

The Filson Historical Society

**Levy-Wolff Family
Papers, 1889-2002**

For information regarding literary and copyright interest for these papers, contact the Collections Department.

Size of Collection:
.66 cubic feet

Location Number:
Mss. A L668

Levy-Wolff Family Papers, 1889-2002

Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of papers of the Levy and Wolff families, Jewish immigrants from the Alsace-Lorraine region of Europe who settled in Louisville, Kentucky. Papers date from 1889-2002 and include a prayer book, photographs, business cards, correspondence, legal documents, newspaper clippings, and autobiographical accounts. Materials document Sol Levy's business and community involvement in Louisville, the lives of Wolff, Hirsch, and Cerf family members in France before and during World War II, their efforts to secure passage to the United States in 1941, and their resettlement in Louisville. Items are in English, French, German, and Hebrew.

Folders 1-3 contain papers, most from 1889-1946, relating to Sol Levy's business, Jewish community involvement, and estate. Included are his Levy-Gould Company business cards, World War II ration books and newspaper clippings, and correspondence arranging his French family members' passage to the United States. There are copies of Levy's will, and memorials and letters of condolence after his death in 1944.

Folders 4-7 consist of photographs, personal papers, and legal documents relating to Wolff, Hirsch, Cerf, and Levy family members in France and the U.S. from the 1900s-1950s. Of note are black-and-white photographs of the Wolff family barrel business in France (one photograph reads on the back, "Albert in midst of his men" and "Au Bourget" (at Le Bourget, outside Paris) and Arthur Wolff's business card and family book. Legal documents are primarily from France and include driver's licenses, identification cards, the 1930 marriage contract for Jacques Wolff and Denise Hirsch, passports, and the leather pouch in which many of the documents were stored. There is correspondence from the 1940s-1950s, mostly in French, among Sol Levy, Wolff family members, and the French consulate in Chicago.

Folders 8-12 consist of the personal and legal papers of Denise and Jacques Wolff from 1945-1987, documenting their family history and their life in Louisville. Included are autobiographical accounts, property and estate records, Kentucky Colonel certificates, certificates from the Jewish Community Federation and the Temple in Louisville, and souvenirs from their travels back to France, such as postcards and a published history of the Jewish community of Haguenau.

Volumes 13-19 are address books belonging to Denise and Jacques Wolff, and volume 20 is a prayer book in German and Hebrew that belonged to Aline (Levy) Wolff. The prayer book includes inscriptions with the name of Aline Wolff, dated 1909, and later notes with dates of the deaths of Aline and Arthur Wolff.

Related Collections:

Fencing medals belonging to Albert Wolff, Filson Museum Collection (2020.2.1-14).

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Biographical Note

Sol Levy was born in 1865 in Alsace-Lorraine, a region that alternately fell under the control of Germany and France in the 19th century and during World Wars I and II in the 20th century. After migrating to the U.S. in 1882, Levy moved to Louisville and worked as a wholesale merchant, establishing the Gould-Levy Company in 1907. He was involved with the Jewish Welfare Federation and a member of Temple Adath Israel and B'nai B'rith.

Sol Levy's sisters Henrietta (Levy) Cerf and Aline (Levy) Wolff remained in the Alsace-Lorraine region until 1940. Aline and her husband Arthur Wolff had five boys. Two of the oldest, Jacques and Albert, founded a steel drum business outside Paris in the mid-1920s; Arthur and another one of the sons had a similar wholesale barrel business in Strasbourg. All of Aline and Arthur's sons served in the French military during World War II. When Germany invaded France in 1940, family members relocated from Alsace-Lorraine to central and southern France.

Sol Levy arranged sponsorship and voyages for Wolff and Cerf family members to emigrate to the United States. Those who came over together to Louisville in 1941 were Levy's sister Henrietta Cerf, widow of Leon Cerf; Arthur Wolff and sons Jacques, Robert, and Albert; Robert's wife Martha and daughter Arlette; and Jacques's wife Denise and their sons Francis and Hubert. Denise Wolff's mother Eugenia (Baer) Hirsch, widow of Jacques Hirsch, emigrated to the United States in 1947 and also settled in Louisville.

