

*The Jacob P. Adler  
Family Photograph Collection  
1870's - 1930's  
Finding Aid*



*Archives and Special Collections*





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Cover photograph: Jacob P. Adler on the cover of a song sheet

Back cover photograph: Jacob P. Adler's Grand Theatre, corner of Bowery and Grand Street, New York City, circa 1908

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Accession Number: 94-01

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Location: Range 6 Section 8 Shelf 45

Archivist: Julio L. Hernandez-Delgado, Associate Professor  
Dr. Louise S. Sherby, Professor

Assistant: Mr. Joel Berkowitz

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## INTRODUCTION

The Jacob P. Adler Family Photograph Collection was donated to Archives & Special Collections in 1994, by Lulla Adler Rosenfeld, granddaughter of Yiddish actor Jacob P. Adler. More than half of the original 81 photographs in the collection documents Adler and his family, including his third wife, Sara, and their children, Celia, Frances, Julia, and Stella Adler. (See Scope and Content Note). Also included in the collection are portraits and production photographs of other prominent figures of the Yiddish theatre in the United States.

The oldest materials in the collection date from Adler's youth and include greeting cards which date after his demise. The bulk of the material spans from the first years of the modern Yiddish theatre in the 1870's until the 1930's, when several of Adler's children were active in the Yiddish theatre in New York City.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jacob (Yankov) Pavlovich Adler was born to Feivel (Pavlov) Abramovich Adler and his wife Hessye Halperin Adler on February 12, 1855 in Odessa, Ukraine (Russia). He attended chaidar (Hebrew school) until age 12 when he was sent to work in a textile factory. He had a variety of jobs (boxer, custom peddler, ataman (leader) for the actress Olga Glebova, and copyist) and served in the Russian Army Medical Corps during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877. After the war, he met Yisroel Rosenberg and thus began Adler's love of Yiddish Theater. He joined Rosenberg's troupe and made his acting debut as Glubman in *Breindele Cossack* in Kherson, a small town outside of Odessa.

Adler married Sonya Michelson, a fellow troupe member, in 1880. They had a daughter Rivka (Rebecca) whom they called Nunia. On August 7, 1883, Yiddish Theater was banned throughout Russia. In November, the Adler's left Odessa for London arriving in December 1883. While still in London, Rivka died of croup at the age of three e. In spring 1885, Sonya gave birth to a son, Abram (Abe). Shortly after giving birth, Sonya fell ill and died at the age of 27 in 1886. While still married to Sonya, Adler had an affair with the actress Jennya Kaiser, who bore him a son, Charles, in 1886. Jacob and Jennya never married. Adler married another actress, Dinah Shtettin, even though he was still in love with Jennya.

On January 18, 1887, a tragedy occurred at Smith's Theater that resulted in 17 deaths, even though there was no actual fire. This essentially was the end of Yiddish theater in London. Thus Adler and his troupe had to move on yet again. In February 1887, he left for America leaving his wife behind with the understanding that she would follow him if all went well. His son Abram travelled with him. After arriving in New York City, they immediately left for Chicago. He had some small success in Chicago but soon returned to New York City leaving behind his son, Abram, with a diamond merchant named Kean and his wife. They promised to raise him and see that he got an education.

He stayed in New York for a short time and then returned to London where he saw Jennya and his son Charles. He then left for Warsaw where his wife Dinah joined him. They stayed there for two years with some success in the theater. In early 1889, he returned to London and by spring of that year, he was back in New York City. Dinah finally joined him there later that year. On December 8, 1891, Dinah gave birth to a girl named Tzirake (later Celia).

Adler left New York to go "on the road" in Philadelphia. There he met Mrs. Sara Heine (née Levitskaya) while both were members of Boris Thomashefsky's troupe. Rumors of their growing attraction reached Dinah Adler and she followed him to Philadelphia. To avoid a scandal, Adler left the troupe and went back to Chicago while Dinah stayed in Philadelphia to perform. After some success in Chicago, he returned to New York, the heart of Yiddish theater, along with Sara Heine and formed his own troupe. Sara Heine finally received a divorce from her husband, Maurice, in 1891. Shortly after, Jacob and Dinah amicably divorced as well. Dinah eventually married Sigmund Feinman who raised Celia as his own daughter. Dinah remained friendly with Adler and remained in his theater troupe. Fall 1891, Jacob married his third wife, Sara Heine, who also remained in his troupe of actors.

Around this time, Adler connected with Jacob Gordin, a Yiddish playwright. Together they

changed the Yiddish theater from the light fare and operettas that were then common to more serious fare such as *The Yiddish King Lear*, *Uriel Acosta*, and *The Wild Man*. In 1903, Adler played perhaps his greatest role that brought him recognition as one of the greatest actors of his time – Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*. He played this role to great success in the Yiddish theater and was even persuaded to perform it on Broadway, his Shylock speaking Yiddish among all the other actors speaking English and garnering rave reviews in the general press as well as the Yiddish press.

