

Guide to the John Breon Papers

YCAL MSS 1



by Tina Evans

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 1

CREATOR: Breon, John, 1923-1984

TITLE: John Breon papers

DATES: 1936-1984

BULK DATES: 1944-1951

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 9 linear feet (17 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers contain correspondence, diaries, writings, subject files, and personal papers of John Breon concerning his World War II experiences, correspondents include Pat Carroll, Charles Cerbone, Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and Carl Van Vechten.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.breon>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.breon>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The material was donated to The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in 1986 by Charles Cerbone, a longtime friend of Breon's, and Margaret Buxton, whose husband, John, was Breon's third cousin.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research. Box 16: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

The John Breon Papers are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

John Breon Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

JOHN WALLACE BREON, JR. (1923-1984)

John Breon was born in Rockford, Illinois, on August 31, 1923, the son of John Wallace Breon and Jessie Breon. He served in the infantry in France during World War II, at which time he met Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas. After his discharge from the army, he studied in Paris. In 1946 Breon returned to the United States and entered Beloit College. After his graduation in 1949, he spent two years at the Sorbonne and at the University of Florence. While in Italy, he began work on a novel, *The Sorrows of Travel* (1955), a copy of which can be found in the Beinecke printed collection.

During the 1950s Breon joined McGraw-Hill Company. but in 1966 he left McGraw-Hill for the New American Library. He remained with the NAL until 1968, when he took a position with Franklin Speir, Inc., a New York advertising agency. In 1969 he returned to McGraw-Hill, joining the Industrial and Business Books Division as an advertising copywriter. Breon retired in 1979.

In 1963 Breon and a companion, Charles Cerbone, purchased the Ryerson House in Wayne, New Jersey. In 1982 they moved to Succasunna, New Jersey, where John Breon died after a lengthy illness on April 21, 1984.

Scope and Contents

The John Breon Papers document the life of the editor and writer John Wallace Breon, Jr. The papers span the dates 1936-1984, with a large part of the material covering the years 1944-1951.

The collection has three series. Series I, *Correspondence*, Boxes 1-8, consists of letters between John Breon and his family and friends. Series II, *Diaries*, contains the diaries of John Breon and is housed in Boxes 9-10. Series III, *Personal Papers*, is housed in Boxes 11-14.

[Series I, Correspondence](#), is composed of alphabetically arranged correspondence spanning the years 1944-84. Breon's letters to his family document his military and academic career between 1944-1951, while correspondence to his friends concerns his varied interests and activities in later years.

The 1944 correspondence details Breon's basic army training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi (Box 1, folders 2-8) and includes his impressions of officers and enlisted men. He also discusses his daily activities, provides diagrams of bivouac problems, and outlines his code school training. At the end of 1944 Breon was sent overseas.

With the war drawing to a close in the spring of 1945 and restrictions on correspondence being lifted, Breon was able to write more freely on such matters as conditions in war-torn Germany, the German people, and refugees. He also wrote a long and detailed account of his trip from Camp Shelby to England and his experiences in the British Isles, France, Belgium, and Germany (Box 2, Folders 29-37).

In October 1945 Breon went to Paris on leave and met Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas (Box 2, folder 34-35). He discusses their initial conversation, their thoughts on the German occupation of France, the theme of "choice" in Gertrude Stein's upcoming work, her dislike of Ernest Hemingway, and Breon's education and writing career.

In November 1945 Breon was transferred to the French Institute of Motion Pictures. His letters describe Paris immediately following the war, including the illumination of the city for the first time since the occupation. He writes about his study of French movie techniques, his social life, the ballet, and his holiday in Mont St. Michel. He also writes in considerable detail about the people he met, including Marlene Dietrich, the actor, Jean Gabin, the stage designer, Christian Berard, and Jean Cocteau, as well as Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas (Box 3-4, folders 36-60). With Stein's help he was admitted to the Sorbonne and he describes his classes, fellow students, and professors. In July 1946 Breon was discharged and returned to the United States.

