

Guide to MS-228:

Veis Family Letters



Gettysburg College, Musselman Library
Special Collections and College Archives

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MS-228: Veis Family Letters

Processed by Lauren Ashely Bradford, Class of 2018, Barbara Holley Intern
Month and Year you worked on collection

Size

1 boxes, 0.3 cubic feet

Location

Special Collections

Dates

Inclusive Dates: 1937-1951

Bulk Dates: 1938-1942

Language

Approximately two thirds of the 165 letters in this collection are in the German language. The other third is in English and one letter is in French.

Provenance

Purchased from *Between the Covers Rare Books Inc.* in 2018.

Biographical Note

Bruno Bernhard Veis (1924- 2019) was born in Bretten, Germany to a Jewish family. His parents, Bertha Blum (1898-1942) and Jakob Veis (1892-1942) ran their own upholstery and feather business. In late 1938, Bruno was one approximately 10,000 children from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia to participate of the Kindertransport to England.¹ While there, he was able to keep in touch with his family that had remained in Germany through letter writing as he was moved from home to home.

Bruno's cousin Julius Veis (1917-1989) managed to immigrate to the United States. While there, Julius was successful in providing passage to the U.S. for his parents and sister, Karl Veis (1886- 1973), Nanette Blum (1891-1983), and Flora Veis (1920-2011). After the family had settled in New York, Bruno traveled from his former boy's home in England to stay with them. The following month, after Bruno moved to the U.S., his parents are deported to Camp de Gurs, a French internment camp in southern France. Bruno, Karl, and Julius contact A. M. Warren, the Chief of the Visa Division in Washington, D.C., in order to acquire visas for both Berta and Jakob.

Throughout the next two years, the Veis family living in New York contacted multiple Jewish refugee services in order to assure safe passage for Bruno's parents. Although they manage to acquire the funds

¹ "Kindertransport, 1938–1940." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed July 31, 2018. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005260>.

to pay for Bertha and Jakob's transportation from France to the U.S., as well as working visas, due to the progression of the war, their visas are withheld from the family. As this is happening, Bertha and Jakob are moved from Camp de Gurs in southwestern France, to nearby Camp du Recebedou, and then up north to Drancy located just outside of Paris. Finally, in October of 1942, the final round of visa certification is finished and their assured passage has been paid for. However, both Bertha and Jakob were deported from Drancy in the middle of August and sent east. They arrive in Auschwitz-Birkenau on August 31, 1942, only two months before their official transportation to the U.S. is confirmed.

The remaining Veis family were informed that Bertha and Jakob have been deported to Eastern Europe, but were never given an exact location. Due to their movement into German occupied territory and U.S. entrance into the war, the Jewish refugee services and the visa division of the government was unable to continue assisting the Veis family in their search.

Historical Note

This series of letters begins in the immediate post-Kristallnacht time period in the German state of Baden-Württemberg. It is after the violent pogrom on November 9, 1938, that the British government altered their immigration restrictions in order to allow children under 17 to enter Britain's borders. They accepted approximately 10,000 children during the two years that the Kindertransport operation was in action.²

In October of 1940 two Nazi Gauleiters, Governors, of the Baden region enacted Operation Wagner-Bürckel after being given authority over the neighboring French region of Alsace.³ This would result in the deportation of approximately 7,000 Jewish residents of some 137 different communities in the German state of Baden- Württemberg, to the unoccupied zone of southwestern France.⁴ The French government had established a detention camp there, de Gurs, before the World War Two for political refugees who fled the Civil War in Spain. The Vichy regime interned a large number of the Badisch-German-Jews in de Gurs, before being sent to other French internment camps. The majority of the Jews that were transported during the operation were ultimately sent to Auschwitz.

Scope and Content Note

The Veis family letter's collection contains 165 letters and 14 additional items⁵ chiefly addressed to Bruno Veis. The majority of the correspondence, approximately two thirds, is in the German language. They are mainly letters from his parent's and other extended family members and friends who remain in Germany while Bruno is at a boy's home in England. The content includes information about immigration plans, deportations, daily activities, and thoughts of the future. The rest of the collection is in English and is correspondence letters from Bruno, Julius, and Karl Veis to several refugee

² "Kindertransport, 1938–1940." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed July 31, 2018. <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005260>.

