The Register of Miriam Sherman - Brooks Family Papers, 1910-1978

Collection number: MSS 63

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research

Los Angeles, California

Contact Information:

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
6120 South Vermont Avenue
Los Angeles, CA, 90044
Phone: (323) 759-6063
Fax: (323) 759-2252
Email: archives@socallib.org
URL: http://www.socallib.org/

Processed by:
Teri Robertson

Date Completed:
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Encoded by:
Teri Robertson

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Miriam Sherman - Brooks Family Papers,

Date (inclusive): 1910-1978

Collection number: MSS 63

Creator: Miriam Brooks Sherman

Extent: 1/6th Linear foot,
1/2 legal box

Repository: Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
Los Angeles, CA 90044

Abstract: The collection is comprised of the personal correspondence among Isador and Bessie Brooks; their three daughters: Miriam, Eleanor and Dorothy; Isador's father Joseph; and Miriam's daughter, during the first half of the 20th century. Isador and Miriam were Communist Party members. There are additional papers which include: Isador's 1929 reports to the Los Angeles Communist Party; Miriam's notebook of a 1932 trip to the USSR as a youth delegate from the International Labor Defense to the World Congress of the International Red Aid; a memo dealing with the "Los Angeles Ten" case, in which Miriam was a defendant for refusing to answer questions before a grand jury regarding her connections to the Communist Party; and clippings about Miriam's firing from a pianist position at UCLA's Physical Education Department in 1950 during the University of California's loyalty oath controversy.

Language: English.

Provenance

Donated by Miriam Brooks Sherman in April, July, September, and December 1988

Access

The collection is available for research only at the Library's facility in Los Angeles. The Library is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Researchers are encouraged to call or email the Library indicating the nature of their research query prior to making a visit.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Miriam Sherman - Brooks Family Papers, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research, Los Angeles, California.

Biography
Isador Brooks (September 1, 1892 - January 6, 1934) came to the United States from Poland in 1906. He first lived in New York City and worked as a pants maker. Soon after his arrival he met Bessie Shapiro, his private English tutor, whom he married in 1912. The couple relocated to Albany, New York, where their three daughters, Miriam, Eleanor and Dorothy were born. In 1927 the family moved to Los Angeles where Isador managed a cooperative restaurant in Boyle Heights. Most of his working life Isador had a dental supply business.

Isador became an active member of the Communist Party in 1919 and was on the Section Committee of the Los Angeles Party. He was a prominent leader in the Pioneers and youth and children’s groups within the party, and was the Educational Director for the Communist Party. In 1932, Isador was arrested by Los Angeles Police Chief William F. Hynes’ Red Squad. He was so severely beaten by them that it permanently affected his health and he died two years later.

After Isador’s death Bessie continued to run the dental supply business, then moved back to Albany, New York where she married Dan Halpert in 1936. They returned to Los Angeles, but separated. Bessie later married Max Hirsh.

Miriam, the eldest Brooks daughter, was born March 26, 1915. She attended Theodore Roosevelt High School in Los Angeles, where she was an honors student. Although she had fulfilled all the requirements for graduation in 1931, she was denied a diploma because she refused to sign a paper saying she would no longer be a member of the Young Communist League. As a consequence, Miriam was denied entrance to college.

In November 1932 Miriam was the International Labor Defense (ILD) youth delegate to the World Congress of the International Red Aid in Moscow, as part of her activities on behalf of the “Scottsboro Nine.” Also in the delegation were: J. Louis Engdahl, head of the ILD, who died in the USSR; Mother Mooney (Tom Mooney’s mother); and Ada Wright (the mother of two of the Scottsboro Boys).

Miriam attended music classes at Chapman College in 1935. Both Miriam and Eleanor became professional artists, Miriam as a pianist and Eleanor as a dancer. Both worked in the UCLA Physical Education Department, Eleanor as a dance teacher and Miriam as a piano accompanist. Eleanor was a dancer with the Lester Horton Dance Company.

Miriam first married Jack Moore, a Communist Party functionary who worked to organize canny workers in San Pedro, and with whom she had daughter. Miriam’s second husband is Allen Sherman, who was expelled from the International Machinists Union in the 1950s because he was accused of being a communist.

In October 1948, a federal grand jury investigating Communist Party activity in Los Angeles called Miriam and nine others in for questioning. Upon refusing to answer questions, the "Los Angeles Ten" were arrested, jailed, and held without bail for an indefinite term. Ben Margolis and John McNern were the attorneys for the "Ten". Miriam was released on her own recognizance at the lawyer’s request she be allowed to return to her three year old daughter. Chief Justice Denman, of the San Francisco U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, ruled that the terms of imprisonment were unconstitutional and the ten were released, having been held for over a week. Called a second time, and again refusing to answer questions, the "Los Angeles Ten" were then accused of contempt of court and sentenced to a year’s imprisonment. This case, which expanded to the "Los Angeles 21", used the Fifth Amendment rights of the defendants as the basis for not responding to the grand jury. All of the "21" were released on bail. This was the first use of the Fifth Amendment in the anti-Communist cases of the era. The Justice Department appealed the release of the "Los Angeles 21" to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a separate but similar case from Denver, the Supreme Court ruled that grand juries could not compel answers to questions such as those posed to the "21". Similar cases during this period, where those who refused to answer questions invoked their First Amendment as protection, were not successful.

In 1949 the University of California implemented a policy of requiring loyalty oaths from faculty, many of whom objected to the practice. During the resulting controversy, California State Senator Jack Tenney launched a campaign against Miriam for her past voter registration with the Communist Party. She was fired from UCLA in 1950, ostensibly for violation of a university anti-nepotism employment policy.

Miriam remained active in education and music, working for decades at Children's Music Center.

Scope and Content
The collection is comprised mainly of correspondence among the Brooks family during the first half of the 20th century. Specifically: from Isador Brooks to his wife Bessie during their courtship and early marriage (1910, 1912); from Isador to his family while he was visiting Los Angeles in the late 1920's; from the three Brooks daughters (Miriam, Eleanor, and Dottie) to their mother and the family (1930s); from Miriam's daughter to her family (1950s), from Miriam's grandfather, Joseph Brooks, to Miriam and her daughter (1952-1953); from two of Miriam's friends, Virgil Rhetta and Jack Eggen, who were members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and were killed in the Spanish Civil War (1938).

There are four reports to the Los Angeles Communist Party by Isador Brooks from the 1930s. One of the reports touches on the factional fight surrounding the Lovestonites.

In addition to correspondence, Miriam Sherman's materials also includes her diary written during the family's cross country trip in 1927 when they moved from Albany, New York to Los Angeles. There is a notebook from her trip to the USSR in 1932 with a photograph of a "send off delegation" (with Karl Yoneda) from the International Labor Defense. Additional photographs show a 1934 meeting of the ILD Southern California Conference, the East Flatbush Young Pioneers, and the State Jamboree of Children's Federation (in California). There is a 1948 memo to the Civil Rights Bar regarding the "Los Angeles 10" case, and an extensive clipping file on the loyalty oaths controversy at the University of California and Sherman's subsequent firing from UCLA. Lastly, there is a 1978 interview with Sherman in a literary magazine of Theodore Roosevelt High School.

**Title:** Citizens Committee to Preserve American Freedom Records  
**Date:**  
**Physical Description:** 1.5 feet  

**Title:** Smith Act Cases Records  
**Date:**  
**Physical Description:** 6 feet  

**Title:** Orilla Winfield Papers  
**Date:**  
**Physical Description:** 1 folder  

**Title:** William Schneiderman Papers  
**Date:**  
**Physical Description:** 17 feet