

# **Frank Weise collection of Helen Weiss papers**

**Ms. Coll. 1399**

**Finding aid prepared by Jamie Foo, India Halstead, and Jane Robbins Mize.**

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Last updated on April 24, 2019.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2019 April 18

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
<b>Creator</b>	Weise, Frank, 1918-2003
<b>Creator</b>	Weiss, Helen, 1920-1948
<b>Title</b>	Frank Weise collection of Helen Weiss papers
<b>Call number</b>	Ms. Coll. 1399
<b>Date</b>	circa 1940-1948, 1966
<b>Extent</b>	1.5 linear feet (3 boxes)
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Language Note</b>	The bulk of the material in this collection is in English; however, there are few items in Spanish.
<b>Abstract</b>	Helen Weiss (1920-1948) was a Philadelphia composer and musician who worked in South America teaching and performing music. This collection documents the last eight years of Helen Weiss's life through letters to her brother, Frank; her educational and musical achievements; and recordings of her work; as well as her legacy as a musician after her death at age 28.

**Cite as:**

Frank Weise collection of Helen Weiss papers, circa 1940-1948, 1966, Ms. Coll. 1399, Kislak Center

for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

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## Biography/History

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Helen Weiss, born January 29, 1920, was a composer and musician. Born in Brooklyn, she was the daughter of Samuel and Sadie (Friedman) Weiss, both of whom immigrated to the United States from either Austria or Poland. The family, including Helen's two brothers, Bernard (1914-1991) and Frank (1918-2003) moved to Philadelphia, living at Lindley Avenue.

Helen obtained her education at the Philadelphia High School for Girls; at the University of Pennsylvania, earning a B.A. in Music in 1941; at the University of Oklahoma, earning an M.A. in Music in 1942; and the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, earning a Ph.D. in Musical Composition in 1944. She completed her studies at the Philadelphia Conservatory.

Following her studies, Weiss taught "theory, harmony, counter-point, orchestration, choral music, piano, appreciation and history of music," (box 1, folder 11) and performed as a soloist, piano accompanist, choral director, and lecturer. She edited notes of the programs of the University of Pennsylvania Orchestra, was a secretary at Mc-Graw Hill Publishing Company, and worked for the University of Pennsylvania Museum.

In early May, 1945, Helen traveled to Peru where she appears to have become a beloved member of the community. She gave concert lectures and performed and served the Peruvian-North American Cultural Institute by organizing a choral group of young men and women. While in Peru, she became ill with cancer and returned to the United States for medical treatment; including an amputation of her foot. She spent about a month in a New York hospital recovering, before returning to Philadelphia with her family to recuperate. In March of 1947, just around the time that she received her prosthetic leg, she was offered a one year position from the Department of State to work in South America. She accepted the position and returned to South America; but was forced to return to Philadelphia in November 1947, due to a return of her illness. She died from a metastatic malignancy of the right kidney, lungs, and brain on February 20, 1948. Following her death, the Helen Weiss Foundation was established in her memory and concerts were to be held annually.

Throughout her short life, she seems to have been particularly close to her brother Frank, an architect who studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating in 1942. He continued his education at Harvard University, earning his masters in architecture in 1945 and Black Mountain College. He worked in Chicago before returning to Philadelphia in 1949, where he worked on notable projects such as the path of Interstate 95 through the city, the renovation of Head House Square, the adaptation of Eastern State Penitentiary, and the Wilma Theater and the Theater of the Living Arts. He also taught at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and the Moore School of Art and the Philadelphia Museum College of Art.

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection documents the last eight years of Helen Weiss's life through letters to her brother, Frank; her educational and musical achievements; and recordings of her work; as well as her legacy as a musician after her death at age 28.

Series I contains correspondence, mostly from Helen Weiss to her brother, Frank Weiss (later Frank Weise). She writes from Rochester, Philadelphia, Peru, Brazil, New York City, and Philadelphia. Letters discuss her education in Rochester and Frank's education and work in the field of architecture; her pleasure in having her music selected for printing; family relationships (particularly between Frank and their mother); what she was reading; philosophical discussions relating to charitable actions, religion, and cultural comparisons; concerts she attended; her plans for trips to and work giving concert lectures in Peru and South America; her illness and temporary recovery; and world politics, including the end of World War II. In one of the programs for a concert in her memory, following her death, she was described as "a brilliant, courageous, and idealistic young person," and those personality traits can be seen throughout the letters; although she also mentions restlessness and periods of depression. The final folder contains letters from Fred Goldman to Frank Weiss and relates to "a theater fiasco." The relationship between Goldman and Weiss is unclear.

