

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

Miriam Shomer Zunser

Papers 1903-1965

**Valerie Wingfield
June 2001**

Summary

- Main Entry:** Zunser, Miriam Shomer
- Title:** Miriam Shomer Zunser Papers, 1903-1965 (bulk dates 1903-1930)
- Size:** .5 linear ft. (3 boxes)
- Source:** Gift of the Jewish Division, 1970
- Abstract:** Miriam Shomer Zunser (1882-1951) wrote plays for both the Yiddish theater and the English-language theatre. The collection contains a small amount of correspondence, 1905-1942, typescripts of her plays and other writings, her family memoir, *Yesterday*, (1939); a poem and a monologue by her husband, Charles Zunser, and printed materials.
- Processed by:** Valerie Wingfield, June 2001

Related Materials Note

In The New York Public Library:

Humanities and Social Sciences Library, Dorot Jewish Division:

Page proofs and published copies of *Yesterday* (classmark *PWZ)

Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theatre Collection.

Additional typescripts of Zunser's plays

In Other Repositories:

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY:

Charles Zunser Papers [ca.1890]-1956

Abraham S. Shomer Papers

Rose Shomer-Batchelis Papers

Brown University, John Hay Archives

Nahum Meir Shaikewich plays

Biographical Note

Miriam Shomer Zunser (née Manya Shaikevitsch) was born on November 25, 1882 in Odessa, Russia. The Shomers left Russia in 1890 and settled in the United States. Shomer, as her father was known, had been hired as a playwright for the Rumanian House in New York City the year before. Once in the United States Manya's name became Miriam. However, she was known by her nickname Minnie. In 1905, she married Charles Zunser a lawyer, social worker and writer.

Zunser was admitted to Hunter College but chose to take a job as a librarian and leader of girls clubs at the Hebrew Educational Society. She taught fine arts for the Board of Education and other institutions. Zunser also wrote for the English section of the Yiddish newspaper *Tageblat* and translated Yiddish pieces into English. Zunser was an active Zionist and, in 1917, was nominated as a delegate to the American Jewish Congress, an organization co-founded by her brother Abraham Shomer.

In the 1920s, Zunser's decided to expand her literary career. She and her sister Rose began writing for the Yiddish theater. Among their joint works was *The master of Thronfield; a play in 4 acts, built on the story of Jane Eyre* (c. 1920).

When the Yiddish theater began to lose popularity in the 1930s, Zunser instead wrote for the Broadway stage. In 1939 she published a memoir of her mother's family, *Yesterday*. The book was republished in 1978 by her granddaughter Emily Wortis Leider as *Yesterday: A memoir of a Russian Jewish family*. Miriam Shomer Zunser died in 1951.

Scope and Content Note

The Miriam Shomer Zunser Papers, 1903-1965 (bulk dates 1903-1930) consist chiefly of her writings. These typescripts with annotations are rough drafts; some are undated and incomplete. Noteworthy among them are the memoir *Yesterday* (1939) which depicts three generations of Jewish life, and *The Enchanted Well* (c.1920s). One of the works in the collection, *The Dance of Love* was written in collaboration with her sister Rose Shomer. There are two examples of her husband Charles Zunser's writing, "The wife beater: a monologue" and the poem "Ode to a Dead Lily".

Zunser's correspondence, 1905-1942, is scant. Included among the few items addressed to Zunser is a letter dated May 18, 1917 from the General Board of Elections notifying her of her nomination as a delegate to the American Jewish Congress. A letter of recommendation dated 1905 commends her for her teaching skills at the Educational Alliance. Overall, the correspondence sheds very little light on Zunser's life or her dramatic writings. The remainder of the collection consists of printed matter, including a brochure for the art exhibit of her son Shomer Zunser, 1965, and a family tree of the Zunser family.

Series Descriptions

SERIES I. CORRESPONDENCE, 1905-1942

BOX 1

Arranged chronologically and in two sections. The General Correspondence, 1905-1942, contains mainly incoming letters to Zunser. The second section is a smattering of family related correspondence, 1920; 1930.

SERIES II. WRITINGS

BOXES 1-3

Arranged by author. The bulk of the writings consist of dramatic works by Miriam Shomer Zunser; there are also two works by Charles Zunser. This series contains Zunser's memoir, *Yesterday* (bound typescript).

SERIES III. PRINTED MATTER

BOX 2

This series contains a brochure for an exhibit of watercolors by Shomer Zunser, 1965, miscellaneous newspaper clippings relating to Charles Zunser, and a pencilled family tree of the Zunser family.

Container List

Series I. Correspondence, 1905-1942

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
1	1	General Correspondence, 1905-1942
	2	Family Related Correspondence, 1920;1930

Series II. Writings

A. Writings of Miriam Shomer Zunser

	3	<i>By the sea</i> , n.d.
	4	<i>The dance of love</i> , n.d. Co-authored by Rose Shomer.
	5	<i>Emily. A story for children young and old</i> , n.d.
	6	<i>The enchanted well</i> , n.d.
	7	<i>Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881-1910</i> . 1914 (Note:in Hebrew)
	8	<i>Lilacs</i> , n.d. <i>The magic gifts</i> , n.d.
	9	<i>A man, a boy, and a dog</i> , n.d.
	10	<i>Man un veib. A drama in drei acten</i> , n.d. (Note:in Yiddish)
	11	<i>The old man and the doctor</i> , n.d.
	12	<i>New winds has arisen</i> , n.d.
	13	
		<i>A strange inscription</i> , n.d.
	14-16	<i>A tale of four sisters</i> , n.d. (Note:Appears to be several typescripts)
	17	<i>Uncle Eli</i> , n.d.
	18	Unidentified chapters of monograph, n.d.
	19	Unidentified writings
2	1-3	Unidentified writings (Note:fragile)
3		<i>Yesterday</i> , c. 1939

B. Writings of Charles Zunser

2	4	<i>The wife deserter. A monolog</i> , n.d.
	5	<i>Ode to a dead lily</i> , 1903

Series III. Printed Matter

	6	Brochure for the art exhibit of Shomer Zunser, 1965
	7	Newspaper Clippings
	8-9	Family tree of the Zunser Family (Note:Original is fragile; copies available)