

**I. I. Rabi Papers**  
**A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress**



**Manuscript Division, Library of Congress**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**2023**

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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

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## Collection Summary

**Title:** I. I. Rabi Papers

**Inclusive Dates:** 1899-1989

**Bulk Dates:** 1945-1968

**ID No.:** MSS76467

**Creator:** Rabi, I. I. (Isador Isaac), 1898-

**Extent:** 41,500 items

**Extent:** 105 cartons plus 1 oversize plus 4 classified

**Extent:** 42 linear feet

**Language:** Collection material in English

**Location:** Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**LC Catalog record:** <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm89076467>

**Summary:** Physicist and educator. The collection documents Rabi's research in physics, particularly in the fields of radar and nuclear energy, leading to the development of lasers, atomic clocks, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and to his 1944 Nobel Prize in physics; his work as a consultant to the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory and as an advisor on science policy to the United States government, the United Nations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization during and after World War II; and his studies, research, and professorships in physics chiefly at Columbia University and also at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

### People

Amaldi, Edoardo--Correspondence.

Anshen, Ruth Nanda--Correspondence.

Bethe, Hans A. (Hans Albrecht), 1906-2005--Correspondence.

Bloch, Felix, 1905-1983--Correspondence.

Bohr, Niels, 1885-1962--Correspondence.

Bush, Vannevar, 1890-1974--Correspondence.

Compton, K. T. (Karl Taylor), 1887-1954--Correspondence.

Condon, Edward Uhler, 1902-1974--Correspondence.

Darwin, Charles Galton, Sir, 1887-1962--Correspondence.

DuBridge, Lee A. (Lee Alvin), 1901-1994--Correspondence.

Einstein, Albert, 1879-1955--Correspondence.

Fermi, Enrico, 1901-1954--Correspondence.

Finkelstein, Louis, 1895-1991--Correspondence.

Kusch, Polykarp, 1911-1993--Correspondence.

Oppenheimer, J. Robert, 1904-1967--Correspondence.

Rabi, I. I. (Isidor Isaac), 1898-1988.

Segrè, Emilio--Correspondence.

Strauss, Lewis L.--Correspondence.

Szilard, Leo--Correspondence.

Urey, Harold Clayton, 1893- --Correspondence.

Van Vleck, J. H. (John Hasbrouck), 1899- --Correspondence.

Zichichi, Antonino--Correspondence.

Zuckerman, Solly Zuckerman, Baron, 1904-1993--Correspondence.

### Organizations

Columbia University--Faculty.

Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology--Faculty.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs.  
U.S. Atomic Energy Commission.  
United Nations.  
United States. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.  
United States. President's Science Advisory Committee.

### **Subjects**

Atomic bomb.  
Atomic clocks.  
Cold War.  
Lasers.  
Magnetic resonance imaging.  
Nobel Prizes.  
Nuclear energy.  
Nuclear weapons--Testing.  
Nuclear weapons.  
Physics.  
Population.  
Radar.  
Science--International cooperation.  
World War, 1939-1945--Science.

### **Places**

Aberdeen Proving Ground (Md.)  
Developing countries.  
Outer space--Exploration--United States.

### **Occupations**

Educators.  
Physicists.

## **Acquisition Information**

The papers of I. I. Rabi, physicist, professor, and Nobel Prize winner, were given to the Library of Congress by Helen N. Rabi, his wife, in 1988.

## **Processing History**

The papers of I. I. Rabi were arranged and described by Joseph Sullivan with the assistance of Kathleen A. Kelly and John R. Monagle in 1992. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

## **Additional Guides**

The Rabi papers are described in *Library of Congress Acquisitions Manuscript Division, 1988*, pp. 36-68.

## **Transfers**

A tape of a lecture entitled "Men and Ideas" given by I. I. Rabi at the University of Texas at Austin has been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division of the Library where it is identified as part of these papers.

## Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of I. I. Rabi in these papers and in other collections of papers in the Library of Congress is reserved. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division for further information.

## Access and Restrictions

The papers of I. I. Rabi are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

## Security Classified Documents

Government regulations control the use of security classified material in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to and use of classified items.

## Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, I. I. Rabi Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

## Biographical Note

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1898, July 29	Born Raymanow, Austria-Hungary
1899	Immigrated with mother to the United States
1919	B.A., Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.
1923-1927	Lecturer, City College of New York, New York, N.Y.; candidate for the Ph.D. in physics at Columbia University, New York, N. Y.
1926	Married Helen Newmark
1927	Ph.D., Columbia University, New York, N.Y.
1927-1929	Studied advanced theoretical physics in Europe, especially quantum mechanics, and worked at the Neils Bohr Institute, Copenhagen, Denmark; met J. Robert Oppenheimer
1929	Appointed assistant professor, Columbia University, New York, N.Y.; later became professor and executive officer, Physics Department, and university professor
1930's	Developed experiments using molecular beam technology, first developed in Europe by Otto Stern, to analyze the physical and magnetic properties of the atom
1940-1945	Associate director, radiation laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass. Consultant on the Manhattan atomic bomb project, Los Alamos, N. Mex.
1944	Nobel Prize in physics in recognition of work in the 1930s regarding properties of the nucleus of the atom
1945	Witnessed first atomic bomb explosion, Alamagordo, N. Mex.(July 16) Returned to Columbia University, New York, N.Y. Published "The Physicist Returns from the War," Atlantic Monthly
1946-1970s	Member, chairman, or advisor to various U. S., United Nations, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization committees regarding atomic energy
1947	Helped found Brookhaven National Laboratory, Long Island, N.Y. Involved with construction of the cyclotron
1954	Testified on behalf of J. Robert Oppenheimer during internal security hearings before Congress
1960	Published, My Life and Times as a Physicist(Claremont, Calif.: Claremont College. 55 pp.)
1963	Published, Science and Public Policy(Haifa: Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. 23 pp.)

1969	Published, with others, Oppenheimer,(New York: Scribner. 90 pp.)
1970	Published, Science: the Center of Culture of Culture (New York: World Publishing Co. 155 pp.)
1988, Jan. 11	Died, New York, N.Y.

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of Isidor Isaac Rabi (1898-1988) span the years 1899-1988, with the bulk of the material dated between 1945 and 1968. The collection documents significant but not all portions of Rabi's life, concentrating heavily on his interests during the later stages of World War II, his service on government policy-making committees in the field of nuclear energy during the 1950s and 1960s, and, to a more limited degree, his teaching career. The papers contain correspondence both to and from Rabi, memoranda, minutes of meetings, reports, charts, graphs, press releases, bulletins, invitations, contracts, newspaper clippings, draft and printed copies of speeches, articles and lectures, notebooks, and miscellaneous material. Letters relating to his wife, Helen, and other correspondence are filed in the [Miscellany](#) at the end of the collection.

Born of Jewish parentage in 1898 in what is now Poland but at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Rabi came to the United States with his mother in the year following his birth. His father, who had come the year before, eventually opened a small grocery store. The younger Rabi grew up in working class areas in Manhattan and Brooklyn and showed great interest in the physical and social sciences, photography, and many other endeavors open to youths of his day with an aptitude for learning. Earning scholarships to Cornell University, he majored in chemistry and was graduated near the top of his class. After failing to win a fellowship to continue his studies in chemistry, Rabi directed his interests to the "irreducibility of matter" and the "whys" of molecular structure rather than observing and recording chemical reactions. He switched his field to physics and entered the doctoral program at Columbia University, supporting himself by teaching and lecturing at the City College of New York.

He received his doctorate in 1927, went to Europe to study quantum mechanics, and then taught quantum mechanics at Columbia. Combining laboratory experiments and teaching during the 1930s, Rabi attained recognition for his studies using the molecular beam and the magnetic resonance method of studying the atom. Publications from these experiments formed the basis for such modern technology as lasers, the atomic clock, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology. These studies culminated in the Nobel Prize in physics in 1944.

As the world came closer to war in the late 1930s and as fear of Germany and its military intentions spread to the United States, Rabi joined other leading scientists in pressuring the United States government to fund projects to develop atomic power before Germany gained overwhelming advantages. Taking a leave of absence from Columbia in 1940, he went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Radiation Laboratory for work in radar and became a consultant to the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos, New Mexico. When the war ended, he worked to persuade the government to develop a science policy for the future that did not separate scientific research from the cultural or political context of American society. His writings during this period, however, indicate that he was not optimistic that politicians would truly understand science, which he termed "the first of the liberating arts."

The [General Correspondence](#) series, dated 1927-1987, is chiefly concerned with his career as a teacher, lecturer, and advisor on scientific matters. His correspondents include many well-known figures in the scientific and political communities. Subjects discussed include the importance of education in science and technology, Rabi's work in the development of radar and the atomic bomb, the relationship between science and the humanities in his 1970 publication *Science: the Center of Culture* (see [Speech, Article, Writings and Lecture File](#)), and civilian control of atomic energy. Letters and telegrams regarding Rabi's 1944 Nobel Prize in physics are filed in the collection's [Miscellany](#).

The state of physics research in the United States during the 1920s, the difficulty that Jews faced in securing tenure in academia, Rabi's European experience in the 1920s, and Edward Condon's problems retaining security privileges in the 1950s are discussed in correspondence between Rabi and Condon filed in the [General Correspondence](#) series. The "Jewish question" is also discussed in correspondence of Louis Finkelstein who tried to interest Rabi in writing at length on the topic. Physics experiments and math are the subject of letters from Charles G. Darwin, J. H. Van Vleet, and Karl Compton. Polykarp Kusch wrote friendly and informative letters regarding life at institutions other than Columbia University and social, personal and family matters. Robert Oppenheimer sympathized with Rabi's reasons for not entering the program at Los Alamos and expressed gratitude for his interest in helping the program as a consultant.