Aline died in France in 1941, just months before the other family members traveled through Spain and Portugal to get to the port of Lisbon. Arthur died a few months after his arrival in Louisville. Their two younger sons could not secure visas to leave France; Jean-Paul, a physician, died in a Nazi concentration camp at the age of 30.

Albert Wolff continued his involvement in fencing in the U.S., participating in the Olympics, winning championship medals, and promoting the sport in Louisville. Albert and his wife Jean had two children, Stephen and Barry; after Jean's death, Albert married Mildred.

Jacques Wolff worked for the Gould-Levy Company for 22 years and was involved in the Young Men's Hebrew Association chorus, later the Jewish Community Center (JCC) chorus. Denise worked with refugees from France and helped found the organization Club 60 for senior citizens that was run through the JCC. Denise and Jacques Wolff's son Francis married Betty Bass and worked for Louisville Wholesale Liquor Company; their children are Mark, Jonathan, Sheldon, and Elise. Hubert Wolff's children are Erik and Michelle.

Source:

Interview with Denise Wolff, July 12, 1978, University of Louisville Oral History Center,

https://ohc.library.louisville.edu/ohms/viewer.php?cachefile=466_wolff.xml

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Folder List

Box 1

- Folder 1: Sol Levy and Levy-Gould Company Papers, 1889-2002
- Folder 2: Sol Levy Personal Correspondence and Papers, 1939-1947
- Folder 3: Sol Levy Will, Estate Papers, and Memorials, 1943-1945
- Folder 4: Arthur Wolff Business Cards and Photographs, ca. 1926-1938
- Folder 5: Wolff/Hirsch/Cerf Legal Documents and Papers, 1918-1952
- Folder 6: Wolff/Hirsch/Cerf/Levy Booklets and Passports, 1902-1966
- Folder 7: Wolff Correspondence, 1944-1956
- Folder 8: Denise Wolff Family Histories and Papers, 1945-1985

Box 2

- Folder 9: Jacques and Denise Wolff Legal Documents and Notices, 1959-1982
- Folder 10: Jacques and Denise Wolff Certificates, 1959-1987
- Folder 11: Miscellaneous Family Papers, 1970-1980
- Folder 12: Jacques and Denise Wolff Souvenirs and Histories of France, ca. 1945-1968
- Volume 13: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1940s-1950s
- Volume 14: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1940s-1950s
- Volume 15: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1950s-1960s
- Volume 16: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1970s-1980s
- Volume 17: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1970s-1980s
- Volume 18: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1970s-1990s
- Volume 19: Jacques and Denise Wolff Address Book, ca. 1970s-1990s
- Volume 20: Aline (Levy) Wolff Prayer Book, ca. 1909

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Subject Headings

Adath Israel (Louisville, Ky.)
Antisemitism.
B'nai B'rith. Louisville Lodge No. 14 (Louisville, Ky.)
Concentration camps.
Emigration and immigration.
Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945).
Fencing.
France – Description and travel.
France – History – German occupation, 1940-1945.
Identification cards – France.
Jewish businesspeople – Kentucky – Louisville.
Jewish businesspeople – France.
Jewish Community Center (Louisville, Ky.)
Jewish families – France.
Jewish families – Prayers and devotions.
Jewish families – Kentucky – Louisville.
Jewish merchants – Kentucky – Louisville.
Jewish Welfare Federation (Louisville, Ky.)
Jews – Kentucky – Louisville.
Judaism – Prayers and devotions.
Louisville Free Public Library.
Naturalization.
Passports.
Prayer books.
Ration books – Kentucky – Louisville.
Wills – Kentucky – Louisville.
World War, 1939-1945 – France.
World War, 1939-1945 – Jews.
World War, 1939-1945 – Prisons and prisoners, German.
World War, 1939-1945 – Refugees.
Young Men's Hebrew Association (Louisville, Ky.)