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Guide to the

Schwimmer family papers

1837-1976 (bulk 1876-1948)

MssCol 17921

Forms part of the Schwimmer-Lloyd collection

Compiled by Rachel Miller, December 2012

Summary

Creator: Schwimmer family

Title: Schwimmer family papers, 1837-1976 (bulk 1876-1948)

Size: 10.12 linear feet (25 boxes)

Source: Donated by Rosika and Franciska Schwimmer beginning in 1944 as part of the Schwimmer-Lloyd collection.

Abstract: The collection documents the personal and professional lives of three siblings, Rosika, Franciska and Béla Schwimmer, as well as that of their parents, Max and Bertha, and one child, Vilma, from the 1880s through the 1940s. Correspondence between family, family friends and colleagues represents the bulk of the materials. In addition, there are vital records, school notebooks, writings, clippings, operetta librettos, programs, research notes towards Franciska's book, *Great Musicians as Children*, and a few photographs.

Access: Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>. Vilma Schwimmer papers closed until 2044.

Preferred citation: Schwimmer family papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: Rosika's Schwimmer's materials unrelated to the family were added to the Rosika Schwimmer papers.

Related collections

Edith Wynner papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Kohlbach - Bickel family papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Leopold and Berta Katscher papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Rosika Schwimmer papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

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

Creator history

The Schwimmer family was consisted of three generations of individuals who lived in Hungary, the United States, and Austria during the 19th and 20th centuries. The first generation consisted of Bertha Katscher (1856-1927) and her husband Max Schwimmer (1845-1922), both from secular Jewish, upper middle class backgrounds. Bertha and Max had three children: Rosika (1877-1948), Béla (1879-1934), and Franciska (1880-1963). Béla married Marie Karp and had one child, Vilma (1921-1948). Rosika and Franciska would become Vilma's guardians in 1935 following Béla's death.

Bertha Katscher (or Berta Kácsér) was born on December 9, 1856 in Temesvár (then Hungary, now Timisoara in Romania) to Rosalia Engel Katscher and Ignaz Katscher, who had married in 1852 in Makó, Hungary. Among Bertha's brothers and sisters were Leopold Katscher, noted pacifist, lawyer and journalist, and Helen Kohlbach.

Max (Miksa or Maximilian) Bernát Schwimmer was born on November 5, 1845 in Szegeed to Bernát (Bernhard) Schwimmer and his first wife. Max and his brothers, as well as their father and grandfather, bought and sold horses to Turkey and Balkan states. The Schwimmer brothers also had a farm, orchards, flour mills, and a distillery. Max trained as an agriculturist and experimented with corn on the family farm in Temesvár, but generally identified himself as a merchant on official documentation.

Bertha and Max married on January 16, 1877 in Temesvár. Shortly thereafter, due to Max's failing health, they moved to Budapest where they started a business of their own and had their first child. Once Max's health had improved, they returned to Temesvár where he reentered business with his brothers, and they had their second and third children. Bertha, an atheist, and Max, an agnostic, did not emphasize religion in the children's upbringing. Music, however, was central in the household, and the entire family would often sing and play music together in the evenings. The family eventually moved to Szabadka (today Subotica in Serbia), where the three Schwimmer siblings spent their teens. In the late 1890s, Max's brother Adolf and family in-fighting bankrupted the Schwimmers, and they moved back to Budapest. Max died in Budapest on January 4, 1922. Bertha emigrated with her daughter to the United States in 1922, and she died on October 29, 1927 in New York.

