



The New York Public Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

**Eleonora von Mendelssohn papers**

1880-1949

MssCol 1963

## Summary

**Creator:** Mendelssohn, Eleonora von

**Title:** Eleonora von Mendelssohn papers

**Date:** 1880-1949

**Source:** Sources Gift of Leo L. Lerman, 1952. Additional materials transferred from Theatre Collection, April 8, 1958

**Abstract:** Eleonora von Mendelssohn was a German stage actress who emigrated to America at the time of Hitler's rise to power. She was actively involved in aiding other emigres and had much contact with the German acting community in Hollywood and New York. The collection includes personal and business papers and memorabilia of Eleonora von Mendelssohn and family members dating from 1880-1949. Papers reveal aspects of Mendelssohn's life, as well as problems, concerns and political tenor of the German emigre community in the United States during this period.

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Preferred citation:** Eleonora von Mendelssohn Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Mary Ellen W. Rogan; machine readable finding aid created by APEX data services and revised by Chatham Ewing.

## Creator History

Eleonora von Mendelssohn was born in Berlin, Germany on December 1, 1900. She was the daughter of Robert von Mendelssohn and Giuletta Gordigiani. Her father, an amateur cellist, was a descendant of Moses Mendelssohn, of whose line the famous composer, Felix Mendelssohn was a part. Robert and his brother Franz controlled the Mendelssohn Bank during the early decades of the 20th century.

Ms. Mendelssohn was named for the celebrated actress, Eleanora Duse, and like her namesake became an actress herself, despite her parents' objections. She joined the company of Max Reinhardt

and made her stage debut in 1921 as Jessica in "The Merchant of Venice". She was married three times - first, to Edwin Fischer, the Swiss pianist; second, to Jedre Jessinski, an Hungarian aristocrat; and last, to Martin Kosleck, a Hollywood actor and a fellow German emigre.

Eleonora von Mendelssohn was the first of the Mendelssohn family to leave Germany when Hitler came to power. Moving to Austria, however, proved to be equally unwise since she was politically outspoken and belonged to a branch of the family that retained its Judaism the longest. In 1938 she left Austria and emigrated to the United States. Settling in New York with her brother, Francesco, Eleonora soon began aiding other refugees.

After perfecting her English, she appeared on the New York stage in a number of plays including: "Flight to the West", "The Russian People", "The Secret Room", "Daughters of Atreus" and "The Madwoman of Chaillot". Her one major Broadway success was her role in "Flight to the West" where she played a Jewish woman fleeing Germany. She counted among her friends an array of notables from the international artistic community. Among them were Alexander Woolcott, Arturo Toscanini, Noel Coward, Thornton Wilder and Helen Hayes.

Tragedy seemed a part of her life. The dissolution of her family fortune, her brother's frail mental health and her own endless search for fame were aspects of a life compounded by Hitler's rise to power and her displacement from her homeland. In 1951, again tragedy struck when her husband, Martin Kosleck, fell from their apartment window and was severely injured. A few weeks later, Ms. Mendelssohn was found dead in bed from an overdose of sleeping pills. She died January 24, 1951 in New York City.

### **Scope and Content Note**

The papers of Eleonora Mendelssohn (1880-1949) are mostly personal, and reflect her life and involvement in the theatre and film industries. The bulk of the collection is personal correspondence from approximately 1930-1949 and is a valuable source of primary data on the German immigrant community, their exodus from Germany after Hitler's rise to power, and their establishment in Hollywood during the 30's and 40's. Another important aspect of the correspondence are the letters from Noel Coward and his mother. This correspondence may be of particular interest to those seeking insight into the Coward family. On a personal and highly sensitive note is the correspondence concerning her brother Francesco's emotional illness and letters from her husband, Martin Kosleck, who periodically dealt with bouts of intense depression. Included in the personal correspondence are letters dating from the 1880's which belong to her father, Robert von Mendelssohn. These letters from various friends and acquaintances make up the oldest section of the papers and are all in German. Much of the content has not been determined.

