Description

Quantity: 18 linear feet

Biography/History
Irene Shwachman, born Irene Shirley Quinto on July 30, 1915, in New York City, was the first of four daughters of clothing manufacturer Oscar Quinto and Eva Rosenberg Quinto. Shwachman, who grew up in Manhattan, graduated in 1932 from the Calhoun School, an independent, coeducational, college preparatory school located in New York City's Upper West Side. She also attended New College, Columbia University for three years studying theatrical production and education. Upon leaving New College, Shwachman worked at B. Altman and Company, a New York City-based department store while pursuing theater work.

Shwachman first picked up a camera in 1927, when, at age 12, she borrowed her father’s Kodak No. 3A Autographic Folding Camera and entered an Eastman Kodak photo contest. In 1937 Shwachman married Arnold Dreyfuss and, that same year, she began photographing again, this time using a twin-lens reflex Voiglander camera. In 1938-1939 Shwachman spent time in Puerto Rico and Tucson, Arizona, before attending secretarial school in southern California in 1940 where she lived until she moved back to New York City after Arnold Dreyfuss died of rheumatic heart disease in 1942.

In 1944 Shwachman met and married Harry Shwachman, M.D., a Boston physician with whom she had would eventually have three children. In 1945, the same year their daughter Elizabeth was born, the family moved to Puerto Rico where Irene Shwachman began photographing using 35mm color film. By 1946 the Shwachmans had settled in Massachusetts where Harry Shwachman was director of the Children’s Hospital’s clinical laboratories in Boston. In May 1951, two of her photos were included in a Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibit *Abstraction in Photography*. From the time of the MoMA exhibit until 1968 Shwachman worked as a freelance photographer while taking photography courses, teaching photography courses, and working for the Boston Redevelopment Authority. In 1959 Shwachman met Berenice Abbott eventually working...
for Abbott for eight years. Irene Schwachman continued to photograph and teach photography until her death in 1988.

Chronology

1915    Irene Shirley Quinto born 30 July in New York City.
1927    Borrows father's folding Kodak to enter a photographic contest.
1932-1935 Attends New College at Columbia University, New York City majoring in theatrical production and education.
1935-1936 Works as a sales clerk at B. Altman, NYC.
1936-1937 Studies art and literature independently and looks for jobs in the theater.
1937    Script girl for Kino Art Film Producing Company, Yiddish language film, *Gruene Felder*; salesperson Bonwit Teller, NYC; begins amateur photography using a twin-lens reflex Voiglander camera; marries Arnold Dreyfuss, City Hall, NYC (27 August).
1939    Returns to NYC then moves to Tucson, Arizona.
1940    Settles in southern California; attends secretarial school.
1941-1942 Clerical work at the California Institute of Technology; Arnold Dreyfuss dies of rheumatic heart disease, (July); returns to NYC after husband's death.
1942-1944 Clerical work for Arnold Constable, and Company, NYC.
1944    Marries Harry Shwachman (20 June).
1945    Daughter Elizabeth born (April).
1945-1946 Lives in Puerto Rico; begins photographing again using 35mm color film.
1946    Settles in Boston; son Alan Mark born (30 July); joins Boston Camera Club.
1948    Daughter Joan born (August).
1949    Lives for next 27 years in Newton Center, MA.
1951    MoMA includes two of her photographs in the exhibition *Abstraction in Photography* (May).
1952-1953 Takes evening photography classes at Franklin Technical Institute, Boston and studies black/white photography; builds small darkroom at home.
1954    Produces book with Jean Dietz, a *Boston Globe* writer, about the Mason School in Newton Center, MA.
1959    Meets Berenice Abbott (May); begins *The Boston Document*.
1959-1961 Helps Carl Siemabab begin exhibiting photography; member of photography discussion group which meets at the gallery.
1959-1968 Continues *The Boston Document*.
1960    Builds large professional darkroom.
1962-1963 Photographer for the Boston Redevelopment Authority.
1965    Exhibitions of *The Boston Document* at the Boston Public Library and the New York Public Library.
Chronology (continued)

1966  Dr. John F. Enders' portrait published in World Book Encyclopedia Supplement, photograph was taken during Children's Hospital project.

1966-1968  Photography consultant for the Curriculum Center, Wellesley Public Schools.

1966-1979  Instructor in photography at School of the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA.

1967  Workshop with Minor White (May-June); exhibition in Boston, Emmanuel College; joins Society for Photographic Education (SPE).


1971  Exhibition in Boston, Carl Siembab Gallery.

1972  Harvard summer school course in visual studies with Robert Heinecken (July-August); begins We Grew Up in Manhattan: Notes for An Autobiography; exhibitions in Durham, NH, University of New Hampshire and Worcester, MA, Worcester Art Museum.


1973, 1975  Member of the advisory panel on the visual arts, Massachusetts Council on the Arts.


1979  Decides to concentrate on book works; admitted to University Without Walls, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.