Max and Bertha's first child, Rosika (Rózsa, Rózsika), was born on September 11, 1877. For biographical information on Rosika see the finding aid for the Rosika Schwimmer papers: <http://www.nypl.org/archives/2500>

Béla (Bernhard), their second child, was born on January 4, 1879. By May 1915, Béla was serving in the Austro-Hungarian military as a commandant of a Red Cross train, and in January 1920, he was discharged from service. Béla was professionally involved in the theater and cabaret world, primarily as a writer. He frequently used the last name of Sarlay or Sarlai, which may have functioned as a stage name or pen name. In Budapest, he was the secretary of the Royal Orfeum during S.Z. Sakall's directorship (1913-1920); he also worked at Endre Nagy's and László Beöthy's theaters. Later he lived in Vienna, Austria, working as a playwright and movie producer and writing operettas. He married Marie (Mitzi) Karp, and their daughter, Vilma, was born in 1921. By September 1926 they were divorced. Béla died in December 1934 in Vienna.

Franciska (Franzi), born October 22, 1880, graduated from the National Music Academy in Budapest and became a piano and music teacher, consciously deciding against a life as a concert pianist or composer. Throughout her career she taught private students, both children and adults. From about 1914 to 1922, she was a music teacher for disabled children at the Gyógypedagógiai Gyermekszanatórium in Budapest, and she also taught piano at a municipal high school in Budapest. In

the 1910s, especially surrounding the 1913 International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress in Budapest, she assisted her sister in feminist organization activities, and was close to a number of figures in the Hungarian and international women's movement. In 1922, she emigrated with her mother to the United States to join her sister, arriving on August 4th. She financially supported her mother, herself and her sister through her work as a piano teacher in Chicago and then in New York. Commissioned by Doubleday Doran & Co, she wrote the book *Great Musicians as Children* (1929), with the intention of introducing children to musicians by presenting them as they were in childhood. Beginning in 1926 and until their deaths, Franciska lived together with her sister on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Edith Wynner, their assistant and protégé, joined them in the apartment in 1941. Franciska died in New York on December 20, 1963.

Vilma Mitzi Schwimmer was born to Béla Schwimmer and Marie Karp in Vienna on March 20, 1921. After her father died, her estranged mother transferred custody and guardianship of Vilma to the Schwimmer sisters, and Vilma emigrated to New York City in 1935. While working in Georgia she met Edward James Cain. They married in Brooklyn in 1944 but were separated by the end of the same year and divorced in 1947 in Texas. Vilma died of a seizure in New York the following year.

Scope and content note

The collection documents the personal and professional lives of three siblings, Rosika, Franciska and Béla Schwimmer, as well as that of their parents, Max and Bertha, and one child, Vilma, from the 1880s through the 1940s. Correspondence between family, family friends and colleagues represents the bulk of the materials. In addition, there are vital records, school notebooks, writings, clippings, operetta librettos, programs, research notes towards Franciska's book, *Great Musicians as Children*, and a few photographs. The papers were collected by Rosika and Franciska Schwimmer.

The collection will enrich any examination of Hungarian or international women's and peace movements between the 1890s and 1920s. Correspondence among family members, especially from Leopold Katscher and prominent feminist colleagues close to the family, reflects Rosika Schwimmer's ascent and fall on the international stage of feminist and pacifist activism. Also documented are Béla's experiences during World War I and Franciska's work as a piano teacher and use of music teaching to help children with behavioral and learning issues. Most broadly the collection chronicles a Hungarian family after their shift away from Jewish traditions into atheism and agnosticism, that family's struggles with finances from the 1890s until their deaths, and their post-WWI migration from Hungary to the United States.

Until the early 1920s, the material is primarily in Hungarian and German, and thereafter increasingly in English. Bertha Schwimmer's correspondence with her children is generally in German, written in old German script. Leopold Katscher's correspondence to Rosika is often in English, sometimes in German. Correspondence between Rosika and Franciska is usually in Hungarian. A few items in the collection are in French, Dutch and Hebrew.