Ms. Mendelssohn was active in a number of refugee relief groups and her correspondence show her activities in the aid of German Jews seeking political asylum in the United States. Subject files reveal her activities in cases on an individual basis. Much of the business correspondence deals with the problems of extricating her family's assets from German and Swiss banks during and immediately following World War II. Letters from United States creditors seeking payment of debts also make up this group of papers.

Most of the correspondence, both personal and business, is in German, Italian and French. It is mostly handwritten and difficult to decipher. The English correspondence gives insight to the lives of the Hollywood emigres, the network of the German-Jewish community in the United States and her own personal life. These papers should be of interest to scholars of social history, political and immigration history of the World War II era and historians of film and theatre as well.

The ephemera consists of sketches, photographs and personal mementos. The most noteworthy are 31 sketches, mostly of Toscanini, for whom Mendelssohn held a great affection. There are also passports, literacy certificates and naturalization papers in this series of personal articles.

**Arrangement:** The papers are divided into two sub groups. Subgroup I, Personal Papers, has 5 series. They are: 1. Personal Correspondence; 2. Handwritten Notes; 3. Printed Works; 4. Subject Files; 5. Ephemera. Subgroup II, Business Papers has 3 series. They are: 1. Business Papers; 2. Business Correspondence; 3. Bank Statements/Cancelled Checks.

## Key Terms

### Occupations

Actors

### Subjects

Jewish actors

Jewish refugees -- United States

Jews in the motion picture industry

Jews, German

### Genre/Physical Characteristic

Photographic prints

Sketches

### Names

Bassermann, Albert

Bassermann, Else

Bernoulli, C. (Christoph)

Coward, Noel, 1899-1973

Coward, Violet

Dieterle, Charlotte

Dieterle, William, 1893-1972

Eichner, Anita

Einstein, Albert, 1879-1955

Forster, Rudolf, 1884-1968

Furtwa\_nghler, Wilhelm, 1886-1954

Horst, 1906-1999

Hutschnecker, Arnold A., 1898-

Kosleck, Alice

Kosleck, Martin, 1904-1994

Mendelssohn, Eleonora von

Mendelssohn, Francesco

Mendelssohn, Giuletta

Mendelssohn, Robert

Reinhardt, Gottfried

Reinhardt, Max, 1873-1943

Toscanini, Arturo, 1867-1957

Twardowski, Hans von

Viertel, Berthold

Viertel, Salka

## Container List

### Subgroup I - Personal papers

The personal papers of Eleonora von Mendelssohn consist of personal correspondence, handwritten notes and excerpts of printed works and reviews. Also included are subject files on various people and events of interest to Ms. Mendelssohn. The personal papers also contain personal memorabilia, newsclippings, sketches and photographs. Some correspondence of other family members and close friends are also included.

Series included in this subgroup are:

1. Personal Correspondence
2. Handwritten Notes
3. Printed Works
4. Subject Files
5. Ephemera

#### 1. Personal Correspondence - 1910 - 1949 (2.5 lf.)

arranged alphabetically, then chronologically within file.

The personal correspondence of Eleonora von Mendelssohn includes letters to family and friends in English, German, Italian and French. Many notables are included among her correspondants. Some are: Albert Bassermann and his wife, Noel Coward and his mother Violet, William and Charlotte Dieterle, Marlene Dietrich, Albert Einstein, Horst Bohrmann, the fashion photographer, Salka and Berthold Viertel, the Toscanini Family, Thornton Wilder, Alexander Woollcott and Max and Gottfried Reinhardt. In this series is also included a sub-series of letters written to family members. Of note is a group of letters from Eleanora Duse, the European stage actress. All miscellaneous correspondence is arranged first by language and then by year.

arranged alphabetically, then chronologically within file.

