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Peter Rehak Papers relating to Imre Finta

Gift of Peter Rehak, 2021

Dates: 1944 - 2004

Extent: 11 boxes, 1.5 meters.

Biographical Note:

Peter Rehak is a Canadian journalist who has worked in North America and Europe in print, television and new media. For 18 years he was an Executive Producer of CTV Television Network's investigative program W5. During Rehak's term the network aired an episode about Imre Finta (1912-2003), accusing him of committing war crimes against Hungarian Jews during the Second World War when he was a police captain in the Royal Hungarian gendarmerie. Finta sued the network for slander. In crafting their defence, CTV lawyers and Rehak traveled in 1985 to Hungary, Israel and Vienna, recording witness testimonies.

Finta had immigrated to Canada in 1951, becoming a successful restaurateur in downtown Toronto. He was the first and only person in Canada to be prosecuted for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, charged with confinement, kidnapping, robbery, and manslaughter of 8, 617 Jews. After a lengthy criminal trial in the Ontario Supreme Court, a jury acquitted Finta on all counts. The acquittal was upheld by the Ontario Supreme Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada. Rehak collected materials relating to Finta intending to write a book but abandoned the project when Finta was acquitted.

Historical Context:

In 1989, Imre Finta gained notoriety in Canada as the country's first person prosecuted under Canada's new war crimes legislation. On the recommendation of the Deschênes Commission, the Criminal Code was amended in 1987 to authorize Canadian courts to try war criminals, including suspected Nazis, for crimes committed in other countries. After leaving Hungary, Finta was convicted in absentia by a Hungarian People's Tribunal in 1948 and sentenced to five years forced labor. He was known to Canadian authorities since 1974 when Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal alerted them of Finta's whereabouts. The highly publicized criminal trial followed two libel lawsuits involving Finta which represented mounting pressure on Ottawa to prosecute war criminals living in Canada.

In 1982 the Toronto Sun published an article and editorial which stated that allegations of war crimes made by Sabina Citron — a Holocaust survivor and co-founder of the Canadian Holocaust Remembrance Association — against Finta were false. Citron filed a libel suit against the newspaper and Finta. In 1983 CTV's W5 program aired an episode accusing Finta of having committed war crimes. Finta claimed he was merely a dispatcher and filed a libel lawsuit against CTV. The network maintained that what they said on air was true, and traveled to Israel,

Hungary and Vienna to obtain evidence, as well as using evidence from the Citron case. Witness testimonies gathered by CTV and Finta's poor health resulted in Finta withdrawing his libel suit against CTV and his defence in the Citron action. He was ordered to pay \$32,000 to Citron and \$100,000 to CTV for legal costs. Finta was unable to pay CTV, resulting in the seizure of his house.

Following Finta's criminal trial, the Government of Canada announced a dramatic change to their strategy regarding war criminals. It would now revoke citizenship from alleged war criminals rather than prosecuting them. Legal scholars have called the Finta case one of the most important cases ever decided by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Scope and Content:

Collection consists of legal documents pertaining to the Citron v. Sun and Finta v. CTV cases, including videotapes of witness testimonies gathered in Hungary, Israel and Vienna. Includes a videotape and transcript of the W5 episode over which Finta sued CTV, documents in English and Hungarian pertaining to Finta's trial in absentia in Hungary, fragments and a draft of Peter Rehak's unfinished book about Finta, as well as newspaper clippings and interviews Rehak conducted on microcassette. Also includes a subpoena sent to Rehak from Commissioner Jules Deschênes and the Sheriff's Sale of Lands in the seizure of Finta's house.

Contains Series:

1. Materials related to Imre Finta's lawsuits and Hungarian trial
2. Peter Rehak's Research on Imre Finta
3. Peter Rehak's unfinished book about Imre Finta

Custodial History: Papers were donated by Peter Rehak to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library in 2021.