Arrangement

The Schwimmer family papers are organized into the following series:

- Series I: Schwimmer Family, 1837-1946
- Series II: Franciska Schwimmer, 1890-1963
- Series III: Bela Schwimmer, 1887-1949
- Series IV: Vilma Schwimmer, 1926-1978

Key terms

Subjects

Feminism -- Hungary
Hungarians -- United States
Jews -- Hungary
Piano -- Study and teaching
World War, 1914-1918 -- Personal narratives,
Hungarian

Names

Feministák Egyesülete
Katscher family
Katscher, Leopold, b. 1853
Schwimmer family
Schwimmer, Béla
Schwimmer, Bertha
Schwimmer, Franciska
Schwimmer, Max B.
Schwimmer, Rosika, 1877-1948
Schwimmer, Vilma

Special formats

Photographs

Occupations

Piano teachers

Places

Hungary -- Emigration and immigration
Hungary -- History -- 1867-1918
Hungary -- History -- 1918-1945

Container list

Series I: Schwimmer Family, 1837-1946 (9 boxes)

This series primarily contains materials exchanged between immediate Schwimmer family members, extended family members, and family friends. Family material stops just after Rosika's death in 1948, when Franciska became the last surviving Schwimmer. See Series II for Franciska's writings on family history, as well as writings on family history she received from other family members in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Correspondence, 1872-1946

This subseries consists of correspondence received by Bertha and Max Schwimmer from family and friends; correspondence Bertha and Max sent to their children, Rosika, Franciska and Béla; correspondence between the three siblings, as well as the extended family correspondence they received, especially from their uncle Leopold Katscher.

Incoming correspondence from extended family members includes that of Adolf, Hedwig, Herman and Berthold Schwimmer; Ella, Helene, Emil, Oskar, Bertalan and Henriette Kohlbach; and Rosalie, Klára, Móricz, Elsa, Jenny, and Markus Katscher (also spelled Kácsér). Family friend correspondents include Charlotte (Sárolta) Steinberger (who signs off as Doctressa), the family doctor and the first female physician to earn a medical degree in Hungary; Bertha Engel; and the Pogány family. There are also letters to Max and Bertha from Rosika and Franciska's women's movement colleagues, such as Vilma Glücklich, Paula Pogány and Adele Spády.

Correspondence between Leopold Katscher and Rosika Schwimmer is particularly rich and reflective of Rosika's beginnings in the peace and women's movements, of Leopold's early role as mentor, and of Rosika's rise as an international activist. Rosika's correspondence with her sister Franciska and parents includes accounts of her experiences as an activist, most notably in 1914 while she was Press Secretary for the International Woman Suffrage Association in London and while on a pacifist talk circuit in the United States. Franciska and Rosika corresponded prolifically while separated, and the letters in their earlier years are often spirited and humor-filled. During WWI there is also substantial correspondence from Béla to his family, while he was serving as a commandant of a Red Cross train.

Note that immediately after Rosika fled Hungary in 1920 and 1921, she signed off on correspondence to her family under the pseudonym of Rowena.

b.1 f.1-2	1872-1876
b.1 f.3-6	1880-1901
b.1 f.7-11	1900-1904
b.1 f.12-14	1905-1906
b.2 f.1-2	1907
b.2 f.3-6	1908-1909
b.3 f.1-3	1909-1911
b.3 f.4-6	1912-1913
b.3 f.7-9	1914
b.4 f.1-3	1915
b.4 f.4-7	1916
b.5 f.1-2	1916-1917
b.5 f.3-6	1918-1920
b.5 f.7-8	1921
b.6 f.1-3	1922-1923

Series I: Schwimmer Family, 1837-1946 (cont.)

Correspondence, 1872-1946 (cont.)

- b.6 f.4-8 1924-1927
- b.7 f.1-3 1928-1929
- b.7 f.4-6 1930-1932
- b.7 f.7-10 1933-1936
- b.7 f.11-13 1937-1939
- b.7 f.14 1942
- b.8 f.1 1943-1946
- b.8 f.2 undated

Family Miscellany, 1837-1949

This subseries contains family wedding announcements; birth, death and medical records; various certificates and travel documents; visiting cards; a scrapbook; a few photographs; voter registration cards from the year women first received the right to vote in Hungary; and a Hebrew prayer book published in 1837, which appears to have belonged to Max Schwimmer's father, Bernhard Schwimmer, and contains handwritten lists of local male children's births and circumcisions.