1981  Exhibition in Boston, Carl Siembab Gallery.


1984  Produces artist book titled, We Grew Up in Manhattan: Notes for an Autobiography funded by an Artist's Book Production Grant from the Photographic Resource Center, Boston.

1985  Receives National Endowment for the Arts, Book Artists' Fellowship.

1986  Harry Shwachman dies of a stroke (9 September).

1987  Produces artist book titled, Now You Know: This is Serious Photography. A Photo Workbook.

ca. 1988  Awarded MacDowell Colony residency to work on artist's books.

1988  Irene Shwachman dies (August ).

1989  Retrospective exhibition in Boston, Photographic Resource Center (November).

Scope and Content Note

The Irene Shwachman Collection is divided into four series: Biographical Materials, 1930-1988; Activity Files, 1959-1992; Photographic Materials, 1930s-1980s; and Berenice Abbott Materials, 1959-1986. Although sparse in information about Shwachman’s personal life, the Biographical Materials series includes information about the Quinto family; several copies of her resume; and materials related to her studies at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, the Visual Studies Workshop at Harvard in 1972, and the University Without Walls. Of particular interest are notes from a Visual Studies class taught by Robert Heinecken in 1972. The series also includes two audio interviews with
Shwachman, one in 1978 with the Brockton Art Center done in conjunction with an exhibition of her work there titled “Sightlines” and one in 1983 with Connie Springer. Additional information about Shwachman’s personal life can be found in her pseudo autobiographical manuscript, “Prior Learning Portfolio”, in the Activity Files Series.

The Activity Files series includes announcements, exhibition catalogs, and label text for exhibitions featuring Shwachman’s work, including information about “Sightlines” at the Brockton Art Center in 1978, as well as for exhibitions she curated. There is minimal material in the series related to Shwachman’s teaching but there are some class outlines and notes as well as 35mm transparencies culled from images she used in the classroom. There are several manuscripts in this series including handwritten notes about life in Puerto Rico during 1945 as well as two drafts of “Prior Learning Portfolio,” Shwachman’s pseudo autobiography/extend vita. Shwachman appeared to keep notes her entire life about possible projects so additional writings by her appear throughout the collection and not just in the Activity Files. This series also includes several work logs, 1961-1988, as well and negative registers for prints purchase by the Boston Athenaeum which were part of an exhibition of Shwachman’s photographs titled “Boston Today: The Changing Face of the City, 1959-1961,” at the Athenaeum in 1962

The bulk of the materials in the Activity Files series is contained within the subseries Photographic and Book Projects and documents several projects, published and unpublished, undertaken by Shwachman. The “Boston Document” materials (1959-1987) documents Shwachman’s project to photograph the city of Boston from 1959-1968 and is tied with her work with and interest in the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Included is correspondence with Ellie Reichlin, 1985-1987, of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, about printing the “Boston Document.” The project, however, was never completed. Other projects documented in this subseries includes books written by Shwachman – *Photography for Girls: 1888* consisting of correspondence, notes, grant proposals, 35mm transparencies, and book dummies; *We Grew Up In Manhattan: Notes from an Autobiography*, consisting of family correspondence, a book dummy, a transcript of an oral history interview, and a bound copy of the finished book inscribed to Ellie Reichlin in 1987; and *Now You Know. This Is Serious Photography*, consisting of correspondence, transparencies, proof prints, book dummies, and a monograph.

The Photographic Materials series, which includes both family photographs and Shwachman’s own work, consists of study prints, contact sheet, negatives and transparencies arranged, when possible, by format and then by date and/or subject. The materials related to Shwachman’s family is arranged separately within the series. The majority of the materials are 35mm transparencies and 2 1/4 negatives.

Of particular note in the collection are the materials related to Shwachman’s working relationship and friendship with photographer Berenice Abbott found in the Berenice Abbott Materials series. Shwachman kept a detailed account of her relationship with Abbott in the form of typed and handwritten notes rather than a formal journal.
Beginning with a detailed account their first meeting in May 1959, events and conversations with Abbott are described by Shwachman in a personal and interpretative manner through 1986. The majority of the notes were written between 1959 and 1967, the most active years of their relationship. Additional materials include exhibition announcements and catalogs, newspaper and magazine clippings – most of which pertain to Abbott, writings by Berenice Abbott, publications, correspondence, and photographic materials. Shwachman planned a book about Abbott which would use the journal notes and selected photographs made by Shwachman but the project was never completed.

The Berenice Abbott Materials series also includes information on the beginnings of photographic exhibitions at the Carl Siembab Gallery in Boston in 1959. Included in the Carl Siembab Gallery files is correspondence from and information about gallery and museum people and photographers including Grace Mayer, Edward Steichen, Helen Gee, Paul Caponigro, and Aaron Siskind. This series also contains numerous New York exhibition catalogs from the 1960s and 1970s, information about Abbott’s deliberations concerning the sale of the Atget collection, and Abbott’s writings on Atget.

