

HYMAN SAMUELSON DIARIES
Mss. 4934

Inventory

by
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Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library
Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

2005

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Summary

Size	.5 linear ft (9 v.)
Geographic Locations	Louisiana (primarily Baton Rouge and New Orleans), Fort Benning, Ga., West (U.S.), York, N.Y., Chicago, Ill.
Inclusive Dates	1936-1940.
Languages	English.
Summary	Diaries reflect the intellectual, physical and social development of a young Jewish college student from New Orleans, La. Diaries relate primarily to academic, recreational and social activities, but also contain entries concerning World War II, African Americans, astronomy, religion, and travel.
Access Restrictions	None.
Copyright	Physical rights and copyright are retained by the LSU Libraries.
Citation	Hyman Samuelson Diaries, Mss. 4934, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Stack Location	O:22

Biographical/Historical Note

Hyman Samuelson was born to Jewish parents, Rebecca Babetch and Samuel Jacob Samuelson, in Donaldsonville, La., April 11, 1919. He grew up in New Orleans, where his father operated a clothing store. Hyman enrolled at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, in the fall of 1936. While at LSU he participated in several organizations, including Kappa Nu, a Jewish social fraternity; Sigma Tau Sigma, a professional engineering society; and Tau Beta Pi, a national engineering honor society (v. 7-9). He also took part in professional organizations and attended conventions in Louisiana and Jacksonville, Fla. He joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) as a freshman and became an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve. After graduating summa cum laude with a degree in civil engineering in June 1940, he received a teaching fellowship to Tulane University in New Orleans to continue his studies in civil engineering in the fall semester. During summer of 1941, Samuelson performed engineering work at the Burrwood, La., naval base near the mouth of the Mississippi River. He was called into active service in September and reported to the 96th Engineer Battalion (Colored), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Captain Samuelson was one of two officers in command of the first African American troops who came under enemy fire during World War II.

Hyman Samuelson married Dora Reiner of New Orleans, La. on Dec. 28, 1941; she died of cancer three years later, at the age of 23. They had one son, Ian, born Dec. 1942, who also died prematurely on Christmas Day 1946 in a tragic accident. Hyman married his second wife, Louise Anderson, and they had four children. After the war, Hyman quit engineering and moved to Austin, Tex., where he established the men's clothing store, Slax Menswear. He retired in 1996.

Scope and Content Note

Hyman Samuelson diaries offer insight into the development of a young Jewish man attending college in the 1930s and the youth of the New Orleans Jewish community. His intellectual, physical and social growth is reflected through his personal observations, opinions, and concerns pertaining to the events and people around him. Diaries narrate his experiences during the years (1936-1940) he attended Louisiana State University as a military cadet and civil engineering student. He reports on all aspects of his life during this period, including his personal relationships with family and friends; participation in social and academic organizations; class assignments; study sessions; religion; personal finances; travel; entertainment; and social activities. Many of his entries concern recreational and social activities in both Baton Rouge and New Orleans, such as movies, dances, LSU football games, sports, and radio programs. Throughout the diaries, Samuelson discusses his personal growth, goals, and his interpersonal relationships, especially with Dora Reiner.

Diaries begin with Samuelson describing initiation activities and his daily duties as a cadet (1936-1937). He describes rifle training (March-April 1937), and later discusses his responsibilities as an ROTC officer (Sept.-Oct. 1938; Jan. 18, Oct. 25, 1939; March 6, 11, May 22, 1940). He gives an account of his training in military engineering, weapons use, chemical warfare and KP duty during his six-week assignment at Fort Benning, Ga. (June 11-July 19, 1939). Samuelson also expresses concern over changes in the LSU ROTC program, which reflect the changes in the U. S. armed services (Sept. 11, 19, 1939). Additionally, he comments on a letter sent to the acting president of LSU from the president of Tulane University suggesting that the LSU cadet corps not attend a football game in New Orleans because fighting might erupt (Nov. 19, 1939).

Entries on travel and recreational activities describe hitchhiking between Baton Rouge and New Orleans for weekend visits; Mardi Gras parades (Feb. 4, 1937, Feb. 20, 1939); summer picnics and swimming at Lake Ponchartrain, Bayou St. John, and Covington, La.; and visiting family in Covington. They tell of traveling by train with other cadets to Birmingham, Ala. (Nov. 13, 1936) and Knoxville, Tenn. (Oct. 28, 1938) for LSU football games and a trip to the Mississippi Gulf Coast with friends (Dec. 26-29, 1936). Entries in v. 3 detail a family trip across country by car (July 1937), describing the Badlands and effects of drought in South Dakota (July 8), the progress on the carving of Mount Rushmore (July 9), Yellowstone National Park (July 11), Salt Lake and Salt Lake City, Utah (July 13, 14), Bolder Dam (July 15), Los Angeles, Palm Springs, low price for fresh fruit in Calif. (July 16, 17), and the deserts of The West. Samuelson gives a detailed description, with drawings, of the levee and swamp along the Mississippi River near LSU (April 25, 1937), and the landscape surrounding Bogue Falaya (July 26, 1937) and Little Bogue Falaya near Covington, La., (July 6, 1938). Samuelson also writes of spending time shopping and attending the movie theaters in downtown Baton Rouge.

Samuelson tells of muddy road conditions and working in the cotton fields while en route to Fort Benning, Ga. (June 11, 1939). He recounts his experiences hitchhiking and sightseeing (July-Aug. 1939) in Washington D. C. (July 21-22, 1939), New York City, the New York World's Fair (July 23-Aug. 2, 1939), and to visit family in Chicago (Aug. 6-11, 1939).