- b.19 f.1 Financial Records, 1911-1926
- b.19 f.2 Kacser, Rosalia Engel, 1840s-1852 (Correspondence and wedding announcement)
- b.19 f.3 Ledgers and Datebook, 1920-1926, and undated
- b.19 f.4 Miscellaneous Certificates (Transcribed), 1939-1949
- b.19 f.5 Photographs, 1914-1918
- b.19 f.6 Prayer book of Bernhard/David/Baruch Schwimmer, 1937 (in Hebrew)
- Schwimmer, Bertha, 1883-1943
 - b.19 f.7 70th birthday scrapbook, 1926-1927
 - b.19 f.8 Death, 1927-1943
 - b.19 f.9 Medical, 1923-1927
 - b.19 f.10 Miscellaneous, 1883-1913
 - b.19 f.11 Passport, 1922
 - b.19 f.12 Writings, 1908, and undated
 - b.19 f.13 Schwimmer, Bertha and Franciska, 1919 (Voter registration)
 - b.19 f.14 Schwimmer, Bertha and Max, 1877 (Marriage)
 - b.19 f.15 Schwimmer, Katscher, Schak and Oblath wedding announcement, 1873-1890
 - Schwimmer, Max, 1879-1922
 - b.19 f.16 Death
 - b.19 f.17 Hebrew notations regarding the children, 1879, undated
 - b.19 f.18 Passports and certificates, 1879-1921
 - b.19 f.19 Visiting Cards, 1913-1916

Series II: Franciska Schwimmer, 1890-1963 (12 boxes)

This series contains material generated or received by Franciska Schwimmer within the context of her own personal and professional life, usually outside the family, with the notable exception in Subseries C of family history writings she wrote or received from a few extended family members in the years between Rosika's death and her own.

For Franciska Schwimmer's correspondence, 1948-1963, concerning her participation in the movement for world government, see the guide to the Schwimmer-Lloyd collection.

Correspondence, 1902-1963

This subseries contains Franciska Schwimmer's incoming correspondence from friends, professional colleagues and piano students, as well as some copies of her outgoing correspondence, especially in later years. There is a notable gap in materials during 1919. Family correspondence can be found in Series I.

Major correspondents include Irma Kemény-Varjas (signing off as Irmus); Margít, Gizella and Viola Nemes (Viola was a former pupil of Franciska's); Ilona and Nándor Pogány, Hugó Hajnál; Otto Róth; Dulci Földiák; Bőszke Kardos; Rosika's close friend and associate, Lola Maverick Lloyd, and Lola's children, Georgia, Mary and Jesse Lloyd; Theodore Koppanyi; Corinne Brown, Katherine Leckie and Esther Strauss. Between 1905 and 1907, there are large caches of correspondence from Emilie Sucharda in Vienna and Andreas Mollerup in Copenhagen.

Among Hungarian and international feminists and pacifists, Franciska corresponded frequently with Vilma Glücklich, Paula Pogány, Adele Spády and Charlotte Steinberger, occasionally with Mellerné Miskolczy Eugénia and Szidónia Wilhelm, as well as with international figures such as Aletta Jacobs, Rosa Manus, Mien Palthe, Bessie and Charles Vickery Drysdale, Alice Park, Jane Addams, Carrie Chapman Catt, Lida Gustava Heymann, and Mary Ritter Beard.

In 1920s-1940s correspondence with Lola Maverick Lloyd, Rosika is a frequent topic of discussion. Much of the later correspondence in the subseries relates to the Schwimmer-Lloyd collection, as Franciska solicited materials and reflections from Rosika's acquaintances, and there are also some carbon copies of Rosika's and her assistant Edith Wynner's correspondence.