- b. 1 f. 1 Correspondence Last Names Unknown - MH (see also Manfred Furst) (4 letters)
- b. 1 f. 2 Cia (4 letters)
- b. 1 f. 3 Iris (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 4 Lieselotte (4 letters)
- b. 1 f. 5 Maximiliano (6 letters)
- b. 1 f. 6 Ned (6 letters, 6 telegrams)
- b. 1 f. 7 Nonna (2 letters)  
(Grandmother)
  
- b. 1 f. 8 Papi (3 letters)
- b. 1 f. 9 Rudi (5 letters, 2 telegrams)
- b. 1 f. 10 Spivy (3 letters, 2 telegrams)
- b. 1 f. 11 Yvette (3 letters)
- b. 1 f. 12 Aigner, Rudolf (1 letter, photo encl.)
- b. 1 f. 13 Archipenko, Alexander (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 14 Bartolini, Dino (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 15 Baruch, Bernard (2 cards, 1 clipping)
- b. 1 f. 16 Bassermann, Else and Bassermann, Albert (16 letters, 3 cards, 1 clipping)
- b. 1 f. 17 Basso, Giorgio (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 18 Becker, Ivan (1 letter, 1 misc.)

Subgroup I - Personal papers (cont.)

1. Personal Correspondence - (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 19 Behrman, S. N (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 20 Berghoff, Herbert and Berghoff, Alice (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 21 Bernoulli, Dr. Christoph (20 letters, 1 photo, 4 cards, 2 clippings)
- b. 1 f. 22 Blair, Ola Bohrman (see Horst) (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 23 Bornowsky, Fifi (4 letters, 1 photo)
- b. 1 f. 24 Bouryanine, Igor (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 25 Brothers, Arthur J (9 letters)
- b. 1 f. 26 Bryner, Yul (1 letter, 2 telegrams)
- b. 1 f. 27 Busch, Mrs. Adolf (2 letters)  
(Frieda)
  
- b. 1 f. 28 Busch, Herman (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 29 Cappa, Lydia (3 letters)
- b. 1 f. 30 Carstairs, Carroll (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 31 Christians, Mady (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 32 Coleman, Patricia (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 33 Colorni, Evelina (1 card)
- b. 1 f. 34 Coward, Noel (3 letters, 10 telegrams clippings)
- b. 1 f. 35 Coward, Violet (52 letters, 4 cards, 1 telegram)
- b. 1 f. 36 Cotton, Margaret (1 letter)
- b. 1 f. 37 Czinner, Elisabeth and Czinner, Paul (3 notes)
- b. 1 f. 38 Des Rinaudes, Lisa (3 letters, 2 cards)
- b. 1 f. 39 Dieterle, Charlotte and Dieterle, William (13 letters, 2 cards, 1 telegram)
- b. 1 f. 40 Dietrich, Marlene (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 41 Drey, Paul (2 letters)
- b. 1 f. 42 Dyrenforth, Harald O (2 letters, 1 card)
  
- b. 2 f. 1 Eckstein, C (2 letters)
- b. 2 f. 2 Ehrenstein, A (2 letters)
- b. 2 f. 3 Eichner, Anita and Eichner, Hans Karl (20 letters)
- b. 2 f. 4 Einstein, Albert (3 letters, 1 telegram)
- b. 2 f. 5 Eisler, Erna (1 letter)
- b. 2 f. 6 Engelmann, Walter (1 letter)
- b. 2 f. 7 Fischer, Alfred (3 letters)
- b. 2 f. 10 Fleishmann, Trude (2 letters)
- b. 2 f. 11 Fontaine, Stella (2 cards)
- b. 2 f. 12 Forster, Carola (3 letters, 1 telegram)
- b. 2 f. 13 Forster, Rudolf (18 letters, 5 telegrams)
- b. 2 f. 14 Free, Marion (2 letters)
- b. 2 f. 15 Friedlander, Elisabeth (2 letters)
- b. 2 f. 16 Furst, Manfred (see also MH) (3 letters)
- b. 2 f. 17 Goldschmidt, Louis (1 letter)
- b. 2 f. 18 Giordigione, Luise (9 letters)

Subgroup I - Personal papers (cont.)

