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Guide to the Rosika Schwimmer Papers 1927-1938



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.SCHWIMMERR
Title	Schwimmer, Rosika. Papers
Date	1927-1938
Size	.25 linear feet (1 box)
Repository	Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract Rosika Schwimmer (b. September 11, 1877, d. August 3, 1948) was a Hungarian-born feminist and pacifist. She was an outspoken advocate for peace during the First World War. This collection contains materials from the 1929 case *United States v. Schwimmer*. Schwimmer's application for U.S. citizenship was denied because she refused to swear to take up arms in defense of the country; she lost the ensuing appeal in a 6-3 vote. The Court's dissenting opinion asserts the importance of protecting freedom of speech. Documents contained in the collection include Schwimmer's correspondence with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, newspaper clippings related to the case, and published case materials.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Schwimmer, Rosika. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Biographical Note

Writer, orator, pacifist, and feminist Rosika Schwimmer was born in Budapest on September 11, 1877. Her parents were Berta Schwimmer (Katscher) and Max Bernat Schwimmer, an agricultural merchant. The oldest of three children, Schwimmer descended from several generations of upper-middle class Jewish merchants and intellectuals.

Schwimmer was raised and educated in the Transylvanian town Temesvár (today Timișoara, Romania), receiving a classical education in music and foreign languages. Following the

bankruptcy of her father's business, the family returned to Budapest where Schwimmer began working as a bookkeeper at age 18. The working conditions inspired her first forays into political organizing, and Schwimmer was soon involved in the Hungarian suffrage and pacifist movements.

During Schwimmer's early career, she supported herself as a writer, speaker, and journal editor. In 1904, she travelled to Berlin to serve as the corresponding secretary for the inaugural congress of the International Women Suffrage Alliance (IWSA). In the same year, Schwimmer founded several Hungarian feminist organizations which campaigned for women's suffrage, equal education, employment rights, and access to birth control.

Schwimmer was briefly married to a journalist named Bédy in 1911. Disputing accounts claim that Bédy passed away in 1912 or that the couple divorced in 1913. They had no children.

In 1914, Schwimmer moved to London to work as the press secretary of the IWSA, where she frequently spoke at suffragist and pacifist events. Unable to return to Hungary after the onset of the First World War and threatened with internment as an 'alien enemy' in the U.K., Schwimmer arranged a 22-state lecture tour to the United States where she spoke on suffrage and pacifism.

In the U.S., Schwimmer connected with other prominent feminists. She helped found the Women's Peace Party alongside Jane Addams and served as the party's international secretary. At a lecture in Chicago, Schwimmer met feminist and pacifist activist Lola Maverick Lloyd, who would later become Schwimmer's professional partner and financial supporter.

At the International Congress of Women in The Hague in April 1915, Schwimmer was chosen to serve as a board member of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP, later known as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom). Subsequently, Schwimmer traveled with a group of pacifist women to both belligerent and neutral countries in attempt to negotiate peace.

Their efforts attracted the attention of automobile magnate Henry Ford, who partnered with Schwimmer in 1915 to initiate the Henry Ford Peace Expedition, or Ford Peace Ship. Organizers invited journalists and dignitaries to travel from the U.S. to Europe with the goal of convincing neutral governments to mediate peace. The voyage was beset by conflict and, on their arrival in Europe, Ford abandoned the expedition to return to the U.S. Press reporting on the failed endeavor damaged Schwimmer's political influence and reputation in the U.S., and alienated her from the ICWPP.

When the war ended in 1918, Schwimmer returned to newly-independent Hungary. Prime Minister Mihály Károlyi appointed her the first woman Hungarian minister to Switzerland, a post she occupied from November 1918 until March 1919. She avoided the “Red Terror” under Béla Kun’s government as well as the Horthy regime’s anti-Semitic “White Terror” by escaping to Vienna in 1920. In 1921, Schwimmer emigrated to the U.S.

Schwimmer’s application for U.S. citizenship was denied in 1924 due to her refusal to take up arms in defense of the country. Her appeal was eventually heard by the Supreme Court in *United States v. Schwimmer* on April 12, 1929 and argued by one of the first women to represent a case in the Supreme Court, attorney Olive Rabe.

On May 27, 1929, the Court voted 6-3 against Schwimmer, with Justices Holmes, Brandeis, and Sanford dissenting. In the majority opinion, Justice Pierce Butler argued that, though Schwimmer was unlikely ever to face conscription because of her gender and age, her pacifist stance and lack of nationalist attachment disqualified her from citizenship. Justice Holmes, with whom Schwimmer struck up a long-time correspondence, authored a dissenting opinion asserting the importance of protecting freedom of speech. As a result of the case, Schwimmer remained stateless until her death.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Schwimmer worked to help refugees escape fascist occupation in Europe. In 1937, she co-founded the Campaign for World Government with Edith Wynn and Lola Maverick Lloyd. She was awarded the World Peace Prize in the same year. Schwimmer also collaborated with writer and historian Mary Ritter Beard to found the World Center for Women’s Archives, one of the earliest organizations to collect and preserve materials on women’s lives and political activism.

Rosika Schwimmer died of pneumonia on August 3, 1948. Shortly before her death, she had been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Ultimately, however, no prize was awarded that year.

Scope Note

The Rosika Schwimmer Papers are organized into one box of five folders. The collection contains materials ranging from 1927 to 1938 related to the Supreme Court case *United States v. Schwimmer*. Documents include published court opinions, newspaper clippings concerning the case, court transcripts, and Schwimmer’s correspondence with Justice Holmes. Subjects include pacifism, free speech, citizenship, and civil rights. All materials are in English.

Related Resources

Jane Addams. Collection

Jenkin Lloyd Jones. Papers

Mabel Wing Castle. Papers

Salmon Levinson. Papers

See also the following related resources at the New York Public Library: <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/>

Rosika Schwimmer Papers

Schwimmer-Lloyd Collection

Lola Maverick Lloyd Papers

Leopold and Berta Katscher Papers

Subject Headings

- Schwimmer, Rosika, 1877-1948
- Holmes, Oliver W. (Oliver Wendell), 1902-1981
-
- Noncitizens--Civil rights--United States
- Freedom of speech--United States--Cases
- Pacifism
- Women and peace

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Case Materials, 1928-1928

Box 1

Folder 2

Newspaper Clippings, 1929-1935

Box 1

Folder 3

Correspondence, Justice Oliver W. Holmes, 1930-1935

Box 1

Folder 4

Pamphlets, Dissenting Opinion of Justice Holmes, 1929-1938

Box 1

Folder 5

Statement, Brief, and Argument for Appellant and Appeal from Decree, 1927-1928