Series II contains biographical material from Helen Weiss's education and also from her time in South America. Of particular interest may be an article written by Weiss on "The United States in Lima," possibly for *Mademoiselle* (she mentioned in a letter to her brother that she had written an article). This series contains memorial concert programs sponsored by the Helen Weiss Foundation (which were to be given annually) and obituaries from both the U.S. and Peru.

Series III contains manuscripts and copies of five musical compositions: "Plaint," "Suite for Piano," "Sonata in A Minor," "Declaration," and "Three Poems for Voice and Orchestra, based on Walt Whitman." There are a number of recordings of Weiss's performance which are restricted from use.

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## Administrative Information

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### Access Restrictions

The bulk of this collection is open for research use; however, access to original audio/visual materials found in Series IV. Recordings is restricted. The Kislak Center will provide access to the information on these materials from duplicate master files. If the original does not already have a copy, it will be sent to an outside vendor for copying. Patrons are financially responsible for the cost. The turnaround time from request to delivery of digital items is about two weeks for up to five items and three to seven weeks for more than five items. Please contact Reprographic Services ([reprogr@upenn.edu](mailto:reprogr@upenn.edu)) for cost estimates and ordering.

Once digital items are received, researchers will have access to the files on a dedicated computer in the Van Pelt-Dietrich

### Use Restrictions

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### **Source of Acquisition**

Gift of Mark Gallini and Andrea Hemmann, 2013.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **FORM/GENRE(S)**

- Audiovisual materials
- Composition (artistic arrangement)
- Concert programs
- Correspondence
- Obituaries
- School yearbooks
- Scores

### **GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)**

- Peru--Description and travel
- South America--Description and travel

### **SUBJECT(S)**

- Cancer--Patients
- Families
- Music
- Music education
- Musicians
- Women musicians

## Collection Inventory

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### I. CORRESPONDENCE.

	Box	Folder
Helen Weiss to Frank Weiss, 1943.	1	1
Helen Weiss to Frank Weiss, 1944.	1	2
Helen Weiss to Frank Weiss, 1945.	1	3
Helen Weiss to Frank Weiss, 1946.	1	4
Helen Weiss to Frank Weiss, 1947.	1	5
Helen Weiss to Frank Weiss, 1948.	1	6
Fred Goldman to Frank Weiss, 1966.	1	7

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### II. BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIALS.

	Box	Folder
Diploma from the University of Oklahoma; yearbook, "The Score," from the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester; and photograph, probably of a performing group, circa 1942-1944.	1	8
Ephemera and material relating to Helen Weiss's travels to Latin America	1	9

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and South America, circa 1946-1948.

Memorial concert programs, after 1948 February, 1950.	1	10
Obituaries, after 1948 February 20.	1	11

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### III. MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS.

	Box	Folder
"Plaint," manuscript, circa 1940-1948.	2	
"Plaint," first printing, 8 copies, annotated, circa 1940-1948.	2	2
"Plaint," song sheet, 2 copies, circa 1940-1948.	2	3
"Plaint," invoice from Harry Reichert Lithographers for 100 copies of song sheet, 1948.	2	4
"Suite for Piano," first printing, 1947.	2	5
"Sonata in A Minor," manuscript, circa 1940-1948.	2	6
"Declaration," manuscript of woodwind, brass, and piano parts, circa 1940-1948.	2	7
"Declaration," copy of string parts, circa 1940-1948.	2	9
"Declaration," onion skin copies of string parts, circa 1940-1948.	2	10
"Three Poems for Voice and Orchestra, based on Walt Whitman," onion skin copy, circa 1940-1948.	2	11

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**IV. RECORDINGS (RESTRICTED).**

Box Folder

27 LP records of Weiss performances, circa 1940-1948.

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