Breon resumed his studies in Europe in September 1949. He chronicles his transatlantic crossing, his reunion with Alice B. Toklas, his impressions of Rome while on holiday there with Carl Van Vechten, his daily activities, his friends, and the general mood of Paris in the late 1940s. He also wrote about giving English lessons to Dora Maar, Picasso's mistress in the late 1930s and early 1940s; his introduction to Thornton Wilder by Alice B. Toklas; and the novel he had begun writing in the summer of 1950. Upon completion of his studies Breon took a job with the State Department in Paris and he recorded his impressions of the job and his co-workers.

Breon also maintained a lengthy correspondence with Margaret Buxton from 1959-84 (Box 5, folders 84-98). His letters to her provide considerable detail about the Ryerson House, the eighteenth-century dwelling Breon purchased with his companion Charles Cerbone in the early 1960s. Other topics include the decoration of the house, the genealogical history of the Breon family, books, antiques, Gertrude Stein, and a play Breon was writing, "See Grady See."

The papers contain a large number of letters from Pat Carroll, the star of the play "Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein," (Boxes 5-7, folders 100-124). The letters are primarily concerned with the play, although some discussion of family news is included. There are also letters from Mary Ellen Devery, the producer of "Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein," containing news of the play and Pat Carroll (Box 7, folders 135-137).

Other correspondents include Dora Maar, Clement Richer, Samuel Seward, and Norman Mailer, who offered criticism of Breon's published novel, *The Sorrows of Travel*. Breon's correspondence with Gertrude Stein can be found in the Gertrude Stein Papers. His correspondence with Carl Van Vechten is located in the Carl Van Vechten Papers. Photocopies of these letters are in Box 8, folders 163, and 166- 167.

[Series II, Diaries](#), is housed in Boxes 9-10. The diaries span the years 1949-84 and are arranged chronologically. The diaries for the years 1949-51 complement the correspondence of the same period.

The 1949 diary begins while Breon was still attending college in Rockford, Illinois. It contains details on Rockford, his friends, his feelings about leaving college, and his short stay in New York. Breon describes his voyage to Europe, comments on his fellow passengers, and reflects on leaving Rockford and returning to Paris. He also recorded his reunion with Alice B. Toklas, including their discussion concerning the publication of Stein manuscripts. He chronicles their efforts to assist Bernard Fäy with his legal problems, comments on Olga Picasso's relationship with Picasso, and records Alice B. Toklas's account of Gertrude Stein's meeting with James Joyce. Breon describes his holiday in Rome with Carl Van Vechten. The 1949-51 diaries provide a record of Breon's friendships and social activities and include wide ranging personal reflections.

Breon's diaries for the years 1952-59 deal with family problems; his father's death; unemployment; his unpublished novel, *The Separation Center*; reflections on his state of mind and his relationships with friends. The diaries spanning the years 1960-84 are much less detailed than those of earlier years. Breon reflects on his youth, personal relationships with others, his difficulties with McGraw-Hill, the death of his mother, and health problems. The diaries end approximately one month before his death.

[Series III, Personal Papers](#), can be found in Boxes 11-14. Included in this series are art exhibit catalogues, drawings by Maurice Genis, and material pertaining to the artist Alfonso Ossario. Breon kept clippings on subjects which interested him for example, Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas, and Carl Van Vechten.

The photographs, (Box 12, folders 214-216), are primarily of art works and include a portrait of John Breon by Rudolphe Schneider and works of art by Alfonso Ossario. Series III also contains a photocopy of the second draft of "See Grady See," a play Breon wrote in the late 1970s and frequently revised. The play is an experimental one, based upon the experiences of friends. Military papers consist of material relating to Breon's military service (Box 12, folders 207-209). The collection also contains medical records, papers on his retirement, material on the history of the Ryerson House, and advertising copy written for McGraw-Hill.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1944-1984

4.00' (8 boxes)

Series I, *Correspondence* consists of eight boxes of alphabetically arranged correspondence. All material is arranged in chronological order within each folder. Individuals are given separate listings based on their importance in the collection or provided the file contains six or more items. The correspondence of those who appear one to five times is filed alphabetically with the first letter of the surname in "Letter" general files.