Notes:

Languages: English and Hungarian

Access: Open

Series 1: Materials related to Imre Finta's lawsuits and Hungarian trial

	Trial in Hungary of Imre Finta in absentia	
Box 1 Folder 1-2	Detailed account of the history of the gendarmerie, Finta's activities in 1944, and his trial before The People's Tribunal in 1948. Includes remarks concerning Finta's hearing in Toronto. (English translation of Hungarian)	n.d.
1:3	Secret decree of the Ministry of Interior Concerning the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews (in Hungarian), includes annexed list of documents	1944
1:4	Minutes of the meeting, held in the Ministry of Interior about the execution of the "Final Solution" (in Hungarian)	1944
1:5	The case of Mrs. Bäack (in English and Hungarian)	1944
1:6	The case of Mr. Stein (in Hungarian)	1944
1:7	The case of Ruzsnyák, Rurjesz, Riesz, Gönczi (in Hungarian)	1944
1:8	The timetable of the deportation of Jews in Szeged (in Hungarian)	19 June 1944
1:9	The list of those persons who committed suicide at the ghetto (in Hungarian)	1944
1:10	The leaflet of "Segítség" – a cry for help of the Szeged Jews (in Hungarian, Russian, English, French, German)	c. 1944
1:11	The ruling of the People's Court concerning the members of the Exemption Committee (in Hungarian)	n.d.
1:12	Bill of indictment against Imre Finta (in Hungarian)	1947
1:13	Police investigation records and People's Court record in the Finta case (in Hungarian)	1946 - 1968
	Sabina Citron v. The Toronto Sun Publishing Corporation, Douglas Creighton, Peter Worthington, Dick Chapman, George Egri, and Imre Finta	
Box 2	Examination of Imre Finta	2 & 3 January 1985
Box 3	Examination of Richard Robert Chapman (writer of the 1982 article about Finta in the Sun over which Citron filed a libel suit)	7, 8, 11 January 1985
	Imre Finta v. The CTV Television Network LTD., Murray Chercover, W.R Cunningham, Gillian Cosgrove and Eric Morrison	
Box 5	"Dispatcher" - CTV's W5 episode about Imre Finta over which he filed libel suit (VHS Videotape, 18:30)	3 April 1983
Box 4 Folder 1	Text of CTV's W5 episode about Imre Finta over which he filed the libel suit	3 April 1983
4:2	Notice of libel action, statement of claim, statement of defence and fact sheet	28 April 1983 – 19 June 1983
Box 7	Brief of Transcripts and Summaries of Examination for Discovery of Imre Finta in both CTV and Sabina Citron actions (2 volumes)	12 & 13 March 1984, 2 January 1985

Box 8	Commission Evidence Brief (2 Volumes)	1985
4:3	Letter from Sidney N. Lederman (CTV lawyer) to Mr. Ron Macdonald, includes a report of evidence, assessment of the defence, and settlement recommendations	4 April 1985
4:4	Subpoena sent to Peter Rehak from Commissioner Jules Deschênes	23 April 1985
Box 5	Examination of discovery and witness testimonies taken in Israel, VHS tapes contain: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Josepha Vardy 2. Josepha Vardy 3. Margit Klein 4. Margit Klein 5. Mordecai Schnitzer 6. Meier Schweiger 7. Meier Schweiger and Hajnal Havas 8. Shoshana Halmos 9. Dr. Kende 	23 July 1985 – 26 July 1985
Box 6	Examination of discovery and witness testimonies taken in Szeged, Hungary and one in Vienna, VHS tapes contain: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Istvan Bokor 2. Mihalyne Ficzere 3. Gaborine Liptak 4. Robertine Weores 5. Bela Liebermann and Sanborne Salamon 6. Barbara Haas 7. Istvane Fonyo 8. Magda Wagner (Vienna tape 1) 	30 July 1985 – 2 August 1985
4:5	Notes about videotapes with witness testimonies collected in Szeged, Israel and Vienna	26 July 1985 – 2 August 1985
4:6	Letter from Finta's lawyer G.W Brigden to CTV lawyer S. Lederman with table of contents showing list of documents being prepared for the Trial Judge	6 January 1986
4:7	An organized summary of the examination for discovery of Imre Finta in both the CTV and Sabina Citron actions	12 January 1986
4:8	Letter from D. Schonberger to CTV lawyer Robert Rueter, includes translated letter from Hungary by Dr. Szanto Tiborne	23 January 1986
4:9	Letter from Finta's lawyer G. W. Brigden to CTV lawyer Robert Rueter including several doctor's assessments of Finta's poor health and advice to postpone legal procedure	24 January 1986
4:10	Letter from Finta's lawyer G.W Brigden to CTV's lawyer R. Rueter, includes documents in Hungarian previously requested by Rueter	30 January 1986
4:11	Affidavit of Robert Rueter (CTV's lawyer)	28 August 1986

