

VHEC ARCHIVES FINDING AID

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FONDS/COLLECTION TITLE

Vilcsek family fonds

IDENTIFIER

RA033

EXTENT & MEDIUM

10 postcards
11 documents
15 etchings (prints)
1 screen print
1 monoprint
4 photographs : prints

DATE

[after 1881]–1971, predominant 1942–1949, 1969

CREATOR

Vilcsek family

ADMINISTRATIVE/BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

Ern? Vilcsek was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1907 to Israel Samu Vilcsek and Berta Weisz; he had one sister and three brothers. Around 1933, Ern? married Irén Hirsch, born February 27, 1913, in Budapest, Hungary to Karolin Fischer and Jacob Hirsch. The couple had two children: Eva Veronika Kero (née Vilcsek) (b. 1934, Budapest, d. December 2018, Vancouver) and Erika Ester Fleischer (née Vilcsek) (b. September 28, 1937, Budapest, d. January 30, 2005, Vancouver). Prior to the Second World War, the family lived at 55 Futó Street, in District Eight in Budapest; they ran a business selling auto parts with members of their extended family.

In 1941, Ern? Vilcsek was taken to a labour camp. Irén went to work at the auto parts business with her mother-in-law, and Irén's mother moved in to help care for their daughters. Early on, Ern? received leave to visit his wife and daughters in Budapest, by 1942 he was permitted only to send correspondence. Eva and Erika recall being woken in the middle of the night in 1942 to drive to a train station to say goodbye to their father, who was being sent to the Russian front in a cattle wagon. In March, 1943, the Vilcseks received notice that Ern? had disappeared in the area of Osztrogoszk. The family heard he had died from typhus and starvation.

Ern?'s eldest brother was married to a gentile woman and the auto parts business was able to operate during the war under her family name. That brother helped to arrange Wallenberg safe Schutzpasses for Irén and her daughters to move into an apartment protected by the Swedish government with their grandmothers.

In the Swedish safe house food was very scarce. Eva and Erika remember Irén going out to find food, being caught by members of the Arrow Cross and taken to a brick factory. She returned two days later. From then on, Eva was sent out for food, without her yellow star. When the Russians surrounded Budapest, the Germans decided to enter the safe houses and evacuate the residents; the Vilcseks were told to get in a large lineup, where the rumour was that they

would be ghettoized and that the ghetto would be liquidated. Eva removed Erika from the line where she stood with her grandmothers, and Irén and the girls snuck back into the safe house, where a caretaker at the apartment hid them under a large eiderdown coverlet. A German soldier found them, but the caretaker convinced him that they were family, not Jewish. After this, the Vilcseks managed to get to the apartment of their gentile aunt, who risked her and her family's life in order to shelter them during the last few days of the war. They survived in part by trading car parts to Russian soldiers in exchange for food.

After the war, the Vilcseks moved back to their apartment; Erika and Eva's grandmothers survived their time in the ghetto. In 1946, Irén married a survivor who lost his wife and child in Auschwitz. Irén and Erika moved to his town; Eva remained in Budapest with her grandmothers and went to school. She graduated in June, 1956. Irén's second husband died of a stroke in 1956. The Vilcseks fled to Austria at the time of the Hungarian Revolution.

Erika came to Canada in late 1956 or 1957, where she first stayed with a great aunt (Maria née Fischer) and uncle. Irén spent two years in Israel with her mother before immigrating to Canada in 1959; she brought the documents and photographs in this fonds with her.

Eva first moved to São Paulo, Brazil, and then settled in Vancouver, where she went to university and worked as a public school teacher and artist. Her first husband's last name was Beck. Eva married Melvin (Mel) Kero (b. 1925, d. 1998), artist and teacher of English literature and film at Langara College in Vancouver, in 1972. Eva and Mel visited Hungary together in 1973.

Erika had a child, Ernie, in 1957; in 1961 she married Hungarian survivor Zoltán Fleischer (b. 1927, Sajóvámos, Hungary); they had a daughter, Susie Kierszenblat, in 1967. The Fleischer family operated Scott Road Trading Ltd. in Surrey, buying and selling scrap metals.

Erika died in 2005 of pulmonary disease. Eva died in 2018.

SCOPE & CONTENT

Collection consists primarily of records generated or used during the period of the Second World War by the Vilcsek family in Budapest, Hungary. These include vital statistics and personal records of the Vilcsek family, photographs, and postcards mailed to the family from Ern? Vilcsek while he was in a labour camp in Hungary. Collection also consists of artworks, several on the theme of the Holocaust, created by Eva Kero after her immigration to Vancouver, BC.

Collection has been arranged into four series: Correspondence (1942), Family records ([after 1881]–1949), Artworks (1969–1971) and Photographs (1917–[before 1943]).

ARCHIVAL HISTORY

Accessions 1993.013, 2008.003, 2010.001, 2019.039

IMMEDIATE SOURCE OF ACQUISITION OR TRANSFER

Records were in the custody of Erika Fleischer and Eva Kero, who donated them to the VHEC in three accessions. Erika Fleischer donated in 1993; Eva Kero donated once in 2008 and once in 2010. Photographs were in the custody of Eva Kero until her death in 2018, after which they were kept by the executor of her will, who donated them to the VHEC in 2019.

ACCRUALS

No further accruals are expected.

LANGUAGE

Hungarian, German, English

SYSTEM OF ARRANGEMENT

Collection has been arranged into series by the archivist; item-level descriptions based on legacy Filemaker Pro database entries. Donations from Erika Fleischer and Eva Kero were processed together.

RIGHTS

Materials available for research and education purposes only. Permission to publish, copy or otherwise use these materials must be obtained from the VHEC.

RULES OR CONVENTIONS

ISAD(G) informed by RAD

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

Arranged in April, 2019 by Shyla Seller. Revised May, 2019 with description of accrual.

DATE OF DESCRIPTION

2019

Collection Contents

Correspondence (RA033-01)

Series is comprised of postcards written from Ern? Vilcsek to his family in Budapest while a prisoner in labour camp 202/57. Postcards are made of pulp stock and written in pencil with stamps.

Family records (RA033-02)

Series is comprised of birth certificates, a Swedish Schutzpass, a marriage certificate and other vital statistics documents issued to or used by the Vilcsek family in Budapest.

Artworks (RA033-03)

Series is comprised of artworks made by Eva Kero while studying at the University of British Columbia. Many of the works address the Holocaust.

Photographs (RA033-04)

Series is comprised of three photographs from the home of Eva Kero in Vancouver, BC. One photograph is of Ern? Vilcsek, one is of her, Erika and their mother, and two are of unknown persons.