Jacob and Sara had five children together – Luther, Stella, Julia, Jay and Francis (Nunia). Of all his children, only Celia (Dinah's daughter), achieved success in the Yiddish theater although many of his children performed on stage or took on other roles, such as producer, in the theater.

In the summer of 1920, Jacob Adler suffered a stroke at a cottage the family rented in Pine Hill, NY. He recovered sufficiently enough to play in a series of “farewell” performances held to provide an income to pay living expenses. He died during Passover on March 31, 1926. His body lay in state at the Hebrew Actors Club where thousands gathered to pay their last respects. His funeral procession on April 2<sup>nd</sup> was described by the *New York Times* as a “demonstration on the lower east side seldom equaled in the history of New York.” (*New York Times*, April 3, 1926, p. 17) Sara Adler died April 28, 1953 at the age of 93.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Jacob P. Adler Family Photograph Collection initially contained 81 photographs relating to the Yiddish theatre and to individuals who elevated it to its grandeur in the United States. However, due to inexplicable circumstances, the collection now contains 67 photographs. (The missing photographs are indicated in the Container List). All but five of the items in the collection are photographs, of which more than half of the collection features members of the Adler family. Most prominently featured in the photographs are Jacob P. Adler and his third wife, Sara Adler, stars of the early Yiddish theatre; several of their children who also became professional actors: Frances, Julia, Luther, and Stella, Celia Adler, and Yiddish actor Joseph Schoengold, husband of Frances Adler and father of Lulla Adler Rosenfeld, the collection's donor.

In addition to the Adler family, the collection contains portraits of Avrom Goldfadn, Bertha Kalish, David Kessler, and Bessie Thomashefsky who were leading personalities of the Yiddish theatre. Also included are production photographs of the 1928 revival of Jacob Gordin's *Der vilder mentsh* [The Wild Man], starring several of Jacob P. Adler's children. In the revival, Luther Adler played the title role, which his late father had made famous.

Some of the photographs in the collection that may be of particular interest to aficionados of Yiddish theatre include studio portraits of several key performers previously mentioned, production photographs, a photograph of Adler's Grand Theatre; and personal images of Adler with several of his children, Jacob P. Adler's funeral in 1926, and Stella Adler as a baby.

One of the main drawbacks of the collection is that many of the photographs are from published works on the Yiddish theatre. Nevertheless, the collection provides glimpses of one of the great theatrical genres of the twentieth century.



## SERIES DESCRIPTION

### **Series I – Adler Family Personal Photographs**

Photographs involving the family away from their theatrical activities. Arranged approximately in chronological order. The photographs involve four generations of the Adler family, from Jacob P. Adler's mother to several of his grandchildren.

### **Series II – Adler Family Theatre Portraits**

Photographs of family members onstage or in studio portraits. Arranged alphabetically by individual. Included are photographs of Celia, Frances, Jacob, Julia, Luther, and Sara Adler, and Joseph Schoengold (husband of Frances).

### **Series III – Yiddish Theatre Personnel**

Photographs of other figures in the Yiddish theatre. Arranged alphabetically by personal name, plus one large group portrait.

### **Series IV – Production Photographs**

Arranged alphabetically by title. Photographs 66-71 are of the production of *Der vilder mentsh* [The Wild Man] featuring several of Jacob and Sara Adler's children.

### **Series V – Miscellaneous**

Photographs, notes, postcard and greeting cards, and a playbill from the revival of Jacob Gordin's *Without a Home* (based on *On a beym* [Homeless]).

## CONTAINER LIST

### SERIES I – ADLER FAMILY PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHS

#### Box Folder Contents

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 1 | Khasye Adler, Jacob's mother, from photograph printed in Yiddish newspaper. Top reads, "Jacob P. Adler's mother." Bottom reads, "Khasye Adler as she looked at 80 years old." (Image 1*) |
|   |   | Sonya Mikhelson Adler, Jacob P. Adler's first wife, 1879. (Image 2)  |
|   |   | Jacob P. Adler and six of his children; from left to right: Luther, Stella, Julia, Jay (Irving), Nunya (Frances), Abe. (Image 3)   |
|   |   | Jacob P. Adler with three of his grandchildren; from left to right: Lulla Schoengold, Alan Adler, and Pearl Schoengold. Pine Hill, N.Y. 1920. (Image 4)                                  |
|   |   | From left to right: Jacob P. Adler, Sara Adler, Peter Graff. (Image 5)   |
|   |   | Jacob and Sara Adler, in a photograph taken shortly before Jacob's death. (Image 6)  |
|   |   | Funeral of Jacob P. Adler, Second Avenue, New York City, 2 April 1926. (Images 7-8)  |
|   |   | Jacob P. Adler in his casket. (Image 9*)   |
|   |   | Celia Adler as a girl; photograph from her memoirs, <i>Tsili Adler dertseylt</i> [Celia Adler Recalls], volume 1. (Image 10)   |
|   |   | Stella Adler as a baby. (Image 11)   |
|   |   | Charles Adler and his wife, Emily Earle (daughter of Yiddish actor Gustave Schacht) (Image 12*)  |