1. Personal Correspondence - (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 19 Gordon-Crotch, Martha (4 letters)
- b. 2 f. 20 Grant, Col (3 letters)
- b. 2 f. 21 Hauptmann, Gerhard (2 cards, 1 telegram)
- b. 2 f. 22 Hayes, Helen (2 letters, 2 cards)
- b. 2 f. 23 Henreid, Lisl & Henreid, Paul (4 letters, 3 cards, 10 telegrams)
- b. 2 f. 24 Heinrich, Hans (1 letter)
- b. 2 f. 25 Horowitz, Wanda (5 letters, 2 cards)
- b. 2 f. 26 Horst, H. P (20 letters, 3 telegram, 1 clipping)
- b. 2 f. 27 Hutschnecker, Arnold A (10 letters)
- b. 2 f. 28 Kaufman, Beatrice (1 letter)
- b. 2 f. 29 Kiendl, Elisabeth & Ted (2 letters)
- b. 2 f. 30 Kleesmann, Ella (2 letters, 1 card)
- b. 2 f. 31 Klein, Erna (1 letter)
- b. 2 f. 32 Kolb, Annette (17 letters)
- b. 2 f. 33 Kochaniska, Zosia (2 cards)
- b. 2 f. 34 Kosleck, Alice (7 letters)
- b. 2 f. 35 Kosleck, Martin (2 photos, 27 letters, 8 telegrams, 1 card)
- b. 3 f. 1 Correspondence - Landshoff, Werner & Ursula (5 letters)
- b. 3 f. 2 Lange, Richard (8 letters)
- b. 3 f. 3 La Touche, John (2 letters)
- b. 3 f. 4 Lederer, Lisl (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 5 Lerman, Leo (1 letter, 2 cards)
- b. 3 f. 6 Massary, Fritzi (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 7 Matthew, Lillian (2 letters)
- b. 3 f. 8 Mendelssohn, Francesco (14 letters, 17 telegrams)
- b. 3 f. 9 Mendelssohn, Francesco (6 letters)  
(to E. Mendelssohn)
- b. 3 f. 10 Mendelssohn, Giuletta (7 letters, 2 telegrams)
- b. 3 f. 11 Mendelssohn, Robert (15 letters)
- b. 3 f. 12 Miller, Yola (4 letters)
- b. 3 f. 13 Mosell, Fritz & -----, Hellmut (20 letters, 2 telegrams)
- b. 3 f. 14 Moser, Herbert (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 15 Nelson, Irene (2 letters)
- b. 3 f. 16 Okun, Arsene (2 letters)
- b. 3 f. 17 Otto, Erich (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 18 Paletta, Manfred (4 letters)
- b. 3 f. 19 Pellicia, A (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 20 Porter, Cole (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 21 Reich, Richard (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 22 Reinhardt, Gottfried (6 letters, 2 cards)
- b. 3 f. 23 Reinhardt, Max (2 letters 1 telegram)

Subgroup I - Personal papers (cont.)

1. Personal Correspondence - (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 24 Reiter, Max (3 letters)
- b. 3 f. 25 Rice, Elmer (3 letters, 1 telegram)
- b. 3 f. 26 Rosenberg, Paul (1 letter, 1 telegram)
- b. 3 f. 27 Rublee, Juliet B (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 28 Ruchward, Fritz (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 29 Saunders, A.P (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 30 Schneider, Margret and Schneider, Heinz (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 31 Schulz, Alice (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 32 Schuster, M. Lincoln (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 33 Selden-Goth, Gisella (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 34 Sheldon, Edward (3 letters, 1 telegram)
- b. 3 f. 35 Snappers, Elsa (3 letters, 1 card)  
(Crebotar)
  
- b. 3 f. 36 Sterling, Cissy (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 37 Stoddard, Haila (1 letter, 1 card)
- b. 3 f. 38 Strong, Herbert (2 letters)
- b. 3 f. 39 Toscanini Family (8 letters, 3 telegrams, 3 notes)
- b. 3 f. 40 Valetti, Lisl (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 41 Viertel, Berthold (4 letters, 2 telegrams)
- b. 3 f. 42 Viertel, Salka (8 letters)
- b. 3 f. 43 Van Leyden, Karen (1 letter)
- b. 3 f. 44 Von Jeszensky, Harriette P (3 letters)
- b. 3 f. 45 Von Twardowski, Hans (12 letters, 2 telegram)  
(Haenchen)
  
