on the economic situation in Germany in the 1920s, in particular the hyperinflation. There is little discussion of the political situation which would eventually force their removal to Switzerland. The majority of correspondence in the collection is largely personal in nature.

Although the bulk of materials pertain to the Kohlbach and Bickel family members, there are some documents belonging to members of the Katscher family, relatives of Helen Kohlbach nee Katscher. The postcards arranged in Helen and Bertalan Kohlbach Postcards Received subseries contain communications from Helen's half-brother, the writer Leopold Katscher. There are also various documents from 1938 that certify the Jewish ancestry and material wealth of Moritz Katscher and his twin daughters, Elsa and Klara, both of whom would die during the war.

Arrangement note

The Kohlbach-Bickel Family Papers are organized in the following series:

Series I. Correspondence, 1896-1944

Series II. Family documents, 1866-1952

Series III. Bertalan Kohlbach professional materials, 1872-1943, n.d.

Series IV. Printed matter, 1900-1940

Series V. Photographs and artwork, ca. 1860-1940

Series descriptions and container list

Series I. Correspondence, 1896-1944

5 boxes

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>
1	1-3

A. Bertalan Kohlbach, Letters sent, 1896

3 folders

Bertalan Kohlbach's outgoing letters consist of personal and professional correspondence written during 1896. All letters are in Hungarian, and the bulk of the materials from April through May of the year are on letterhead related to his position as rabbi in Temesvár. For professional correspondence received, see Bertalan and Helen Kohlbach Letters received.

B. Bertalan and Helen Kohlbach, Letters received, 1896-1944, n.d.

5 boxes

The letters received by Bertalan and Helen Kohlbach are grouped into files by author and arranged chronologically within. Materials consist of professional correspondence to Bertalan, and personal correspondence to both Bertalan and Helen.

Of particular interest in Bertalan Kohlbach's professional correspondence is a letter in Hebrew dated April 19th, 1912, from Rabbi Jacob Meir (1856-1939), then chief rabbi of Salonica (now Thessaloniki), and later chief Sephardic rabbi of Palestine (1920-1939). In this letter, Rabbi Meir addressed community variations on customs such as the practice of throwing grain on the floor during weddings.

The personal correspondence in this series was primarily written by the Kohlbach children: Bertalan and Helen's son Emil, daughter Ella, and son-in-law Erich Bickel. There is also correspondence from a variety of friends and relatives, arranged chronologically rather than by individual author. Included with the letters received are a number of postcards sent from various individuals and locales, and a small amount of blank postcards, the majority of which appear to be souvenirs. Readers interested in letters from Emil, Ella and Erich are advised to review the postcards in addition to the letters received.

The bulk of the correspondence is in Hungarian and German.

1	4 4-8 9-10	Professional correspondence, 1892-1913, n.d. From Emil Kohlbach, 1914-1944, n.d. From Ella Bickel, 1913-1916
2	1-7	From Ella and Erich Bickel, 1917-1929
3	1-6	From Ella and Erich Bickel, 1930-1938
4	1-4 5-8	From Ella and Erich Bickel, 1939-1943, n.d. From relatives and friends, 1896-1929
5	1-2 3 4	From relatives and friends, 1930-1936, n.d. Postcards received, ca. 1910-1935 Blank postcards, undated

Box Fol

C. Emil and Ella Kohlbach, Letters received, 1903-1938, n.d.

2 folders

Arranged in folders by recipient, the majority of letters received by both Emil and Ella Kohlbach consist of postcards written in Hungarian. Ella's received correspondence also includes a few letters, as well as several items in German.

5	5	Emil Kohlbach, ca. 1910-1931
	6	Ella Kohlbach, 1903-1911, 1918, 1938, n.d.

Series II. Family documents, 1866-1952

1 box

Family documents held in this series consist primarily of educational documents, but also include a small amount of identification papers, children's schoolwork, calling and membership cards, financial materials--some of which belong to close relations of the Kohlbach's, and an account in German of Helen Kohlbach's 1943 escape from Hungary to safety in Switzerland.

There are educational certificates and diplomas for Bertalan, Helen and Ella, including Bertalan's diploma and wax seal for his doctorate. The identification papers consist of several passports and citizenship papers for Ella and Helen, containing photographs in several instances.

The Kohlbach financial materials consist of bank statements, a financial ledger, and ration cards. There is also an account from 1938 of the assets belonging to Helen's brother Moritz Katscher, and his twin daughters Elsa and Klara, both of whom died at the hands of the Nazis.

