
Guide to the Benjamin M. Levaco Papers

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Language of Material: Multiple languages

Contributing Institution: Special Collections & Archives

Title: Benjamin M. Levaco Papers

Creator: Levaco, Benjamin M., 1911-1998

Identifier/Call Number: OCH.BML

Extent: 2.90 linear feet

Date (inclusive): Circa 1900-1999

Abstract: Benjamin Levaco was a Russian-born Jew who moved to China with his family in 1915 at the age of four. He grew up in Harbin and Tientsin, and after graduating high school began working for a sausage casing company in the 1930s. After World War II, he opened his own casing company with plants in Shanghai, Hangchow, Tientsin and Peking. He fled China with his wife in 1950, immigrating to New York City. He retired in the Los Angeles area, and traveled to China multiple times in the 1990s before his passing in 1998. The collection contains items from Levaco's life in China, as well as items related to his continued interest in the Old China Hands experience during his retirement.

Language of Material: English,Russian,Hebrew,Chinese

Arrangement of Materials:

Series I: Personal Materials, circa 1920s-1998

Subseries A Correspondence, 1929-1996

Subseries B: Groups and Organizations, 1959-1996

Subseries C: Travel, 1982-1994

Subseries D: Narratives and Poetry, 1978-1994

Subseries E: Miscellaneous Documents and Ephemera, circa 1920-1999

Series II: Collected Publications and Narratives, circa 1917-1999

Subseries A: Scholarly Works and News Clippings, circa 1917-1999

Subseries B: Memoirs and Personal Narratives, 1943-1984

Series III: Photographs and Photocopied Images, circa 1900-1999

Biographical Information:

Benjamin (Ben) Levaco was born to Michael and Rachel Levaco in Kainsk, Siberia in 1911. His family moved to Harbin in 1915 to escape the rising Bolshevik forces in Russia, where his father ran a variety of businesses. In 1918, the family moved again to Yokohama, Japan, where Levaco attended Saint Joseph's College. The family lived in Japan until 1923, when the Great Kanto Earthquake hit and destroyed most of the city of Yokohama. The Levaco's were left without a home, business, or liquid assets as all records of their bank accounts were lost to the destruction of the earthquake. The family then moved to Tientsin, China, where Michael Levaco was able to establish a haberdashery. Benjamin attended the British Grammar School in Tientsin, graduated in 1927, and found employment in an American firm dealing in natural sausage casings, the Oppenheimer Casing Company.

As a part of his employment, Levaco traveled extensively throughout the interior of China and Mongolia to buy casings, and as a result became proficient in Chinese. In 1936, he was made the manager of a branch office in Shanghai, and worked there until 1941 when the occupying Japanese forces terminated all American-run businesses. During this time he worked as a real-estate agent, and after the war decided to establish his own casing export company with a few partners. His company, Huhzung Trading Company, owned plants in Shanghai, Hangchow, and expanded in 1948 to Tientsin and Peking as well. This business ran successfully until 1949, when Levaco decided to leave in the wake of the Communist takeover.

After hastily wrapping up his business affairs and losing much in the process, Levaco received a U.S. Immigration Visa in October of 1950, and moved to New York City with his second wife, Nata. Levaco worked a variety of jobs, including as a salesman for the Oppenheimer Casing Company and a Canadian casing company. Nata passed away in 1955 from cancer, and Levaco married his third wife, Sonia, in 1956. In 1971, he began working for the Independent Casing Company of Montreal, where he stayed for 20 years, even working over the phone when he and Sonia moved to Los Angeles, California, in 1986. Sonia passed away in 1989, but Levaco continued to live in the area, close to their daughter Gail and her family. Levaco took a number of trips to China in his later life, and was involved in a number of organizations for Old China Hands and Jewish people who formerly lived in China. He passed away in 1998, at the age of 87.

Scope and Contents

The *Benjamin M. Levaco Papers* contain items from Levaco's life in China, as well as items related to his continued interest in the Old China Hands experience during his retirement. The collection is arranged in three series: **Personal Materials**

(circa 1920-1998), **Collected Publications and Narratives** (circa 1917-1999), and **Photographs and Photocopied Images** (circa 1900-1999).

Series I, **Personal Materials**, contains five subseries: **Correspondence** (1929-1996), **Groups and Organizations** (1959-1996), **Travel** (1982-1994), **Narratives and Poetry** (1978-1994), and **Miscellaneous Documents and Ephemera** (circa 1920-1998). The **Correspondence** subseries consists of letters sent to and from Benjamin Levaco covering a variety of topics, including a series of love letters written by Levaco to a former girlfriend, Tania. The **Groups and Organizations** subseries consists of newsletters, correspondence, and other documents related to a number of groups in which Levaco was involved. These groups include Jewish organizations, groups related to the Old China Hands experience, and a creative writing group. The **Travel** subseries consists of brochures, postcards, ephemera, and arrangements related to the various trips Levaco took to China in the 1990s. The **Narratives and Poetry** subseries consists of stories, essays, and poetry written by Levaco mostly about his life and family. Also included are translations done by Levaco of his father Michael's poetry written in Russian in China. The **Miscellaneous Documents and Ephemera** subseries consists of a number of items related to Levaco's personal life in China and America, including identification documents, records of property owned by Levaco in Hungjao, genealogical information, and grades from his grammar school in Tientsin.

Series II, **Collected Publications and Narratives**, contains two subseries. Subseries A, **Scholarly Works and News Clippings** (circa 1917-1999,) contains articles, presentations, and news clippings collected by Levaco related mostly to the Jewish experience in China as well as information on China in general. Subseries B, **Memoirs and Personal Narratives** (1943-1984), contains narratives and stories collected and sent to Levaco written by others about their experiences living and visiting China and Japan.

Series III, **Photographs and Photocopied Images**, consists of photographs and photocopied pictures of Levaco's life in China and America as well as his trips to China in the 1990s.

Related Material

[Benjamin Michael Levaco Papers at the Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University](#)

Conditions Governing Access:

The collection is open to research use.

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gail Levaco Goldman, 1998.

Preferred Citation:

For information about citing items in this collection consult the appropriate style manual, or see the [Citing Archival Materials](#) guide.

Processing Information:

Andy Villalobos, May 2012

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Ephemera

Documents

Photographs

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General Correspondence, 1968-1986

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