

# Windmueller, Otti Y., Papers

Otti Y. Windmueller papers  
1951-1999

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## Title Statement

Windmueller, Otti Y., Papers A Guide to the Otti Y. Windmueller Papers M 424

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## Profile Description

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**Language Usage:** Description is written in: English, Latin script.

**Descriptive Rules:** Describing Archives: A Content Standard

## Revision Description

**March 2020** Biography, Arrangement, Scope & Content notes revised, consolidated like materials. Rearranged materials. Consolidated from 3 boxes to 2 boxes, added notebooks in map case to finding aid.

## Descriptive Summary

### Unit ID

M 424

### Unit ID

/repositories/5/resources/596

### Unit Date

1951-1999

### Language

English German

### source

Windmueller, Steven

### Extent

1.5 Linear Feet 2 boxes- 1 5" document case, 1 flat newspaper box. 2 folders in a map case

### Repository

VCU James Branch Cabell Library

# Administrative Information

## Conditions Governing Access

There are no restrictions.

## Conditions Governing Use

Collection is open for research.

## Immediate Source of Acquisition

Donated by Steven Windmueller, son of Otti Y. Windmueller, in 2002.

## Preferred Citation

Otti Y. Windmueller papers, Collection Number M 424, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va.

# Biographical / Historical

Ottillie Yohanna Heimann Windmueller was born in Borghorst, Germany, on August 16, 1916, to Albert and Freida Heimann. Otti, as she was known, was the oldest of four children and grew up in an upper-middle class Jewish family. After graduating high school, Otti could not continue her education, even though she wished to, because Nazi laws made it difficult if not impossible for Jews to enter universities or obtain apprenticeships. However, a sympathetic Gentile dressmaker took her on as an apprentice despite the laws prohibiting such a practice. Otti learned tailoring, pattern making, and the dress-making business, first as an apprentice and later as a journeywoman dressmaker.

Otti married Fritz (Fred) Walter Windmueller in February 1938, and two months later, the newlyweds fled Nazi German on the S.S. Volendam. Initially, Otti wished to follow her brother to South Africa, but South Africa's border closed before they could leave. The couple then chose to join Fred's sister Ilse and her family in Richmond, VA. All three of Otti's siblings survived the Holocaust, but her parents died in concentration camps - Albert at Auschwitz and Freida at Theresienstadt. Eventually, the siblings reunited and recorded an oral history, which can be found at the Jacob Radar Marcus Center of Jewish American Archives in Cincinnati.

Otti and Fred arrived in Richmond nearly penniless. Drawing on her dressmaking experience, she found work doing alterations, saved money to buy fine fabrics, and created dresses on the side for private clients. During this time, the Windmueller's had a son, Steven, in 1942. Otti also took classes at Richmond Professional Institute (RPI) and eventually accepted a part-time position in the Fashion Department in 1953. She quickly became known for bringing a high-fashion couture flare to the design courses. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts in 1959 and became a full-time professor. She established a fashion "museum" in the department with clothes spanning the past few centuries so students could study the evolution of construction, design, fabrics, embellishments, and techniques up close. She also established a full scholarship for one student a year sponsored by Thalheimer's. She brought well-known fashion designers to campus to lecture and organized trips to fashion meccas for students.

Otti became department chair in 1965 and continued in that role until 1976. In 1969, she received a Master's degree from the Deutsche Bekleidungs Akademie-Suscheide Schule in Munich, where she studied a new method of pattern-making. In 1973, after translating the method from German to English and converting the measurement units from metric to Imperial, Otti introduced it at VCU, calling it the best way of pattern-making in the Western hemisphere. She stepped down as chair to resume full-time teaching until her retirement in 1993, when she was named Professor Emerita. VCU established the Otti Y. Windmueller scholarship for fashion students to mark the occasion. She continued to work at VCU as a volunteer, both in Special Collections in Archives, and in the hospital. She also worked with her husband Fred at Temple Beth Ahabah as the person in charge of acquisitions in their museum and archives. Otti Windmueller died on December 12, 2001.

# Content Description

This collection chronicles some of her accomplishments at VCU's Department of Fashion as well as glimpses into her life through correspondence to Ms. Windmueller. The collection also helps tell the story of her survival as young Jewish Woman in Nazi Germany, primarily through photographs and newspaper clippings though there are a few letters from friends and family which lend more information to this time in her life.

Most materials are in English, but a minority are in German.

# Keywords

Jews

Jews -- Germany -- History -- 1933-1945

Jews -- Germany -- Migrations

Fashion design

Windmueller, Steven

Windmueller, Otti Y.

Richmond Professional Institute

Virginia Commonwealth University. Department of Fashion Design and Merchandising

## Arrangement

The materials are arranged alphabetically. Correspondence, photographs, and newsletters are grouped with like materials.