This subseries documents Franciska's career as a piano teacher, her work teaching disabled children, her book, *Great Musicians as Children*, and her 1925 article in "Music as an Aid to Nervous Children" in *Social Progress*. Her current and former piano students corresponded with her frequently. See also the Professional Papers subseries for additional correspondence from Franciska's colleagues and friends, especially in response to *Great Musicians as Children*.

b.8 f.3-7	1902-1907
b.9 f.1-6	1908-1911
b.10 f.1-8	1912-1920
b.11 f.1-7	1921-1927
b.12 f.1-8	1927-1934
b.13 f.1-8	1935-1942
b.14 f.1	1944-1946
b.14 f.2	1950-1963

Series II: Franciska Schwimmer, 1890-1963 (cont.)

Correspondence, 1902-1663 (cont.)

- b.14 f.3-4 1890s-1950s and undated
- Professional Papers, 1896-1946
This subseries chronicles five decades of Franciska's professional career via correspondence, notes, certificates, programs, clippings, and writings. Most represented is her work in New York when she was struggling to support her sister and herself financially from the 1920s through the 1940s. During that time, in addition to conducting private piano lessons, Franciska tried to promote Lester Avery, a child soprano and piano player, and she conducted musical therapy with Donny Crane, the young son of actress Alice Brady. Also in this subseries are Franciska's drafts and research for her book *Great Musicians as Children*, as well as her copy of the book. There is correspondence with prominent figures featured in the book, including George Gershwin, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Frau Johann Strauss, and Leo Slezak. Béla Schwimmer assisted with this book project, as evidenced here by notes, correspondence and his German translation of the book.
- b.14 f.5 Advertising for Piano Students, 1926-1928
- Avery, Lester
- b.14 f.7 Agreements, 1939
- b.14 f.8 Biography and repertoire, 1937
- b.14 f.9 Correspondence, 1937-1938
- b.14 f.10 Notes, 1937
- b.14 f.11 Photographs, 1937
- b.14 f.12 Biographical sketches and business cards, ca. 1920-1940
- Brady, Alice, 1928
- b.14 f.12 Correspondence, 1928
- b.14 f.13 Miscellaneous, 1928
- b.15 f.1 Photographs and clippings, 1927-1939
- b.15 f.2 Play Group Solicitations, 1928
- b.15 f.3 Reports, 1928
- b.15 f.4 *Childhood Under the Searchlight*, 1926
- b.15 f.5 Dent, Edward, 1926-1937
- Great Musicians as Children*
- b.15 f.6 Book, 1929
- b.15 f.7-11 Correspondence, 1928-1945
- b.15 f.12 Draft of German Translation by Bela Schwimmer, 1929-1930
- b.15 f.13 Drafts, undated
- b.15 f.14 Notes and Clippings, 1928-1929
- b.16 f.1-2 Notes by Bela Schwimmer, undated
- b.16 f.3 Radio Sketch, 1931, 1946
- b.16 f.4 Reviews and Clippings, 1929-1936
- b.16 f.5-6 Miscellaneous, 1908-1932 (Hungary and United States)
- b.16 f.7 Notes, 1922-1934

Series II: Franciska Schwimmer, 1890-1963 (cont.)

Professional Papers, 1896-1946 (cont.)

- b.16 f.8 Performances, 1896, 1903, 1908
- b.16 f.9 Photographs, 1917-1927
- b.16 f.10 Talks, 1927, 1932
- b.16 f.11 Therapeutic Kindergarten class, 1927 (At Mount Sinai Hospital)
- b.16 f.12-13 *When Schubert Sang*, 1937, 1945

Personal Miscellany, 1887-1968

Notable in this subseries are family history writings, which Franciska wrote or received from extended family members from the 1950s until her death. Also of interest may be invitations, mailings, programs and membership cards from Feministák Egyesülete and other women's organizations. Additionally, this subseries includes an array of Franciska's personal items, such as address books, an account ledger, vital records, school documents, clippings, and visiting cards. Items post-dating Franciska's death were added by Edith Wynner.

