



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Herbert J. Seligmann papers

1894-1984

MssCol 2719

Compiled by Valerie Wingfield, Robyn Hjermsstad, 2015

Summary

Creator: Seligmann, Herbert J. (Herbert Jacob), 1891-

Title: Herbert J. Seligmann papers

Date: 1894-1984

Size: 8.5 linear feet (27 boxes)

Source: Gift of Lise Seligmann (Mrs. Herbert J. Seligmann) 1992-1996.

Abstract: Herbert Jacob Seligmann (1891-1984), writer and civil rights activist, published books and articles on civil rights, World War II, artists, and related topics. Papers document the career and personal life of Herbert J. Seligmann through letters, writings and printed and visual materials. A prolific writer, he published books and contributed to many newspapers and magazines. His works include studies of the civil rights of African-Americans and the rise of Nazism during World War II, reviews of fine art books, and articles about artists such as Vincent A. Hartgen, John Marin and Georgia O'Keeffe. Clippings of his articles are contained in the scrapbooks, 1920-1946. Visual materials consist of photographs, slides and negative roll films of Seligmann's trips through the United States and Europe. Photographs of Europe include pictures of Jews in the Netherlands, Poland and Romania. These pictures were taken by Seligmann when he traveled to Europe after World War I as publicity director for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Photograph album contains pictures of Haiti during the 1920's, the Adirondacks and western United States.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Herbert J. Seligmann papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

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Creator History

Herbert J. Seligmann, the son of Albert and Carrie (Metzger) Seligmann, was born on November 13, 1891 in New York City. He graduated from the School of Ethical Culture and from Harvard University, cum laude (1912). As a writer and civil rights activist, Seligmann wrote articles and books advocating the civil rights of African-Americans. During the years 1919 through 1932, he was the publicity director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

After World War I, Seligmann also held the position of publicity director of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and traveled throughout Poland, Romania and Latvia. During World War II, he administered the Washington Bureau of the Overseas News Agency and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. He wrote a series of articles on fine arts and artists; he had friendships with artists such as Vincent Hartgen, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Alfred Stieglitz.

His publications include *The Negro Faces America* (1920); *D. H. Lawrence, An American Interpretation* (1924); *Sun and Tides* (poems, 1932); *Man and Bird Together*, a memoir of Albert R. Brand; and *Voyages*. He was also a contributor of numerous articles for periodicals and newspapers. Married twice, first to Liliias H. MacLane (1893-1964), Seligmann was survived by his second wife Lise Seligmann. He died on March 3, 1984 at the age of 92.

Scope and Content Note

The papers reflect Seligmann's career as a writer and civil rights activist and to a lesser extent his personal life, through letters, documents, writings, and printed and visual material. The General Correspondence covers several subjects including Seligmann's position as publicity director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Other correspondence includes Seligmann's letters to his first wife, Liliias H. MacLane Seligmann, and acknowledgements (1964-1966) regarding three books titled *In Memory of Liliias - Collected Poems of Herbert J. Seligmann 1919-1964*, *A South Carolina Independent of the 1880s: J. Hendrix McLane*, and *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931*.

The typescripts are comprised of Seligmann's writings, and include "Marsden Hartley," "Georgia O'Keeffe" and his autobiography *Voyages*. The commonplace books contain four decades of his observations, thoughts and poetry from the 1940s through the 1980s. The travel diaries pertain to trips to Europe, Chicago, New Mexico and elsewhere. Notes and miscellaneous papers complete the typescripts. Seligmann was widely published as evident from the scrapbooks (1920-1946) of clippings of his articles on fine arts, civil rights and World War II. The printed material contains the periodical *Manuscripts* (1922-1923), miscellaneous articles and other periodicals.

