
Language of Material: German

Contributing Institution: USC Libraries Special Collections

Title: Walter A. Klinger papers

creator: Klinger, Walter A.

creator: Klinger, Hertha Bley

Identifier/Call Number: 6044

Physical Description: 6.67 Linear Feet 13 boxes

Date (inclusive): c. 1631-2002

Date (bulk): bulk

Abstract: The Walter A. Klinger (1912-2003) papers consists of photographs, correspondence, clippings, and typescripts that document the pre-war Austrian lives of Walter, his wife Hertha, and father Adolf; their emigration via Trinidad in the early 1940's; and from their lives in the United States. Walter A. Klinger was born May 12, 1912 in Vienna, Austria. In 1929, he began working for Warner Bros. in Vienna, and subsequently spent his entire career working in some aspect of the film industry. He and his family emigrated to the United States in 1940, settling in Los Angeles. He died on March 15, 2003 in Camarillo, California.

Biographical note

Walter A. Klinger was born May 12, 1912 in Vienna, Austria to Adolf Klinger and his wife Julia Bellak Klinger. He attended the Academy of Commerce, followed by business school. From school age, he worked toward fluency in French and English in addition to his native German, skills that would prove to be useful to him in his later work. Beginning in 1929, Klinger moved from his job for Warner Bros. in Vienna to Berlin and worked for the American Film Industry, and later Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. On September 22, 1935, Klinger married Hertha Bley, daughter of Paul Bley and Josefine Koffler Bley, in Vienna. Hertha had attended the Wiener Handelsakademie fuer Maedchen and graduated in 1930.

In about 1933, Klinger fled Berlin, which by then was under Nazi control. In a later short essay he composed about his life, he claimed that a threatening phone call from a Nazi official caused him to leave; he traveled first to Switzerland and then to Nice, France, where he began writing anti-Nazi propaganda for the Ligue Contre L'Antisemitism. But because he worked for M.G.M., they were able to transfer him to Vienna, where he worked until about 1937. At this time, he moved to a similar position at Warner Bros., also in Vienna.

In March 1938, Austria was annexed by Nazi Germany, and the Klingers fled in June, taking with them their only living relatives, Walter's father (Adolf Klinger) and Hertha's mother (Josefine [Josephine] Bley). Stopping first in Amsterdam, the group eventually made it to Trinidad, then a part of the British West Indies. While in Trinidad, Klinger used the time to continue to work for Warner Bros. as well as to establish his own screen advertising company. He also began to learn Spanish, eventually becoming nearly fluent. Walter and Hertha remained in Trinidad until about 1940; after the fall of France in 1940, they were declared enemy aliens and placed in internment camps. Hertha and Walter were able to emigrate to the United States in 1941 and eventually became citizens. Adolf and Josephine remained in Trinidad. Adolf was not able to emigrate to the U.S. until 1947.

Going by way of St. Louis, Missouri and Portland, Oregon, Walter and Hertha made it to Los Angeles by May 27, 1941. He soon after found a position within the Foreign Department of Warner Bros. Studios. Walter worked there until 1943, when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. A member of the 4th Armored Division Artillery, he started as a Private and rose to the rank of Master Sergeant (Grade 1). He was also a part of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) headed by Dwight Eisenhower. Within SHAEF, Walter worked under the Psychological Warfare Division, particularly in the Film Control and Distribution Sections, serving in England, France and Germany. He was a part of the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) and Office of War Information (O.W.I.), the former of which eventually became the peacetime C.I.A.

After the German surrender, Walter was placed in charge of Arts in Bavaria. When his military service ended in 1946, Walter was honorably discharged and returned again to Warner Bros. to work on pro-American propaganda being sent to Latin American countries. After leaving Warner Bros. in 1949, he sold motion picture production equipment for twenty years before retiring. He continued to be involved in the motion picture industry in some way or another before retiring in 1972; he was highly involved in negotiations to bring the story of Austrian family singers the Von Trapps to the stage in 1963, in a production eventually known as "The Sound of Music." Walter Klinger died on March 15, 2003 in Camarillo, California.

[Information about Walter Klinger's life was compiled partially through his own testimony in a short essay he wrote to account for his immigrant status upon being drafted into the U.S. Army. Other sources for information were his official army file, his resumes, and other documents, including birth and death certificates.]

Scope and Content