b. 1, f. 1	"B" general	1945-73, n.d.
b. 1, f. 2-22	Breon, John	1944 Mar-1945 Jun
b. 2, f. 23-37	Breon, John	1945 Jul-1945 Nov
b. 3, f. 38-54	Breon, John	1945 Nov-1946 Mar
b. 4, f. 55-82	Breon, John	1946 Mar-1984
b. 4, f. 83	Burns, Edward	1973-80
b. 5, f. 84-98	Buxton, Margaret	1959-84
b. 5, f. 99	"C" general	1983, n.d.
b. 5, f. 100-01	Carroll, Pat	1980 Jan-May
b. 6, f. 102-23	Carroll, Pat	1980 Jun-1984 Feb
b. 7, f. 124	Carroll, Pat	1984 Mar-Apr
b. 7, f. 125-32	Cerbone, Charles	1984
b. 7, f. 133	Coccioli, Carlo	1950-83
b. 7, f. 134	"D" general	1951-80
b. 7, f. 135-37	Devery, Mary Ellen	1980-83
b. 7, f. 138	Diesbach, Ghislain de	1977-84
b. 7, f. 139-40	Dragon, Edward F.	1958-81
b. 7, f. 141	"F" general	1984
b. 8, f. 142	"G" general	1974
b. 8, f. 143	Gallup, Donald	1952-84
b. 8, f. 144-46	Genis, Maurice	1950-66, n.d.
b. 8, f. 147	Guyenot, Pierre	1957-68, n.d.

b. 8, f. 148	"H" general	1974, 1980
b. 8, f. 149	"J" general	1977
b. 8, f. 150	"K" general	1946-62
b. 8, f. 151	"L" general	1984
b. 8, f. 152	"M" general	1959-75
b. 8, f. 153	Maar, Dora	1950-73
b. 8, f. 154	Mailer, Norman	1955-56
b. 8, f. 155	"O" general	1955-80
b. 8, f. 156	"P" general	1959
b. 8, f. 157	"R" general	1973
b. 8, f. 158	Reynolds, Charlie	1973-74
b. 8, f. 159	Richer, Clement	1950-60, n.d.
b. 8, f. 160-61	Ryerson, Edward	1965-68
b. 8, f. 162	"S" general	1960-84
b. 8, f. 163	Stein, Gertrude Includes: ALS from Stein to Breon's mother	1945
b. 8, f. 164	Steward, Samuel	1977-82
b. 8, f. 165	"T" general	1964-84
b. 8a, f. 166a-d	Toklas, Alice B. Includes: ALS from Toklas to Breon's mother	1946-62
b. 8a, f. 167-69	Van Vechten, Carl	1949-64, n.d.
b. 8a, f. 170	"W" general	1981
b. 8a, f. 171	Yale University Library	1957-84
b. 8a, f. 172	"Z" general	1960
b. 8a, f. 173	Unidentified	1972-84, n.d.

Series II: Diaries, 1949-1984*1.00' (2 boxes)*Series II, *Diaries*, is composed of two boxes of chronologically arranged material.

b. 9, f. 174	Diary	1949 Apr-Dec
b. 9, f. 175	Diary	1949 Dec-1951 Apr
b. 9, f. 176	Diary	1951 May-1953 Feb
b. 9, f. 177	Diary	1953 Apr-Dec
b. 9, f. 178	Diary	1954 Jan-1955 Apr
b. 9, f. 179	Diary	1955 Apr-1956 May
b. 9, f. 180	Diary	1956 May-1957 Aug
b. 9, f. 181	Diary	1957
b. 10, f. 182	Diary	1959 Feb-1965 Apr
b. 10, f. 183	Diary	1965 Jun-1968 Mar
b. 10, f. 184	Diary	1968 Apr-1978 Dec
b. 10, f. 185	Diary	1979 Jun-1984 Mar

Series III: Personal Papers, 1936-1984

3.50' (5 boxes)

The papers in Series III are arranged alphabetically by subject.