Seligmann's photographic skills are evident in pictures of New York City, Maine and other locales. An album of rare photographs of Haiti (to which Seligmann was sent as a reporter by the *Nation* during the 1920s) contains pictures of Haitians going about such daily activities as shopping, grinding coffee and attending religious services. There are several pictures of Haitian prisoners photographed during the Caco War. The album also includes images of the Adirondack Mountains and the western United States (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah). Individuals photographed include Liliias MacLane Seligmann, Georgia O'Keeffe, Vincent A. Hartgen and John Marin. Other photographs in the collection include contact sheets of Seligmann's photographs of the Jewish communities of Holland, Poland and Romania taken in 1936 as part of his work for the Joint Distribution Committee, and a portrait of Seligmann taken by Alfred Stieglitz. Assorted prints and Seligmann's diplomas complete the collection. The slides contain chiefly photographs taken on vacation trips.

The collection also contains a small amount of material pertaining to Seligmann's first wife, Liliias H.

MacLane Seligmann (1893-1964), including photographs; writings; correspondence; clippings; and letters and poems that Seligmann wrote to her. Included is her essay "Experiment with Dancing in Infantile Paralysis," in which she outlines her experiences teaching dance to children recovering from polio. The essay is accompanied by still photographs from a motion picture that was created in conjunction with the experiment.

Arrangement: Six series: I. Correspondence; II. Writings; III. Scrapbooks; IV. Printed Material; V. Photographs; VI. Seligmann, Lilius H. MacLane

Key Terms

Geographic Names

Haiti -- History -- American occupation, 1915-1934

New York (N.Y.) -- History -- 1898-1951

New York (N.Y.) -- History -- 1951-

Subjects

Jews -- Netherlands

Jews -- Poland

Jews -- Romania

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Photographs

Names

Hartgen, Vincent A.

Marin, John, 1870-1953

O'Keeffe, Georgia, 1887-1986

Seligmann, Herbert J. (Herbert Jacob), 1891-

Seligmann, Lilius H. MacLane

Container List

Series I. Correspondence 1909-1977 (1 box, 6 folders)

The correspondence reflects Seligmann's career and personal life, and includes general incoming correspondence, 1909-1977; letters to Lawrence Sampter, 1944-1945; to Liliias H. MacLane, 1919-1945; and acknowledgements regarding three books: *In Memory of Liliias - Collected Poems of Herbert J. Seligmann 1919-1964*, *A South Carolina Independent of the 1880s: J. Hendrix McLane*, and *Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931*.

- b. 1 f. 1 General correspondence 1909-1955
- b. 21 f. 1-3 General correspondence 1936-1977
 - b. 1 f. 2 Letters to Lawrence Sampter 1944-1945
 - b. 1 f. 3-6 Letters to Liliias H. MacLane 1919-1921
- b. 21 f. 4-5 Letters to Liliias H. MacLane 1928-1945
 - b. 1 f. 7 *Acknowledgements regarding two books: In Memory of Liliias - Collected Poems of Herbert J. Seligmann 1919-1964 and A South Carolina Independent of the 1880s: J. Hendrix McLane*
 - b. 21 f. 6 *Acknowledgements regarding two books: In Memory of Liliias - Collected Poems of Herbert J. Seligmann 1919-1964 and Alfred Stieglitz Talking: Notes on Some of His Conversations, 1925-1931* 1964-1966

Series II. Writings 1932-1984 (8 boxes, 9 folders)

The writings consist of typescripts, commonplace books, travel diaries, and three issues of *The New Republic* (1937) that contain articles written by Seligmann. The typescripts are arranged by topic and are mainly concerned with the subject of fine arts. The topics include "Vincent Hartgen," "Georgia O'Keeffe," and Seligmann's autobiography *Voyages*. The commonplace books which span four decades of Seligmann's poetry and reflection, are arranged chronologically. The travel diaries contain recollections of Seligmann's trips throughout the United States and Europe.