### SERIES II – ADLER FAMILY: THEATRE PORTRAITS

#### Subseries 2.1 Celia Adler

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | Celia Adler (Image 13)   |
|   |   | With Jacob Ben-Ami in scene from unidentified play. (Image 14) |

\*Missing photographs

## SERIES II – ADLER FAMILY: THEATRE PORTRAITS

### Subseries 2.2 Frances Adler

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Contents</u>
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1	3	<p>In Jacob Gordin's <i>Die emesse kraft</i> [The True Power], 1904. Photograph from the <i>New York Telegraph</i>, November 6, 1904. (Image 15)</p> <p>Frances Adler, 1927 (Image 16)</p> <p>With her brother Charles in <i>Millions</i> (1930). (Image 17)</p> <p>Frances Adler. (Image 18)</p> <p>With husband Joseph Schoengold in scene from an unidentified play. (Image 19)</p>
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### Subseries 2.3 Jacob P. Adler

1	4	<p>Earliest known photographs of Jacob P. Adler. (Images 20-21)</p> <p>In title role of Jacob Gordin's <i>Der vilder mentsh</i> [The Wild Man] (Image 22)</p> <p>In Gordin's <i>Der fremder</i> [The Stranger]. (Image 23*)</p> <p>As Zelig Itsik Klezmer in Gordin's <i>Reyzele</i>, an adaptation of Schiller's <i>Kabale und Liebe</i>. (Image 24)</p> <p>In Cameo from various roles: (Image 25)</p> <p>[Top, Left to Right: title role in Gordin's <i>Elisha ben Avnye</i>; Shloyme Khokhem; Title role in Karl Gutzkow's <i>Uriel Acosta</i>; Zelig in Gordin's <i>Reyzele</i>] [Middle: <i>Uriel Acosta</i>; title role in Gordin's <i>Der yidisher galakh</i> [The Jewish Priest]; two unidentified cameos] [Bottom: Dovid in Gordin's <i>Yidisher kenig Lir</i> [The Jewish King Lear]</p> <p>A historic partnership between Jacob P. Adler and Boris Thomashefsky [Seated left to right. Standing, Left to Right: Abe Adler, Peter Schmuckler, Joseph Edelstein, Mrs. Schmuckler, Mr. Epstein, Edwain Relkin.] (Image 26)</p> <p>On the cover of a song sheet. (Image 27)</p>
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\*Missing photographs

## **SERIES II – ADLER FAMILY: THEATRE PORTRAITS**

### **Subseries 2.4 Julia Adler**

#### **Box Folder Contents**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 5 | In an unidentified play. (Image 28)   |
|   |   | As Jessica in David Warfield's Broadway production of <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (1922 -1923 season). (Image 29) |
|   |   | In <i>Millions</i> (1930). (Image 30)   |

### **Subseries 2.5 Luther Adler**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | Luther Adler. (Image 31)                                  |
|   |   | In Gordin's <i>Der metureff</i> [The Lunatic]. (Image 32) |

### **Subseries 2.6 Sara Adler**

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 7 | Sara Adler. (Images 33-35)   |
|   |   | As Katusha Maslova in Tolstoy's <i>Resurrection</i> . (Images 36-37) |

### **Subseries 2.7 Schoengold, Joseph (husband of Frances Adler)**

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 8 | In title role of a 1924 production of <i>Uriel Acosta</i> . (Image 38) |
|   |   | In an unidentified play. (Image 39*)                                   |
|   |   | With an unidentified child actor. (Image 40)                           |
|   |   | With Ludwig Satz in an unidentified musical comedy, 1929. (Image 41*)  |