## Description of Subordinate Components

### **Business Card**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63894

**Unit Date** undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 1 (folder)

### **Caricature of Otti**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63895

**Unit Date** undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 2 (folder)

### **Correspondence: Congregation Beth Ahabah**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63896

**Unit Date** 1971-1994

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 3 (folder)

### **Correspondence: Family- General**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63897

**Unit Date** 1980s, Undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 4 (folder)

#### **Scope and Contents**

Of particular notes are letters to and from her brother in South Africa regarding the family's experience during the Holocaust.

### **Correspondence: Family- Fred Windmueller**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63898

**Unit Date** undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 5 (folder)

#### **Scope and Contents**

Primarily letters from Otti to her husband Fred while on a working vacation with Steven.

**Correspondence: Family- Steven and Michelle Windmueller**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63899

**Unit Date** 1980-1999

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 6 (folder)

**Scope and Contents**

Primarily cards from Ms. Windmueller's son and daughter-in-law.

**Correspondence: Family and Friends**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63900

**Unit Date** 1986-1987

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 7 (folder)

**Language** German English

**Scope and Contents**

Of particular note are letters from Ms. Windmueller's brother and friends in South Africa detailing their experiences in Germany and the family's fate during the Holocaust.

**Correspondence: General**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63901

**Unit Date** 1951-1999, undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 8 (folder)

**Correspondence: General- Cards**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63902

**Unit Date** 1986-1991, undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 9 (folder)

**Correspondence: Hintz, Dolly**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63903

**Unit Date** 1986-1987

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 10 (folder)

**Correspondence: Hirschberg, Ruth**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63904

**Unit Date** 1990

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 11 (folder)

**Correspondence: Kleibacker, Charles**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63905

**Unit Date** 1991

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 12 (folder)

**Correspondence: Lewis, Sydney**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63906

**Unit Date** 1986-1990

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 13 (folder)

**Correspondence: MCV Volunteers**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63907

**Unit Date** 1988

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 14 (folder)

**Correspondence: Sara, Dortha**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63908

**Unit Date** 1959

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 15 (folder)

**Correspondence: Town & Country Realty**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63909

**Unit Date** 1968

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 16 (folder)

**Correspondence: Valentine Museum**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63910

**Unit Date** 1983

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 17 (folder)

**Correspondence: VCU**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63911

**Unit Date** 1984, 1988, 1992

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 18 (folder)

**Correspondence: Virginia Historical Society**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63912

**Unit Date** 1992

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 19 (folder)

**Elderhostel Program Materials**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63913

**Unit Date** 1988

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 20 (folder)

**Excerpt from "The Yiddish Language"****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63914**Unit Date** undated**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)**Container** 21 (folder)**Invitation: Bar Mitzvah and Bat Torah****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63915**Unit Date** 1980s-1990s**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)**Container** 22 (folder)**Invitation: Heimatverein Borghorst****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63916**Unit Date** 1995**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)**Container** 23 (folder)**Language** German**Meyers Briggs Type****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63917**Unit Date** undated**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)**Container** 24 (folder)**Newspapers****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63918**Unit Date** 1963, 1980s, 1990s, undated**Mixed Materials** 2 (box)**Language** English German**Scope and Contents**

Newspapers include the Richmond Times Dispatch, Style Weekly, Richmond News-Leader, VCU Today, VCU Voice, Richmond Jewish News, Virginia Business and Steinfurter Nachrichten. There are also clippings from these newspapers. The relevant articles are predominantly about Ms. Windmueller and the VCU fashion department, or the Windmueller and Heimann families in the Holocaust and after.

**Newsletters: Congregation Beth Ahabah****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63919**Unit Date** 1980, 1987, 1994**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)**Container** 25 (folder)**Newsletters****Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63920**Unit Date** 1987, 1991, 1993**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)**Container** 26 (folder)**Language** English German

**Notebooks**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63926

**Unit Date** 1968

**Mixed Materials** Map case

**Language** German

**Extent** 2 Items Materials contained in two folders.

**Scope and Contents**

Two notebooks from courses Ms. Windmueller took in Munich at the Deutsche Bekleidungs Akademie-Suscheide Schule.

**Pamphlets**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63921

**Unit Date** 1982, undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 27-28 (folder)

**Photographs**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63922

**Unit Date** 1993, undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 29-33 (folder)

**Poem to Neighbors Paul and Estelle**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63923

**Unit Date** 1982

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 34 (folder)

**Shawanga Theme Song**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63924

**Unit Date** undated

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 35 (folder)

**VCU Annual Report**

**Unit ID** /repositories/5/archival\_objects/63925

**Unit Date** 1990

**Mixed Materials** 1 (box)

**Container** 36 (folder)