³ "Gurs: A Brief History." Shema (Poem by Primo Levi) - Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust. Accessed July 31, 2018. <http://www.lamoth.org/visitor-information/guide-to-the-museum/museum-panels/room-5/the-death-camps/camps/gurs/gurs-a-brief-history/>.

⁴ Seemann, Uwe. Information Portal to European Sites of Remembrance. Accessed July 31, 2018. <https://www.memorialmuseums.org/eng/staettens/view/985/Memorial-to-the-Deported-Baden-Jews>.

⁵ Additional items include: a newspaper, letterhead for a Veis decoration company, and receipts.

organizations and government officials in an attempt to provide transportation and visas for Bruno's parents, Bertha and Jakob, who are interned in a French concentration camp.

Half of the German letters are (legibly and illegibly) hand written with ink, pencil, and carbon copy ink. The other half is typed with a typewriter and often contain additional hand written notes in the margins. The bulk years of the German letters range from December of 1938 to November of 1939. There are gaps in correspondence after Bertha and Jakob are transported to an unknown location in late 1942. The English correspondence letters begin in July of 1941 and steadily continue until December of 1942. There are four German letters and two English letters sent in the post-war period.

The family's German letters provide an insightful look at life in Germany for Jewish families in 1938 as they attempt to flee from the Nazis. The collection's greatest strength is the direct and open way in which the family writes about their everyday lives in Nazi Germany and their dealings with persecution of their Jewish family. The references to the deportations and removal of fellow family members or other Jews by the Nazis, that are included in several of Bertha's letters to Bruno, shows the way in which they spoke about and reacted to such events. The intense desire to flee Germany, which can be seen throughout a number of the German letters, progressively builds with each passing date and is directly linked to the virtually universal social tensions and constant animosity shown towards the Jewish people by 1939. Most of all, Julius's statements about "the horrors" that his aunt and uncle were facing while interned at a French concentration camp when writing to A.M. Warren the chief of visas, sheds light on just how much certain branches of the government knew about the inner-workings of concentration camps.

This collection consists primarily of correspondence sent to Bruno Veis from his family living in Bretten (Baden) in pre-World War Two Germany, as well as correspondence chronicling an unsuccessful attempt to rescue a family member from a series of French concentration camps during the war.

Series Description

This collection is divided into 3 series. **Series I:** Pre-War, War-time, and post-War Correspondence Predominantly in German, **Series II:** War Correspondence Predominantly in English (Relating to the Attempted Removal of Family from a French Concentration Camp), **Series III:** German and English War and Post-War Ephemera.

The items in each series are arranged chronologically by year, month, and day. In the case of letters with no written date, the postmarked date was recorded.

Series I: Pre-War, War-time, and post-War Correspondence Predominantly in German This series—which contains 125 letters—consists of letters sent to Bruno Veis from his friends and family members in Germany and England.

Series II: War Correspondence Predominantly in English (Relating to the Attempted Removal of Family from a French Concentration Camp)

This series—which contains 45 letters—consists of correspondence between Bruno, Karl, and Julius Veis and the Chief of the Visa Division, A.M. Warren, American Express, the Red Cross, the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, the National Refugee Service, Inc., and others who took part in the process

of trying to release Jakob and Bertha from the French concentration camp and evacuate them to the U.S.

Series III: German and English War and Post-War Ephemera

This series—which contains 14 objects such as documents, cards, newspapers, or receipts— consists of ephemera in both English and German, spanning from Bruno’s time in London as a Kindertransport refugee, the years surrounding the Veis family’s attempt to save Bruno’s parents, to the post-war period.

Box List

Box 1

Series 1: Pre-War and Post-War Correspondence Predominately in German

- 1-0 Finding Aid and Biographical Information
- 1-1 August 1937 – December 1938
- 1-2 January 1939 – April 1939
- 1-3 May 1939 – November 1939
- 1-4 August 1940
- 1-5 July 1946 – January 1949

Series 2: War Correspondence in English

- 1-6 1941-1951

Series 3: German and English War and Post-War Ephemera

- 1-7 Ephemera

Related Collections

MS-164: Assorted Documents from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)

Contact Information

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