



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

The library : an East-Side scrapbook

1931-1970

MssCol 25816

Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2020

Summary

Creator: Finkel, Gertrude, 1898-1994

Title: The library : an East-Side scrapbook

Date: 1931-1970

Size: .25 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Purchase; 2019.

Abstract: Gertrude Finkel (1898-1994) was a librarian with The New York Public Library, associated for many years with the Library's Hamilton Fish Park Branch on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The Branch opened in 1909 at 388 East Houston Street, serving a predominantly immigrant population. It closed in 1958 to prepare for removal to a new location, reopening at 415 East Houston Street in 1960. The collection consists of a scrapbook (1 volume, disbound), dated 1931-1963, containing watercolor drawings and pasted photographs and clippings depicting activities at the Hamilton Fish Park Branch Library, accompanied by some loose items and personal correspondence of Gertrude Finkel, dated 1940-1970. Content focuses on reader services and community programs at the Branch, mainly during the 1930s and 1940s, evoking the ethnic makeup of the Lower East Side, especially its Jewish heritage. A few later staff photos mark the transition from the "old HF" to the new location.

Preferred citation: The library : an East-Side scrapbook, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Susan P. Waide, 2020

Creator History

Gertrude Finkel (1898-1994) was a librarian with The New York Public Library, associated for many years with the Library's Hamilton Fish Park Branch on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She was born in Warsaw, Poland to Emanuel and Tillie Finkel and emigrated to the United States in 1914. The family lived in Brooklyn, where she graduated from the Pratt Institute with a library degree in 1919. Finkel married pharmacist Charles Sharcoff, who died in 1936, and in later years she moved to the Lower East

Side. Known as Gertrude F. Sharcoff in private life, Finkel retained her maiden name in her professional work. She wrote "Jewish Book Month in Public Libraries" for the Jewish Book Council of America, and was active in forwarding donations of Jewish books to Europe in the aftermath of World War II.

The Hamilton Fish Park Branch of The New York Public Library opened in 1909 on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, serving a predominantly immigrant population. It closed in 1958 to prepare for removal to a new location, reopening at 415 East Houston Street in 1960. During the period reflected in the scrapbook, the branch served mostly first and second-generation Americans of Hungarian, Polish, Russian, German, Ukrainian, and Italian descent.

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of a scrapbook (1 volume, disbound), dated 1931-1963, containing watercolor drawings and pasted photographs and clippings depicting activities at the Hamilton Fish Park Branch Library, accompanied by some loose items and personal correspondence of Gertrude Finkel, dated 1940-1970. Content focuses on reader services and community programs at the Branch, mainly during the 1930s and 1940s, evoking the ethnic makeup of the Lower East Side, especially its Jewish heritage. A few later staff photos mark the transition from the "old HF" to the new location. The creator and artist (possibly the same person) are not identified, but the scrapbook is attributed to Gertrude Finkel based on the correspondence found with it and her association with the Library.

The scrapbook was designed with an illustrated title page, showing the Library's entrance at 388 E. Houston Street, and thematic headings for pasted photographs and clippings: The Staff, The Children, Holidays, Drama, The Mothers, and The Neighborhood. Watercolor and ink vignettes illustrating neighborhood scenes and patrons of the Library are found throughout. Photographs are chiefly black and white; many illustrate theatrical productions for Jewish holidays.

There are 30 leaves of acidic mounting paper, consisting of a blank leaf bearing a dealer's notation and 26 leaves including the title-page, followed by 3 blank leaves. Of the 26 leaves, 10 contain only vignettes. The front cover is lacking.

Loose items, 1940-1970, comprise a loose page, apparently from a different scrapbook, with three photographs of a puppet show captioned "Scenes from the play 'Joseph and his brethren,'" two black and white photographs, identical or similar to images of performances pictured in the scrapbook; an undated watercolor Christmas card from the Hamilton Park Branch Staff, showing neighborhood children skating; and some personal notes, cards and letters addressed to Gertrude Finkel or Sharcoff from former colleagues. A four-page pencilled note to her, date-stamped September 3, 1940, contains a cartoon drawing of Miss Finkel rushing 'back from the country' with her belongings in hand.

Key Terms

Subjects

Amateur theater -- United States -- History -- 20th century
Branch libraries -- New York (State) -- New York -- Pictorial works
Immigrants -- New York (State) -- New York
Jews -- Social life and customs
Jews, East European -- New York (State) -- New York
Public libraries -- New York (State) -- New York -- Pictorial works

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Clippings (information artifacts)

Drawings (visual works)

Pen and wash drawings

Personal correspondence

Photographs

Scrapbooks

Occupations

Librarians.

Geographic Names

Lower East Side (New York, N.Y.) -- Social life and customs -- 20th century -- Pictorial works

Names

Finkel, Gertrude, 1898-1994

New York Public Library. Hamilton Fish Park Branch