Entries regarding World War II include references to the Jewish situation in Germany (Feb. 26, 1939), Adolph Hitler (May 30, Oct. 12, 1939), the British ambassador to Germany (Aug. 27, 31, 1939), attack on Poland and the state of British and French forces (Sept. 3, 4, 6 1939). Entries give updates on the developments in Poland, France, and Britain (Sept. 12, 20, 1939). Samuelson reports on the assassination of the Prime Minister of Romania and Nazi supporters causing trouble (Sept. 21, 1939). He discusses Poland's collapse, Germany's invasion, and Russia's troops crossing into Poland, and expresses the need for U. S. participation in the war and the repeal the Neutrality Act (Sept. 17, 1939). He also reports that the British refused Hitler's peace proposal, and states that the war news is contradictory with both sides claiming victories (Oct. 16, 1939). Other entries pertain to the sinking of a British battleship (Oct. 14, 1939), a cessation in fighting in the Finland-Russian war (March, 13, 1940), and Germany's invasion of Denmark, with the probable invasion of Norway (April 8, 1940). Samuelson gives brief descriptions of Germany's military actions and comments on Germany's success in Northern Europe (April 30, May 2, 11, 1940). He comments on a speech by Roosevelt calling for increased national security, and voices strong criticism of Mussolini and the Italians for allying with Germany (May 26, 1940).

There are few references to African Americans (June 21, 1937; May 11, Nov. 27, 1938; May 30, June 11, July 14, Aug. 6, 1939). However, Samuelson does describe the difficulty in finding a cook for the family while vacationing in Covington (June 17, 1937). Of particular interest is an entry concerning an African American family at Elm Hall sugar plantation. By describing their living conditions and circumstances, the passage illustrates the extreme poverty of the plantation worker and his family (Aug. 16, 1937). Samuelson also comments Joe Louis' boxing matches (June 22, Aug. 29, 1937), Armstrong-Ambers match, and the participation of African Americans in sports (Aug. 17, 1938). Notations relating to economic conditions include his observations on a shortage of money among people (March 3, 1937); hardship and worry seen in the faces of WPA workers (June 9, 1937); and comments by a stranger on the objectives of the sulfur industry and labor problems (June 4, 1939).

Personal religious views are expressed at length (March 17, April 18, 1937) and referred to throughout the diaries. He also mentions religious observances (March 1937; Sept. 6-7, 14, 1937; Sept. 26, Oct. 5, 1938; Sept. 24, 1939). Other references to Judaism include a conversation with an anti-Semitic complaining that American Jews were pushing for war with Germany (Dec. 22, 1938); mention of the Jewish situation in Germany (Feb. 26, 1939); Colonel Middleton's speech to Jewish students (March 26, 1939), and remarks made by others that Samuelson would not receive a Tulane University fellowship because he was a Jew (June 1, 1940).

Passages concerning prominent individuals tell of Gov. Richard Leche's announcement to send the entire cadet corps to the LSU/Auburn game and possibly the Rose Bowl (Oct. 10, 1936), Eleanor Roosevelt's speech (March 6, 1937), and Col. Middleton's speeches on leadership (Oct. 26, 1937) and the American way of life (March 26, 1939). He expresses his cynicism on Louisiana politics at the election of Governor Samuel Houston Jones (Feb. 21, 1940), and mentions dancing with Russell Long's date (March 25, 1938).

Diaries also record opening ceremonies for the new LSU golf course (Feb. 17, 1937), dedication of the new flag pole (Feb. 20, 1937), repairs made on "sand boils" between the swollen Mississippi River and the LSU stadium (Feb. 18, 1937), debris left by Mississippi River floodwaters (April 20, 1937), a tropical storm (Aug. 14, 1938), and snow in Baton Rouge and New Orleans (Jan. 21-23, 1941). Samuelson mentions inoculations for typhoid and small pox (Sept. 23, Oct. 7, 1936) and a severe reaction to a second injection (Sept. 29, 30, 1936). He describes his flu symptoms (Feb. 28-29, April 14-16, 1939), and hives (Dec. 30-31, 1938). Samuelson exhibits his interest in astronomy by detailing the constellations in the night sky (Sept. 1938 – April 1940) and the position of the planets (Feb. 25, March 15, 1940). Other entries concern with the deaths of his young niece, Lita (Feb. 19., Oct. 13, 1938) and his cousin Mitchell (April 30, 1939); disturbing nightmares (Nov. 18, 1938, March 18, 1939); and witnessing a murder/suicide in Winnsboro, La. (Dec. 22, 1938). Diaries end with Samuelson discussing prospects for employment, interviews, and graduate studies (April-May 1940).

Diaries also contain illustrations, poetry, newspaper clippings [photocopies] (v. 9), photographs (v. 8, v. 9), and transcriptions of conversations and letters. Photographs include Samuelson saluting an officer at camp (undated); an unidentified officer (undated); two identical group photographs of identified individuals at the construction sight of the Mississippi River Bridge (March 18, 1940); group photograph of identified individuals on the bridge; and two group photographs of unidentified cadets (undated).

Note: The diaries were received in loose-leaf binders. For preservation, the pages were removed from the binders and housed in archival folders. Photographs interleaved in the diary were removed to appropriate housing.

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	3		Empty binders