b. 11, f. 186	Art exhibit catalogues	1949-69
	Cocteau, Jean	
b. 11, f. 187	Drawings	1972
b. 11, f. 188	Education	1943-51
b. 11, f. 189	Gallup, Donald	1980, n.d.
	Genet, Jean	
b. 11, f. 190	<i>Querelle de Brest</i>	n.d.
b. 11, f. 191	Genis, Maurice	n.d.
b. 11, f. 192-93	"Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein"	1980-81
b. 11, f. 194	Internal Revenue Service	1980
b. 11, f. 195-98	McGraw-Hill Book Company	1967-79, n.d.
b. 11, f. 199-201	Medical bills	1980-82
b. 12, f. 202-206	Medical bills	1983-84, n.d.
b. 12, f. 207-209	Military papers	1944-84, n.d.
b. 12, f. 210-13	Miscellaneous	1949-84, n.d.
	See also: Oversize, Box 15, folder 246	
	Photographs	
b. 12, f. 214	Breon, John	ca. 1946, n.d.
b. 12, f. 215	Miscellaneous	1945, n.d.]
b. 12, f. 216	Ossario, Alfonso	1942-76, n.d.
	See also: Oversize, Box 15, folder 247	
b. 13, f. 217-18	Ossario, Alfonso	1947-82
b. 13, f. 219	Postcards	n.d.
b. 13, f. 220	Resumé	ca. 1979
b. 13, f. 221-22	Retirement	1980-83
b. 13, f. 223	Ryerson House	1938-82, n.d.
	Stein, Gertrude	
	See also: Oversize, Box 15, folder 248	
b. 13, f. 224	Art	1967-71

Stein, Gertrude (continued)

b. 13, f. 225	<i>A Book Concluding With a Wife Has A Cow</i>	1973
b. 13, f. 226	Biographical	1943-64
b. 13, f. 227	Book reviews	1943-64
b. 13, f. 228	<i>On Our Way</i>	1959
b. 13, f. 229	Writings	1936
b. 14, f. 230	Theater programs	1939, 1952, n.d.
b. 14, f. 231-32	Toklas, Alice B.	1967-72, n.d.
	Writings	
b. 14, f. 233	<i>I Hardly Know What to do About Christmas Some Years Ago</i>	n.d.
b. 14, f. 234-40	"See Grady See"	ca. 1977
b. 14, f. 241	<i>Vingt Lithographs pour un libre que j'ai lu</i>	1945
b. 14, f. 242	Van Vechten, Carl	1964-84
	Verlaine, Paul	
b. 14, f. 243	<i>Oeuvre Libres</i>	n.d.
b. 14, f. 244	Unemployment	1976-80, n.d.
b. 14, f. 245	Yale University Library	1974-75

Oversize

b. 15 (Oversize), Miscellaneous
f. 246

b. 15 (Oversize), Photographs: Alfonso Ossario
f. 247

b. 15 (Oversize), Stein, Gertrude: scrapbooks
f. 248

1945-52

Restricted Fragile Papers*0.50' (1 box)*

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

b. 16, f. 249	Box 1, folders 7, 9, 15, 17-22
b. 16, f. 250-51	Box 2, folders 23-27, 29-31, 34-36
b. 16, f. 252	Box 3, folders 39, 44-45, 48-49, 51, 53
b. 16, f. 253	Box 4, folders 56-59, 64, 78, 81
b. 16, f. 254	Box 5, folders 84-88, 90, 92, 94-96
b. 16, f. 255	Box 7, folders 133-34
b. 16, f. 256	Box 8, folders 144, 149-50, 152, 160, 162, 165
b. 16, f. 257	Box 10, folder 184
b. 16, f. 258	Box 11, folders 189, 191-92
b. 16, f. 259	Box 12, folders 209, 211
b. 16, f. 260	Box 13, folders 218, 223-24, 226-27
b. 16, f. 261	Box 14, folders 231, 242

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Basic training (Military education)
Friendship
Single men
World War, 1939-1945 -- Personal narratives,
American

Genres / Formats

Diaries -- United States

Names

Breon, John, 1923-1984
Breon family
Burton, Margaret
Carroll, Pat, 1927-
Cerbone, Charles
Devery, Mary Ellen
Dregon, Edward F.
Genis, Maurice
Maar, Dora, 1907-1997
Ossario, Alfonso
Richer, Clément
Ryerson, Edward L.
Stein, Gertrude, 1874-1946
Toklas, Alice B., 1877-1967
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964

Corporate Body

United States. Army (Military life)