A. Typescripts

- b. 21 f. 7 Addresses 1944, 1946, 1959
- b. 21 f. 8 Adrift on the Cruel Fundy
 - b. 2 f. 1 Along the Airline: Wilderness Frontier
 - b. 2 f. 2 Burning Focus 1966
(Includes the published article in *Infinity Magazine*).
 - b. 2 f. 3 Cape Split Sketches (incomplete)
- b. 21 f. 9 Codfish Smother
 - b. 2 f. 4 The Dilleys
- b. 21 f. 10 Exhibition of Landscapes and Seascapes by Vincent A. Hartgen 1964
- b. 21 f. 11 Vincent Hartgen
 - b. 2 f. 5 Vincent Hartgen
 - b. 2 f. 6 Marsden Hartley 1957 (2 copies)
 - b. 2 f. 7 Hummingbird Babysitter
- b. 2 f. 8-14 Man and Bird Together: A Portrait of Albert R. Brand 1970 (2 copies)
 - b. 2 f. 15 Georgia O'Keeffe (2 copies)
- b. 21 f. 13 Georgia O'Keeffe
 - b. 2 f. 16 George Santayana: An Appreciation 1966
 - b. 2 f. 17 Some People of Our Times: A Manifesto Against Disintegration
 - b. 2 f. 18 They've Always Gambled

Series II. Writings (cont.)

A. Typescripts (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 19 Two Georges: George Sand and George Eliot (incomplete) 1932
- b. 2 f. 20 Colonel Laurens Van der Post
- b. 21 f. 14 Colonel Laurens Van der Post
- b. 2 f. 21 A Way of Life Called Berwick 1963
- b. 3 f. 21 *Voyages* (3 versions)
- b. 21 f. 15 *Voyages Index*
- b. 4 f. 1-2 Miscellaneous typescripts
- b. 4 f. 3-4 Notes; Miscellaneous papers

B. Commonplace Books

- b. 5 1942-1949
- b. 6 1951-1968
- b. 7 1968-1975
- b. 8 1975-1983
- b. 9 1984, undated

C. Travel Diaries (3 vols)

- b. 20 New Mexico and Chicago 1960-1962
- b. 20 New Mexico and elsewhere 1964-1970
- b. 20 Europe 1970-1973
- b. 21 f. 12 *D. The New Republic* 1937

Series III. Scrapbooks 1920-1946 (4 boxes)

The scrapbooks contain Seligmann's published articles from newspapers and magazines. The subjects include fine arts, civil rights and World War II.

- b. 10 1920-1926
- b. 11 1918-1937
- b. 12 1944-1946

Series IV. Printed Material 1922-1953 (1 box)

The printed material consists of an assortment of clipped articles and periodicals, including the periodical *Manuscripts*, 1923/1924.

- b. 13 Articles 1944-1953
- b. 13 *Manuscripts* 1922-1923
- b. 13 Miscellaneous periodicals
- b. 13 Brochures and flyers - NYC Art exhibits 1921-1963
- b. 13 Woodcut Christmas cards designed by Polly Inman

Series V. Photographs 1906-1980 (10 boxes)

The photographs include those taken by Seligmann of Liliac MacLane Seligmann, Georgia O'Keeffe and other individuals. There is also a portrait photograph of Herbert J. Seligmann taken by Alfred Stieglitz. A photograph album also includes photographs of Haiti, the southwestern United States, and the Adirondack region. The slides (ca. 1960-1964) consist of images taken on vacation trips across the United States. There are also several scenic photographs of Maine.

- b. 22 f. 1-6 1906-1964
- b. 23 f. 1-8 1930s-1982
 - b. 14 Liliac MacLane Seligmann, Herbert J. Seligmann, Liliac Walker Hazewell, Georgia O'Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz, and others Maine: Houses and buildings
 - b. 15 Maine, New Mexico and New York City
 - b. 16 Photograph album

Series V. Photographs (cont.)

- b. 16 Holland, Poland and Romania 1936
- b. 17 New York City views (matted color prints)
- b. 17 Diplomas awarded to Seligmann
- b. 18 Slides
- b. 23 f. 9-12 Slides 1963-1968
- Negatives
- b. 24 f. 1-5 1922-1936
- b. 25 f. 1 1930s-1950s
- b. 26 f. 1-4 1934-1960s
- b. 27 f. 1-5 1958-1983

Series VI. Seligmann, Lilius H. Maclane 1890s-1964 (3 folders)

Materials pertaining to Lilius H. Maclane Seligmann consist of photographs; writings; correspondence; clippings; and letters and poems that Seligmann wrote to her.

- b. 27 f. 6 1890s
Photographs
- b. 28 f. 1-2 1894-1964