- b. 4 f. 1 Weill, Robert (3 letters)
- b. 4 f. 2 Weissberger, L. Arnold (1 letter)
- b. 4 f. 3 Werfel, Franz (1 letter)
- b. 4 f. 4 Wegener, Paul & Elisabeth (1 letter)
- b. 4 f. 5 Wilder, Thornton (4 letters, 1 note, 1 telegram)
- b. 4 f. 6 Woolcott, Alexander (16 letters, 2 notes, 8 telegrams, 1 obituary)
- b. 4 f. 7 Wolff, Kurt (2 letters)
- b. 4 f. 8 York, Ruth Landshoff (6 letters, 1 note, 1 telegram)
  
- Miscellaneous Correspondence
- b. 4 f. 9 Miscellaneous - Fan Mail
- b. 4 f. 10-19 Miscellaneous - English 1941-49
- b. 4 f. 20 Miscellaneous - French
- b. 4 f. 21-39 Miscellaneous - German 1917-49
- b. 5 f. 1-12 Correspondence - Miscellaneous - Italian 1904-49
- b. 5 f. 13 Telegrams
- b. 5 f. 14 Outgoing - Eisenhower, D
- b. 5 f. 15 Outgoing - Miscellaneous

Subgroup I - Personal papers (cont.)

1. Personal Correspondence - (cont.)

Family Correspondence

- b. 5 f. 16 Duse, Eleanora to: Francesco Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 17 Fischer, Edwin to: Francesco Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 18 Cima, Aldo to: Giulietta Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 11 Fischer, Edwin to: Giulietta Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 12 Mendelssohn Children to: Robert Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 13 Joachim, Joseph to: Robert Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 14 Unidentified to: Robert Mendelssohn
- b. 5 f. 15 Parker, Cyril to: Toscanini, Arturo
- b. 5 f. 16 W.A. to: Toscanini, Arturo
- b. 5 f. 17 Mase, Owen to: Madame Wanda
- b. 5 f. 18 Unidentified German 1880-1906

2. Handwritten Notes - (.5 lf.)

Three file folders of Eleanor Mendelssohn's miscellaneous handwritten notes. These notes are in German and English.

unarranged.

b. 6 f. 1-4 Handwritten notes

3. Printed Works - 1934 - c.1945 (4 folders)

The printed works consist of newsclippings, a review of Mendelssohn as Mary Stuart; excerpts from various authors, many unidentified, written in both English and German; portions of scripts; and chapter 1 of Francesco von Mendelssohn's manuscript *The Mendelssohns*.

arranged by form.

- b. 7 f. 1 Excerpts of reviews of Mendelssohn as Mary Stuart May 1934
- b. 7 f. 2 Excerpts of Scripts
- b. 7 f. 3 Excerpts from Written Works
- b. 7 f. 4 Excerpts of The Mendelssohns by Francesco von Mendelssohn
- b. 7 f. 5 Newsclippings

4. Subject Files - 1940 - 1949 (4 folders)

The subject files of the Mendelssohn collection include correspondence, newsclippings and personal profiles of German immigrants either already in the United States or wishing to establish themselves in the United States. Of particular note is the file on the German symphony conductor, Wilhelm Furtwängler, who took a leading role in German cultural life under Hitler and the Nazi party. The file contains correspondence and newsclippings over the outcry in the German refugee community when it became apparent that Furtwängler might take over the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

arranged alphabetically by name.

- b. 7 f. 6 Csokor, Franz Theodor
- b. 7 f. 7 Furtwängler, Wilhelm
- b. 7 f. 8 Hutschnecker Case
- b. 7 f. 9 Hietanen, Thomas E
- b. 7 f. 10 Schnitzer, Adolf F



Subgroup I - Personal papers (cont.)