Photographic materials in the Abbott materials produced by Shwachman consist of contact sheets, prints, and negatives. Abbott is pictured in a variety of domestic situations as well as in formal portraits from 1960-1978. These materials are numbered and described as part of Shwachmans’ planned book project about Abbott.

NOTE: Boxes 5 and 6 were combined with other materials at time of reprocessing in 2014. Boxes 5 and 6 no longer exist but box numbers were not reused.

Copyright
Copyright is held by the heirs of Irene Shwachman.

Provenance

Administrative Information
Collection was partially reprocessed and the finding aid updated in 2014 by Leah Rios, Ruth Ann Richwine, and David Benjamin. NOTE: Boxes 5 and 6 were combined with other materials at time of reprocessing in 2014. Boxes 5 and 6 no longer exist – these box numbers were not reused.
**Container List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Biographical Materials, 1930-1988, undated</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quinto Family Materials, 1930, 1966, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SPE Statement for Ballot, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>University of Massachusetts-Boston, 1967-1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Visual Studies Workshop, Harvard, Notebooks, 1972 July-August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Without Walls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Admission Materials, 1979-1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Correspondence, 1979-1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Essays for Introductory Seminar, 1979-1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Readmission Materials, 1985-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Penland [School of Crafts] Notes, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Brockton Art Center, 1978 November [audiocassette]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connie Springer, 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>[Audiocassette]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Photograph of Shwachman by Springer, 1983 April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Newspaper Clippings Notebook [by and about Shwachman]</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Boxes 5 and 6 were combined with other materials at time of reprocessing in 2014. Boxes 5 and 6 no longer exist – these box numbers were not reused.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Files, 1959-1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exhibitions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Activity Files, 1959-1992 (continued)
- Negative Registers for Prints Purchased by the Boston Athenaeum, 1959-1963
- Photographic and Book Projects, 1983-1987
- “Boston Document”
- Correspondence, 1983-1985, 1987
- Prints Borrowed, 1985
- Negative List, Compiled 1980, 1987
- [Prints]
- Photography for Girls: 1888
- We Grew Up in Manhattan: Notes for an Autobiography
- Now You Know. This Is Serious Photography
- Miscellaneous Project Materials

#### Photographic Materials, 1930s-1980s, undated

**NOTE:** Includes study prints, contact sheets, negatives, and transparencies arranged in chronological order and by subject in some instances. Negatives and contact sheets depicting family are arranged separately. The majority of the photographic material consists of 35mm and 2 1/4 negatives

- Family Negatives
  - 1930s-1950s and undated
  - 1950s-1970s
  - Negatives, 1930s-1970s, undated
    - 2 1/4 and 35mm
  - Undated
  - 1953-1978
  - 2 1/4, 35mm, 4x5 and transparencies, 1959-circa 1980
- Contact Sheets, 1956-1976
- Family, 1954-1968
- Transparencies
- [Possible Book Project Materials]
- Color Proofs and Negatives
- Negatives and Contact Sheets
## Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Journal, 1959-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1959 May 17 – 1962 September 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11B</td>
<td>1-24</td>
<td>1962 September 26 – 1970 September 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Samples of Original Negative Sleeves from Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Research Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes on Abbott Book Project / List of Photographs from Contact Sheets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>Drawing &quot;for Irene, Self-Portrait, Berenice Abbott&quot; [photocopies]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carl Siembab Gallery – Inception, 1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Abbott Correspondence, 1959-1960 [carbon copies, possibly typed for Abbott by Shwachman]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Print list of Atget photographs used in <em>A Vision of Paris</em>, 1960 ed. of Arthur Trottenberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writings by Abbott, 1940, 1951-1952, 1961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contact Sheets and Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

Index to Bernice Abbott Correspondence

Note: The index lists only correspondence contained in the Berenice Abbott Materials series. Correspondence with museums at universities is listed under the museum name. Folders are labeled with the date span of the materials they contain therefore the month and year of each article of correspondence is listed after the name of the correspondent to make locating the material easier.


Alexander, Barbara, see Baxter Art Gallery
Baxter Art Gallery, 12/81
Boyle, Kay, 8/64
Dalhousie University, 7/72, 9/72
Dorr Foundation, 7/59
Ealand, Maria, see United States Information Agency
Fraser, John, see Dalhousie University
Goodwin, Claribal, see Dorr Foundation
Hudson River Museum, 12/81
Jareckie, Stephen B., see Worcester Art Museum
Kuhlthau, Margareta, 5/59
Ludwig, Coy, see Hudson River Museum
Museum of Modern Art, 11/70
Peters, Helen, see WGBH TV Boston
Szarkowski, John, see Museum of Modern Art
United States Information Agency, 1/60
WGBH TV Boston, 6/67
Worcester Art Museum, 5/59, 6/86