\*Missing photographs

### SERIES III – YIDDISH THEATRE PERSONNEL

#### Box   Folder   Contents

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 1  | 9 | Jacob P. Adler and other leading figures of early New York Yiddish theatre. Left to Right: David Kessler, M. Krastoshinsky, Rudolph Marks, Siegmund Mogulesko, Siegmund Feinman, and Jacob P. Adler. (Image 42) |
|    |   | Osip Dimov, playwright. (Image 43*)   |
|    |   | Emma Thomashefsky Finkel, actress. (Image 44)   |
|    |   | Maurice Finkel, actor/manager, probably taken in the late 1890's. (Image 45)  |
|    |   | Avrom Goldfadn, playwright, supposedly taken in 1877, probably in Romania. (Image 46)   |
|    |   | Socher and Sophia Goldstein (later Sophia Karp), actors in Goldfadn's company in Romania, probably taken late 1870's. (Image 47)  |
|    |   | Jacob Gordin, playwright. (Images 48-50)  |
| 10 |   | Bertha Kalish as Etenyu in Gordin's <i>Der kroytser sonate</i> [The Kreutzer Sonata]; photo from Zalmen Zylbercweig, <i>Leksikon fun yidishn teater</i> , 4:2451. (Image 51)                                    |
|    |   | Bertha Kalish in <i>Monna Vanna</i> . (Images 52-53)  |
|    |   | Esther Rokhl Kaminska and her daughter Ida, leading Yiddish actresses in Poland. (Image 54)   |
|    |   | David Kessler in the title role of David Pinski's <i>Yankl der shmied</i> [Yankl the Blacksmith]. (Image 55)  |
|    |   | Keni Liptzin, actress, probably taken in the late 1880s. (Image 56)   |
|    |   | Writer Sholem Aleichem (pen name Sholem Rabinovitsh). (Image 57)  |
|    |   | Bessie Thomashefsky, actress. (Image 58)  |

\*Missing photographs

## SERIES IV – PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

### Box Folder Contents

- 1 11 *Der dibuk* [The Dybbuk] by Joseph Lateiner (Odessa, 1884). Left to Right: Sabina Laksas as the Angel, Siegmund Mogulesko as Grandmother Eve. Photograph from Zalmen Zylbercweig, *Albom fun yidishn teater*, 92. (Image 59\*)
- Celia Adler and Paul Muni in *A Flag is Born*, by Ben Hecht. (Image 60\*)
- Dos groyshe gevins* [The Big Win], by Sholem Aleichem. Recital directed by Maurice Schwartz at the Yiddish Art Theatre, New York. Seated at far right is Paul Muni. (Image 61\*)
- Der iberiker mentsh* [The Extra Man], by Zalmen Libin. (Image 62)
- Mitn rebns koyekb* [With the Rabbi's Strength]. Hopkinson Theatre, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1920's. Joseph Schoengold is second from the left. (Image 63\*)
- Shklavn fun folk* [Slaves of the Public], by Osip Dimov, a satire on the early American Yiddish theatre. (Image 64)
- Der shturm fun lebn* [The Storm of Life], by Leon Kobrin. The playwright reading the script to the company; Left to Right: Samuel Rosenstein, Bella Gudinska, Boris Thomashefsky, Leon Blank, Bessie Thomashefsky, Zygmund Weintraub, Rebecca Weintraub, and Bina Abramowitz. (Image 65)
- 1 12 *Der vilder mentsh* [The Wild Man], by Jacob Gordin, in a 1928 revival starring several of the Adlers. (Images 66-71)
- Frances Adler and Joseph Schoengold. (Image 66)
- Left to Right: Frances Adler, Joseph Schoengold, Stella Adler. (Image 67)
- France and Luther Adler. (Image 68)
- Left to Right: Julia, Jay, Luther, Charles, and Abe Adler. (Images 69-70)
- Left to Right: Jay Adler, Joseph Schoengold, Luther Adler. (Image 71)
- Yede froy* [Everywoman], by Walter Brown (New York, 1911). Photograph from Zylbercweig, *Albom*, 25. (Image 72)
- Dos yidische harts* [The Jewish Heart], by Joseph Lateiner. Left to Right: David Kessler, Jennie Goldstein, Malvina Lobel. (Image 73)

\*Missing photographs

## SERIES IV – PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

**Box   Folder   Contents**

1      12      *Yisroyls bofnung* [Israel's Hope], by Leon Kobrin, starring Bertha Gersten and Boris Thomashefsky. Photograph from Zylbercweig, Albom, 43. (Image 74\*)

**SERIES V – MISCELLANEOUS**

1      13      Photocopy of Luther Adler's notes on how to play Hitler. (Image 75)

Postcard of Maxim Gorky and Skitales. (Image 76\*)

Greeting card featuring four Jewish writers: Mendele Moykher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, Mordecai Ben-Ammi and Hayyim Nahman Bialik. (Image 77)

Jacob P. Adler's Grand Theatre, the first theatre in America built specifically for Yiddish performances, corner of Bowery and Grand Street, New York City, circa 1908. (Image 78)

Playbill from revival of Jacob Gordin's *Without a Home* (based on *On a heym* [Homeless]) featuring the children of Jacob Adler, Cleveland, Ohio. (Image 79)

Greeting card with Helen Beverly and David Opatoshu in a film of Mendele Moykher Sforim's *Fishke der krumer* [Fishke the Lame]. March 16, 1991. (Image 80)

Pearl Pearson and John O'Malley in *Gods of the Lightning* by Maxwell Anderson. (Image 81)

\*Missing photographs