**5. Ephemera - c.1930 - 1949 (6 folders)**

The ephemera of the Eleonora von Mendelssohn papers consists of personal memorabilia, passports, photographs and sketches. Of special note are 31 sketches, mostly of Arturo Toscanini in concert. The photographs are primarily of friends. There is one photograph of Max Reinhardt. Photographs of Ms. Mendelssohn herself are on 2 passports - one from Germany and the other from England.

arranged by form of material.

- b. 7 f. 11     **Horoscope**
- b. 7 f. 12     **Literacy Certificate**
- b. 7 f. 13     **Memorabilia**
- b. 7 f. 14     **Naturalization Papers**
- b. 7 f. 15     **Passports**
- b. 7 f. 16     **Photographs**  
23 photographs and wallet containing 21 photoprints (transferred from Theatre Collection, Dec. 1992)
- b. 7 f. 17     **Sketches**  
31 sketches (mainly Toscanini)

**Subgroup II - Business papers**

The business papers of Eleonora Mendelssohn consist of business correspondence, contractual papers, bank statements and cancelled checks. Both the bank statements and cancelled checks were reviewed and were then sampled at a rate of 10% and a 10% sample was retained.

Series in this subgroup are:

- ol class="list">
- 6. Business papers
- 7. Business correspondence
- 8. Bank Statements/Cancelled Checks/ol>

**6. Business Papers 1912-1949 (7 folders)**

These papers include important documents concerning the Mendelssohn holdings, agreements for art works to be used in special exhibits, sale of valuable items, tax returns, acting agreements and a variety of business documents in German. Of note is the contractual agreement for the sale of a Ladenburg cello and a Paganini violino to Emil Hermann, Rare Violins, and correspondence relating to a showing of Van Gogh works belonging to the Mendelssohns.

arranged by form.

- b. 8 f. 1     **Automotive Insurance Policy**
- b. 8 f. 2     **Declaration of Valuables**
- b. 8 f. 3     **Emil Hermann Rare Violins**
- b. 8 f. 4     **Shortwave Research, Inc**
- b. 8 f. 5     **Tax Returns**
- b. 8 f. 6     **Departing Alien Income Tax Return**
- b. 8 f. 7     **Business Papers - Miscellaneous**

Subgroup II - Business papers (cont.)

**7. Business Correspondence 1935-1949 (.5 lf.)**

The business correspondence of Eleonora Mendelssohn contains letters from creditors, bills and correspondence dealing with Ms. Mendelssohn's business transactions. Included is correspondence concerning the pre-war and post-war assets of Guiletta von Mendelssohn, her mother. Most of the miscellaneous correspondence is letters from creditors for unpaid bills.

arranged alphabetically, miscellaneous files chronologically

- b. 8 f. 8 Correspondence - Re: Giuletta von Mendelssohn Pre and Post War Assets
- b. 8 f. 9 Actor's Equity Association
- b. 8 f. 10 Swiss Family Foundation
- b. 8 f. 11 Daffos, Jeanne M
- b. 8 f. 12 Goldschmidt, Jacob
- b. 8 f. 13 Hutschnecker, Arnold (M.D.)
- b. 8 f. 14 Kempner, Frederick
- b. 8 f. 15 Kempner, Paul
- b. 8 f. 16 Kosleck, Martin
- b. 8 f. 17 Mendelssohn, Francesco
- b. 8 f. 18 Rudolph Wurlitzer Co
- b. 8 f. 19 Vassar Diet Institute
- b. 8 f. 20-33 Miscellaneous Bills 1935-1949

**8. Bank statements/cancelled checks 1942-1949 (.5 lf.)**

Bank statements and cancelled checks from 1942-1949. Due to the repetitive and routine nature of the materials, a 10% sample was taken and retained.

arranged chronologically.

- b. 9 f. 1 Check Stubs
- b. 9 f. 2 Cancelled Checks (10% sample) 1942-1945
- b. 9 f. 3 Cancelled Checks (10% sample) 1946-1949