

University of Waterloo Library. Special Collections & Archives.

Sommer family fonds. (GA393)

Summary information

Date: 1918-2008 (date of creation)

Physical description: * 1.1 metres of textual records

* 151 photographs : b&w, some col. ; 21 x 30 cm or smaller

* 1 cross-stitch : embroidery (visual work) on waste canvas ; 15 x 15 cm

Immediate source of acquisition: Donated in 2017.

Administrative history/Biographical sketch

Sommer family

Gisela Sommer and Ulrich Sommer, both from Germany, married and had two children; Cornelius and Angelika. In pursuit of a better quality of life, Gisela and Ulrich immigrated to Canada with their two children in 1954 and settled in Georgetown, Ontario. Initially, the couple worked as farmhands. Eventually, Gisela found work as a dietary assistant in a local hospital and Ulrich opened his own art gallery called Gallery House Sol in 1962.

Purported to be the first art gallery in Georgetown, Ontario, Gallery House Sol primarily collected and displayed contemporary Canadian art for more than 40 years. Both Gisela and Ulrich remained deeply involved in the local artistic community their entire lives.

Angelika Sommer returned to Germany shortly after completing her high school degree in Canada and became involved in German politics during the 1970s and 1980s. Cornelius Sommer worked as a lawyer in Toronto, Ontario.

Over the course of many years, the Sommer family wrote countless letters to each other, their friends and family back home in Germany including Gisela's parents Eduard Hopken and Elisabeth Hopken.

Scope and content

A compilation of personal correspondence consisting mostly of letters exchanged between members of the Sommer family, and occasionally their friends, in Canada or Germany. These letters are interspersed with details of family life and contain observations about the Sommer family's immigration to Canada, educational pursuits, health and well-being, relationships, finances, businesses and careers, and more. Additionally, these letters contain commentary on contemporary social and political events including the aftermath of World War II, Quebec separatism, and German politics during the 1970s and 1980s. The fonds also includes photographs, greeting cards, postcards, pamphlets and related ephemera likely exchanged alongside the letters between family members and friends.

Collection holdings

File 1: Lina (Nini) Neumeyer Raatz: letters, photographs, cards.

Date: 1918-1969 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between Ulrich Sommer and Lina Neumeyer Raatz. Lina Neumeyer Raatz was Ulrich Sommer's aunt and she lived in Germany. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as Lina's death on January 21, 1969. Records include letters, postcards, poems, amateur drawings, and photographs of family members and friends.

File 2: Familienbriefe: 1947-1957.

Date: 1947-1957 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Höpken and Sommer families. Includes several candid letters from Eduard Höpken that describe his experiences during and after World War II as well as the political climate in Germany during the 1950s. Of special interest is a family newsletter written in 1971 by Eduard and his wife Elisabeth Höpken that provides biographical information about their children including Gisela Sommer and her husband Ulrich Sommer, Johann Höpken, Walter Höpken, Karl Höpken, Wilhelm Höpken, and Peter Höpken. Records include letters and postcards.

File 3: Familienbriefe: 1954-1958.

Date: 1950-1959 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as Ulrich Sommer and his wife Gisela Sommer's immigration to Canada with their two children Cornelius Sommer and Angelika Sommer in 1954. Also contains letters confirming Ulrich and Gisela Sommer passed an exam designed for new Canadians that was established by the Government of Ontario's Department of Education Information Branch. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, children's drawings, pamphlets, hand-drawn floor plans, wallpaper samples, a cross-stitch sampler, and photographs of family members.

File 4: Briefwechsel mit Ilse Stein: 1954-1969.

Date: 1954-1969 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family and Ilse Stein. Ilse Stein was a friend of the Sommer family and she lived in Germany. Records include letters, a postcard and photographs of Ilse Stein, her family, and the Sommer family.

File 5: Briefe von Annemarie Boden, Max Boden, Axel and Sibylle Boden, 1954 mit einige briefe von John und Gisela Sommer an Annemarie Boden.

Date: 1954-1990 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between the Sommer family and the Boden family. The Boden family lived in Bonn, Germany and included Annemarie Boden, Max Boden, Axel Boden and Sibylle Boden. Of special interest are letters commenting on social and political matters such as issues of ethnicity, Quebec separatism, and World War II. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, press clippings, a funeral invitation, and photographs of a family home and the University of Bonn in Germany.

File 6: Familienbriefe: 1958-1962.

Date: 1958-1962 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters describing Eduard and Elisabeth Hopken's impending trip to Canada and letters discussing Ulrich Sommer's adult adoption by a man named Friedrich Joachim who lived in Germany. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, floor plans, and a wedding invitation.

File 7: Gallery House Sol: correspondence, press clippings and related material.

Date: 1959-1963 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters discussing Gallery House Sol, an art gallery opened by Ulrich Sommer on Saturday, July 21, 1962. The gallery was located inside Ulrich Sommer's home at 45 Charles Street in Georgetown, Ontario. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, press clippings, children's drawings, a matinee program and a photograph possibly of Elisabeth Hopken reading on a ship in 1961.

File 8: Familienbriefe: 1962-1966.

Date: 1962-1966 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Of special interest is a letter written by Eduard Hopken on May 29, 1965 revealing that he was a dedicated member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany since 1930. Eduard claimed that he reinstated his support for the political party after 1945. In this letter, Eduard wrote about the development of laws to provide the state increased control during emergencies. Also contains correspondence between the Sommer family and Friederich Joachim. Friederich Joachim adopted Ulrich Sommer as an adult and he lived in Germany. Records include letters, post cards, birth announcements, and a funeral invitation.