Materials are in Hungarian and German.

		Financial documents
6	1	Angol-Magyar bank statements, 1922-1926, n.d.
	2	Ledger and ration cards, 1919-1923, 1935, n.d.
		Bertalan Kohlbach
	3	Educational and exam certificates, 1866-1932
	4	Doctorate diploma, 1888
		Helen Kohlbach
	5	Educational certificates and identification papers, 1880-1926, n.d.
	6	Accounts of escape from Hungary to Switzerland, 1952
	7	Ella Bickel (née Kohlbach) educational documents and passports, 1900-1919, n.d.
	8	Hans and Edith Bickel schoolwork, 1931-1932, n.d.
	9	Kohlbach membership and calling cards, ca. 1890
	10	Moritz, Klara, and Elsa Katscher's accounts of Jewish assets, 1938
	11	Miscellaneous, 1926-1928, n.d.

Box Fol

Series III. Bertalan Kohlbach professional materials, 1872-1943, n.d.

0.5 boxes

Bertalan Kohlbach's professional materials consist of his writing and notes, paired with a list of his literary publications from 1890-1895. The writings produced by Kohlbach himself are primarily sermon texts, biblical analyses, and notes, and exist in both manuscript and printed form. Many coincide with his time as a rabbi in Temesvár. There are some printed sermons from other nineteenth-century rabbis, in addition to excerpts from letters and sermons written by the same.

The list of Kohlbach's literary work contains approximately 40 articles and includes article title, journal or newspaper title--of which one example is the *Temesvarer Zeitung*--and two separate dates, of which one appears to be date of submission, and the second date of publication.

Materials are in Hungarian, German, and Hebrew.

7	1-4	Writing and notes, 1872-1899, 1903-1943, n.d.
11	1	List of literary work, 1890-1895

Series IV. Printed matter, 1900-1940

3 folders

Printed matter in the collection consists of pamphlets, newspaper clippings, and souvenir picture books and articles.

The pamphlets are generally materials of likely professional interest to Bertalan Kohlbach, and include a few items written by Kohlbach's brother-in-law Leopold Katscher. The file of newspaper clippings contain materials similar in focus to the pamphlets, in addition to articles and letters submitted by Kohlbach himself. Several of these articles were attributed to Berthold Kohlbach.

Highlights among the souvenir picture books are an undated book of photographs of the city of Dresden previous to World War II; and a book of photos of the Paris World's Fair of 1900.

In German, Hungarian, and French.

7	5	Pamphlets, 1902-1923, n.d.
8	1	Newspaper clippings, 1891-1940, n.d.
11	2	Souvenir picture books and articles, 1900, 1939, n.d.

Box

Fol

Series V. Photographs and artwork, ca. 1860-1940

3.5 boxes

The sizable number of photographs in this collection are arranged by subject, and include images of immediate family and their houses, other relatives, friends, several years of Bertalan Kohlbach's school classes, WWI troops and trenches, family vacations, and European cities such as Sarajevo and Budapest. There are a significant number of cabinet cards and cartes de visites, in addition to small and larger format printed photographs.

Among the photographs of immediate family are images of Bertalan and Helen Kohlbach spanning their adult lives, a large number of their daughter Ella and her husband and three children, and photos of Emil—in particular his photos taken on the front during WWI, which show troops and trenches.

Photographs of relatives include members from the Katscher, Oblath and Schwimmer families, among others, with a large number of images of Leopold and Bertha Katscher. There are also a fair amount of photos of Rosika and Franciska Schwimmer.

The original artwork present in the collection is represented by a small amount of drawings by Ella Kohlbach and László Kácsér (sic).

8	2-4	Family photographs, ca. 1890-ca. 1935, n.d.
	5	Emil Kohlbach's World War I photographs, 1914-1916
9	1	Katscher family photographs, ca. 1860-ca. 1935, n.d.
	2	Oblath family photographs, ca. 1880-1910, n.d.
	3	Schwimmer family photographs, ca. 1870-ca. 1935, n.d.
	4-6	Relatives and friends, ca. 1880-ca. 1940, n.d.
10	1-4	Cabinet cards and cartes-de-visite, ca. 1880-ca. 1920, n.d.
		Large-format photographs
11	3	Family photographs, undated
	4	Bertalan Kohlbach's annual class photos, 1923-1924, n.d.
	5	Unidentified family and friends, undated
	6	European cities and sights, undated
	7	Original artwork by Ella Kohlbach, László Kácsér and others, undated