The [Columbia University Office File](#), 1924-1987, the largest series in the collection, is concentrated in the post-World War II period and related to Rabi's career at Columbia as well as his service as a scientific advisor to numerous government agencies and committees. Files prior to the late 1940s include Rabi's work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Joint Research and Development Board during World War II. Files between the years 1950 and 1987 concern scientific research on the national and international level and Rabi's interest in the peaceful uses of atomic energy. A significant portion of the files in this series relate to his work with the United Nations from 1946 to 1979.

Rabi's work with other organizations and committees is documented in such files as "Aberdeen Proving Grounds," "Arms Control and Disarmament Agency" (ACDA), "Atomic Energy Commission," "North Atlantic Treaty Organization," "President's Science Advisory Committee," and "Pugwash International Conference on Nuclear Proliferation." Throughout the files are discussions regarding radar development, conscription of scientists, and strategic use of atomic weapons (Aberdeen files); nuclear test ban (ACDA); attempt to retain Enrico Fermi at Columbia University after the war and population control (Office of Scientific Research and Development); government participation in problems of underdeveloped areas, the reduction of tensions between East and West, using the scientific community to smooth relations between allies, and the government's space program (President's Science Advisory Committee).

Much in the [Columbia University](#) series describes Rabi's association with the radiation laboratory at MIT, the Joint Research and Development Board, and the Brookhaven National Laboratories, which he was instrumental in founding. Rabi's efforts in national and international organizations were in large part devoted to developing peaceful uses of atomic energy. Files in this series also relate to the atomic bomb, the nuclear age, the role of NATO, and the United Nations. Rabi's tenure at Columbia University is represented in the Columbia University Internal subseries relating to the administration of the Physics Department, "networking" through other universities to secure students and teachers for a variety of positions, and scientific conferences, meetings, and associations of interest to Rabi as executive officer of the department.

Rabi's thoughts regarding humanism and science, his efforts in arms control, and science and education, though mentioned in his correspondence, are more comprehensively discussed in his speeches and writings in the [Speech, Article, Writings, and Lecture File](#), 1942-1987. Notable files include his article entitled "The Physicist Returns from the War," published in the Atlantic Monthly in 1945, in which he discussed the subordination of pure science to industrial needs, his article on Oppenheimer, and other articles on the atomic bomb and humanism. Technical writings filed with this series relate to the atomic nucleus, various aspects of the electron and magnetic field theories, and molecular beams. Public policy and the government's role in the sciences are subjects of many of Rabi's lectures. His speeches reflect, as do a large part of his articles, his interest in keeping the public aware of science as a useful tool for human affairs.

The [Academic File](#), 1919-1976, documents aspects of Rabi's teaching and lecturing career as well as his student and postdoctoral years. Notebooks relate to his research in the 1930s and include notes generated from lectures given by physicists Otto Stern and Wolfgang Pauli between 1927 and 1929 regarding quantum mechanics and molecular beam theory.

Many items in the [Printed Matter](#) series, 1938-1985, supplement files in the [Columbia University Office File](#). Biographical items relating to Rabi and others, including correspondence, academic and other awards, material regarding his Nobel Prize in physics, and correspondence of Rabi's wife, Helen, are among the [Miscellany](#) series, 1899-1988. The [Lantern Slides and Experimental Apparatus](#), 1930-1955, [Classified Material](#), 1945-1972, and [Oversize](#) series, 1924-1987, complete the collection.

Correspondents include Edouardo Amaldi, Ruth Nanda Anshen, Hans Bethe, Felix Bloch, Niels Bohr, Vannevar Bush, Edward Condon, Lee A. DuBridge, Albert Einstein, Enrico Fermi, Polykarp Kusch, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Wolfgang Pauli, Emilio Segrè, Lewis L. Strauss, Leo Szilard, Harold C. Urey, J. H. Van Vleck, Antonino Zichichi, and Solly Zuckerman.

## Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in ten series:

- [General Correspondence, 1925-1987](#)
- [Columbia University Office File, 1924-1987](#)
- [Speech, Article, Writings, and Lecture File, 1928-1987](#)
- [Academic File, 1919-1976](#)

- Printed Matter, 1938-1985
- Miscellany, 1899-1988
- Lantern Slides and Experimental Apparatus, circa 1930-1950
- Oversize, 1942-1987
- Classified, 1945-1972
- NATO Classified, 1958-1968

## Description of Series

<b>Container</b>	<b>Series</b>
BOX 1-9	<p><b><u>General Correspondence, 1925-1987</u></b></p> <p>Mostly letters received, with attachments, together with some letters sent. Arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 10-60	<p><b><u>Columbia University Office File, 1924-1987</u></b></p> <p>Correspondence, memoranda, reports, statements, agendas, minutes of meetings, charts, graphs, bulletins, notices, invitations, press releases, newspaper clippings, publications, photographs, applications, and contracts. Arranged alphabetically by name or subject and chronologically therein.</p>
BOX 61-72	<p><b><u>Speech, Article, Writings, and Lecture File, 1928-1987</u></b></p> <p>Typed, printed, and handwritten copies of speeches, articles, chapter drafts, notes, and other writings by Rabi. Arranged by type of material and therein alphabetically by title. Writings and speeches by others appear in the Miscellany series at the end of the collection.</p>
BOX 72-79	<p><b><u>Academic File, 1919-1976</u></b></p> <p>Notes, charts, graphs, calculations, notebooks, course outlines, examinations, and other material relating to Rabi's student years, his early research, and teaching career. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX 80-86	<p><b><u>Printed Matter, 1938-1985</u></b></p> <p>Reports, monographs, conference proceedings, charts, graphs, publications, bylaws, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by name of organization, with separate categories for institutes, laboratories, and conference proceedings and reports.</p>
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Organized and described according to the series and folders from which the items were removed.

**BOX NATO 1**

**NATO Classified, 1958-1968**

NATO classified documents consisting of memoranda, reports, statements, summaries, and notes.

Organized and described according to the series and folders from which the items were removed.

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## General Correspondence, 1925-1987

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BOX 100-05	<b>Lantern Slides and Experimental Apparatus, circa 1930-1950</b> Lantern slides, dry plates, glass negatives, and negatives used by Rabi in his lectures and fragments of apparatus used in his laboratory. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 100-105	Lantern slides and dry plates used by I. I. Rabi with his lectures; experimental pieces of apparatus
BOX OV 1	<b>Oversize, 1942-1987</b> Reports of government agencies and technical materials. Organized and described according to the series, folders, and boxes from which the items were removed.
BOX OV 1	Columbia University Office File Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) General Advisory Council Reports and related material, 1964 ( <a href="#">Container 12</a> ) Associated Universities (AUI) Miscellany, 1953 ( <a href="#">Container 13</a> ) Columbia University, New York, N.Y., internal file Nevis Cyclotron Laboratory Harmonic Oscillator, 1953 ( <a href="#">Container 20</a> ) Navy Department Naval Research Advisory Committee General, 1948-1967 ( <a href="#">Containers 36-37</a> ) Research and development, 1942-1948 ( <a href="#">Container 38</a> ) Office of Science Research and Development (OSRD), 1942-1946 ( <a href="#">Container 43</a> ) Project East River, 1951-1953 ( <a href="#">Container 48</a> ) Printed Matter Organizations “A-B” miscellaneous, 1966 ( <a href="#">Container 80</a> ) Miscellany Biographical items Rabi Articles about General, 1987 ( <a href="#">Container 89</a> )
BOX CL 1-CL 3	<b>Classified, 1945-1972</b> Government classified documents consisting of correspondence, reports, statements, minutes of meetings, summaries, surveys, and notes. Organized and described according to the series and folders from which the items were removed.
BOX CL 1	Columbia University Office File Atomic Energy Commission Correspondence, 1947

	International conference of scientists, proposed, 1954
	Miscellany, 1947-1967
	International Atomic Energy Agency Reports, general, 1959-1967
	National Radio Astronomy Observatory, Green Bank, W. Va., 1961
	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
	Correspondence, 1966
	Science Committee
	General, 1958-1965
	Reports, 1966-1968
	Summaries and working papers, 1959
	Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic Anti-Submarine Warfare (SACLANT-ASW)
	Research Center, 1959
	Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Oak Ridge, Tenn., 1954
	Office of Science and Technology, 1966
	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 1969-1970
	President's Science Advisory Committee, correspondence, 1957-1964
	Research Board for National Security, 1945
BOX CL 2	United Nations
	Atomic Energy Commission
	Reports
	1945-1947
	(4 folders)
BOX CL 3	1947
	(5 folders)
	Conferences
	Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy
	First, general, 1954
	Third, 1963
	General, 1946-1972
	Scientific Advisory Committee, minutes and summaries, 1963
BOX NATO 1	<b>NATO Classified, 1958-1968</b>
	NATO classified documents consisting of memoranda, reports, statements, summaries, and notes.
	Organized and described according to the series and folders from which the items were removed.
BOX NATO 1	Columbia University Office File
	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
	Science Committee
	General, 1958-1965
	Reports, 1966-1968
	Summaries and working papers, 1959
	Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic Anti-Submarine Warfare (SACLANT-ASW)
	Research Center, 1959