File 9: Familienbriefe: 1967-1969.

Date: 1967-1969 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as Ulrich Sommer and Cornelius Sommer's studies in university, Angelika Sommer's pending visit with her grandparents, and Lina Neumeyer Raatz's declining health. Lina Neumeyer Raatz was Ulrich Sommer's aunt and she lived in Germany. Also contains correspondence between the Sommer family and the Altenmueller family from Cooksville, Ontario. Records include letters, postcards, and pamphlets.

File 10: Familienbriefe: 1969-1971.

Date: 1969-1971 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence between various members of the Sommer family including letters that describe Cornelius Sommer's European vacation and Angelika Sommer's political involvement in Germany, her Marxist beliefs and her plans to pursue post-secondary education in Germany. Some letters also indicate that Angelika Sommer met and was dating Uwe Schriever, who later becomes her husband. Also includes greeting cards, postcards, a pamphlet, and photographs of Uwe Schriever, and the wedding of Friedemann and Petra (surnames unknown) in March 1970.

File 11: Briefwechsel mit Ilse Stein: 1970-1982.

Date: 1970-1982 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family and Ilse Stein. Ilse Stein was a friend of the Sommer family and she lived in Germany. Includes letters that discuss Angelika Sommer's impending divorce from her husband Uwe Schriever. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, and photographs of Christmas decorations.

File 12: Familienbriefe: 1971-1973.

Date: 1971-1973 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters expressing concern for Angelika Sommer because she was increasingly committed to Communist ideologies and involved in politics in Germany during the 1970s. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, and a press clipping.

File 13: Familienbriefe: 1973-1975.

Date: 1973-1975 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as Eduard Hopken's declining health and Angelika Sommer's relationship with her parents and her husband Uwe Schriever. Records include letters and greeting cards.

File 14: Familienbriefe: 1976-1978.

Date: 1976-1978 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as Cornelius Sommer's university graduation and his plans to open his own law firm as well as Angelika Sommer's move to Hamburg, Germany. Also contains letters describing Ilse Stein's upcoming visit with Ulrich Sommer and Gisela Sommer in Canada. Records include letters, greeting cards, and postcards.

File 15: Familienbriefe: 1979-1980.

Date: 1979-1980 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters sent between Gisela Sommer and Ulrich Sommer that were written while Gisela visited her parents in Germany. Also contains a copy of the last will and testament of Friederich Hopken. Friederich Hopken was Eduard Hopken's brother and he lived in Brazil. Records include letters, greeting cards, and postcards.

File 16: Familienbriefe: 1981-1982.

Date: 1981-1982 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters sent between Gisela Sommer and Ulrich Sommer that were written while Gisela visited her parents in Germany. Of special interest are German press clippings about the development of the German Democratic Republic in the 1980s. Records include letters, greeting cards, and press clippings.

File 17: Briefwechsel mit Ilse Stein: 1983.

Date: 1983-1995 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family and Ilse Stein. Includes letters indicating that Ilse Stein moved from Essen, Germany to Reutlingen, Germany. Ilse Stein was a friend of the Sommer family. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, and photographs of Christmas decorations, animals, buildings, and landscapes.

File 18: Familienbriefe: 1983-1985.

Date: 1983-1985 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as information related to Angelika Sommer's partner Gunther (surname unknown) and Cornelius Sommer's request to his grandmother, Elisabeth Hopken, for a loan of money to buy a house near Toronto, Ontario. Records include letters, greeting cards, and postcards.

File 19: Familienbriefe: 1985-1987.

Date: 1985-1987 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters sent between Gisela Sommer and Ulrich Sommer that were written while Gisela visited her parents in Germany. Of special interest is a letter by Ulrich to Gisela that describes his experience attending Barker Fairley's birthday celebration at University College in Toronto, Ontario on May 21, 1986. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, funeral invitations, and photographs of family members.

File 20: Familienbriefe: 1988-1992.

Date: 1988-1992 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as Angelika Sommer's training and participation in a local choir and Cornelius Sommer's trip to Hamburg, Germany in 1993. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, press clippings, and photographs of family members, events, pets, and a choir.

File 21: Familienbriefe: 1993-1999.

Date: 1993-1999 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family. Includes letters interspersed with details about family life such as information about Angelika Sommer's partner Gunther (surname unknown) and Angelika's concern for Ilse Stein's well-being. Ilse Stein was a friend of the Sommer family and she lived in Germany. Records include letters, greeting cards, postcards, press clippings and, photographs of family members, flowers, buildings, Christmas decorations, and art.

File 22: Family Letters: 1952-2008.

Date: 1952-2008 (date of creation)

Scope and content: Correspondence primarily between members of the Sommer family and Wilhelm and Helga Hopken. Wilhelm and Helga Hopken are Gisela Sommer's brother and sister-in-law. Of special interest is a programme for an exhibit presented by the University of Guelph from January 12, 2001 to March 17, 2001 titled, The John & Gisela Sommer Collection: 40 years of collections at Gallery House Sol. The exhibit featured 111 items, mostly books and prints, collected by Ulrich and Gisela Sommer for their art gallery,

Gallery House Sol. All of the items featured in the exhibit were subsequently donated to the University of Guelph. Records include letters, greeting cards, post cards, a programme, press clippings and, photographs of family members, friends, plants, art, and animals.