4:12	Motion by Finta to withdraw from the action and court order for Finta to pay the costs of the lawsuit, includes CTV press release	August - September 1986
4:13	Affidavit of Imre Finta	7 June 1989
4:14	Notice of Motion by Imre Finta to not pay the legal costs of the Defendants, includes affidavits of Finta, Sidney S. Lederman, Dr. Joseph V. Ormay and George Egri	12 June 1989
4:15	Sheriff's Sale of Lands in the seizure of Finta's house to pay for legal costs of CTV	15 August 1990
4:16	Brief of Witness Statements in CTV Television at the suit of Finta	n.d.

	Series 2: Peter Rehak's Research on Imre Finta	
Box 9 Folder 1-2	Photocopied book chapters on topics of Canadian immigration policy, war criminals, history of Hungary and the Holocaust in Hungary, includes Canadian law magazine and a manifesto regarding Finta in Hungarian.	1962 - 1990
9:3	A book Finta published titled The Golden Age, with autograph by Finta	1976
9:4-5	Package from Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) for a program on Finta that was not broadcast. Contains: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General information on Finta and summary of the CBC's "case" 2. Affidavit of Jenő Fenyő – Hungary 3. Affidavit of Miriam Drucker – Hungary 4. Statement by Dr. Olga Reich and Dr. László Bach to Wiesenthal 5. Affidavit of Emma Tannacs 6. Affidavit of Sandor Ungar and a letter by him 7. Affidavit of Hajnal Havas 8. Two affidavits from Szeged residents on Finta 9. Affidavit of Magda Wagner 10. Copy of a "protocol" (diary) kept in the city university, N.Y. Archives and a transcript of a conversation with Professor Braham 11. Dozsa Pal interview 12. Interview with Dr. Paradi Istvan – a captain in the gendarmes who knew Finta, but resisted and joined Wallenberg 13. Affidavit, Letter (and translation) of Margit Klein 14. Letter from Gonczi to Finta's wife and Rabbi Frenkel's response 15. Statement by Berwald to CBC on Finta threat 16. Hand drawn map of ghettos and transports 	22 February 1985

9:6	Criminal Code of Canada amendment for war crimes	16 September 1987
9:7	Report by a researcher Rehak sent to a Finta benefit meeting	30 March 1990
9:8	Publication by The Law Society of Upper Canada titled Ontario Reports Third Series Volume 1 Part 2	1 March 1991
Box 10	Newspaper clippings regarding Imre Finta	1985 - 2004

	Series 3: Peter Rehak's unfinished book about Imre Finta	
Box 5	Rehak's interviews with Simon Wiesenthal and Mike Berwald on Microcassette	1989
11:1	Transcripts of Rehak's interviews with Simon Wiesenthal and Mike Berwald	1989
11:2	Fragments including Szeged, commission evidence, Berwald story, Finta's Toronto trial, and notes on prosecutor Amerisinghe's summation	1989 - 1990
11:3	Proposals, contains: The Trial of Imre Finta: The Story Behind Canada's First War Crimes Trial and Description of the book	c. 1990
11:4	Draft - Finta third basic outline	4 February 1990