- b.17 f.1 Address books, 1922-1941
- b.17 f.2 Birth Certificate, 1888
- b.17 f.3-4 Citizenship, 1927-1963
- b.17 f.5 Clippings, 1927, 1957-1964
- b.17 f.6 Estate, 1939, 1952-1968
- Family History
 - b.17 f.7 Archives, undated
 - b.17 f.8-9 *Family Potrait: When Hungary Was Liberal*, 1959-1962
 - b.17 f.10 Kohlbach, Helen Katscher, 1944-1958
 - b.17 f.11 Notes, 1959-1961
 - b.17 f.12 Oblath, Richard, 1944
 - b.17 f.13 Feministak Egyesulete, 1907-1921
 - b.17 f.14 Income Ledger, 1903-1920
 - b.17 f.15 Medical, 1943, 1957-1959
- b.18 f.1-2 Notebook and Notes, 1896-1897, 1919-1955
 - b.18 f.3 Photographs, 1907-1942
- b.18 f.4-5 School, 1887-1902
 - b.25 f.3 School Diploma, 1902
- b.18 f.6-7 Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection, 1916, 1934-1964
 - b.18 f.8 Trip to London, 1908
 - b.18 f.9 Visiting Cards, 1908-1924
 - b.18 f.10 Women's Organizations , 1902-1921

Series III: Bela Schwimmer, 1887-1949 (3 boxes)

This series contains personal and professional papers the Schwimmer sisters received from Béla directly or from his contacts after his death in 1934. Items include operetta librettos, school notebooks, military records, certificates, and correspondence with or about his daughter Vilma. Béla authored the librettos, some of which the Schwimmer sisters translated and tried to find publishers and producers for in the U.S.

The bulk of his correspondence with his family members can be found in Series I. For his research assistance on and translations of Franciska's Great Musicans as Children, see Series II.

Correspondence related to Vilma is restricted until 2044.

Personal Miscellany, 1880s-1934

- b.19 f.20 Military Registration Papers, 1918-1920
- School
- b.19 f.21 Composition books, 1880s
- b.19 f.22 Reports and certificates, 1891-1899
- b.25 f.1 Reports and certificates, 1887-1892, 1934

Operettas, 1929-1935, 1949

- b.19 f.23 *Bluff*, 1930s (Libretto)
- b.19 f.24 *Einbruchs & Co.*, 1931 (Libretto)
- b.19 f.25 *Gotterpleite*, undated (Libretto)
- b.20 f.1 *Jupiters Erzählungen*, undated (Libretto)
- b.20 f.2 Miscellaneous Libretto Drafts, undated
- Olympus, Incorporated*
- b.20 f.3 Correspondence and Notes, 1929-1935, 1949
- b.20 f.4-5 English Translation of Libretto by Rosika Schwimmer, 1930-1934
- b.20 f.6 Score By Hugo Placheta, 1934
- b.25 f.2 Score By Hugo Placheta, 1934
- b.20 f.7 *Olympus, Incorporated* and *Bluff*, 1930-1934 (Correspondence)
- b.20 f.8 *Schmierenzauber*, undated (Libretto)

Professional Miscellany, 1899-1901, 1926-1928

- b.20 f.9 Braun, Wilhelm, *Revolution bei Sterns*, undated
- b.20 f.10 Contracts, 1899-1901
- b.20 f.11 Alfred Kempf v. Deesy and Emil Seliger, 1926-1928
Manuscripts of *Numerus Clausus*, 1921, *Der Abrunnige*, *Ahasver in Wien* and *Simon's Son*
with related correspondence and photographs

Series IV: Vilma Schwimmer, 1926-1976 (4 boxes)

This series consists of materials the Schwimmer sisters collected which were from, received by, or related to their niece Vilma Schwimmer, including correspondence, clippings, vital records, schoolwork, and drawings. Correspondents include the Schwimmer siblings, Vilma, Marie Karp Schwimmer, Edward James Cain, Marguerite Gobat, and Lola Maverick Lloyd. This series is restricted until 2044.

RESTRICTED until 2044