

STAT210 (Mining the History of Holyoke) Bachelder Letters Report

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2023-05-21

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Overview of the Bachelder Family Collection

The Bachelder Family Collection contains 135 documents, comprised of mostly letters but also telegrams. According to Penni Martorell of the Wistariahurst Museum, 76 of these letters are from Walter Frederick (Fred) Bachelder to his mother Selma Bachelder. The rest are from Julia Bachelder (minus a few signed by his daughter Susan). The early letters are handwritten, but several of the later letters are typed. The collection spans many years (1927-1953), but

there are also some letters/telegrams that are undated. There is only one letter from the 1930s (written by Julia to her mother in 1932). Interestingly, some of the letters have parts that are cut out or whited out. For example, on December 8, 1943 Fred writes to his mother telling him where the Army has moved him, yet the part where he writes the location is covered with whiteout.

Currently, the Wistariahurst Museum's Holyoke Collection Finding Aid includes a subseries on the Bachelder Family (Subseries B). In this subseries are letters from Julia Bachelder to her friends and family, day planners, golf score cards, postcards to Julia and Mrs. W.F. Bachelder, sympathy cards, and a scrapbook of Julia Bachelder. The golf score cards are from 1949-1971, the day planners are from 1969-1979 and 1968-1987, and the letters from Julia to her mother are from 1933-1934.

According to her obituary in *The New York Times* ("Paid Notice: Deaths BACHELDER, JULIA BLOODGOOD" 2009), Julia was

"Born February 6, 1915...She attended Wellesley College, Class of 1936. Moving to New York in 1942, she became secretary to the war desk of the New York Times. A member of the 30 Year Club of The New York Times, Julia was picture editor for the Sunday Book Review under Francis Brown and retired as picture editor of the Tuesday Science Section in 1980."

According to his obituary in *The New York Times* ("Paid Notice: Deaths BACHELDER, WALTER FREDERICK" 2005), Fred was

"Born November 12, 1918 in Holyoke, MA. He served his country in WWII in the OSS and retired in 1997 as President of Testing Machines Inc."

Fred attended Deerfield Academy, Dartmouth College, and the Tuck Business School before his time in the army. The letters indicate that Fred had seriously considered law school, although he ultimately did not enroll. In a September 9, 1942 letter to his mother, Fred stated that

"I have about decided not to go to law school. I find that the cost is a bit more than I can afford because I find myself badly in need of clothes. There are also many other factors which I mentioned before. If things change or something else happens I can start in February just as well."

According to his *Mass Live* obituary ("Walter Frederick Bachelder," n.d.), Fred served in WWII and was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) following the end of the war. He then joined partisan units in 1947 where he spent two years in North Africa, Italy, and Yugoslavia. He began working for his family's business - Testing Machines Inc. - in 1947, which was based out of Long Island. A decade later he took over as President, and remained at the helm of the company until 1997. Fred died on May 9, 2005. Julia passed away three years later, on November 28, 2008.

Scans and Transcripts

The https://github.com/STAT210-S23/STAT210-Wistariahurst/tree/main/Bachelder_Letters/ is where the materials related to this project are stored.

Each scanned letter can be found in the [scans_processed_pdfs](#) folder.

Transcriptions can be found in the [transcriptions](#) folder.

Most of the documents are labeled using a format given by “Year_Month_Day_Location.pdf”. For example, a letter Julia wrote from Camp Mystic on August 3, 1927 and is named “1927-08-03_Mystic_CT.pdf”. Some letters do not have known years, and thus the year is denoted as “19ND” in the file name.

There are a few exceptions to this standardized naming. Some telegrams include descriptions in their file name. For example, a Valentine’s day telegram is named “ND_Valentine_Greeting_by_Western_Union_from_Camp_Hulen_TX.pdf”. Another is named “ND_Merry_Christmas_Telegram_from_Palacios_TX.pdf”.

File Information Spreadsheet

Information about each letter is contained in a spreadsheet, titled [bachelder_addresses.xlsx](#). The spreadsheet displays the file name and the family member, address, and country associated with each letter. Table 1 shows a glimpse of the spreadsheet, and Table 2 presents the ten addresses associated with the most letters.

Table 1: A glimpse of the Bachelder addresses spreadsheet.

family_member	country	file	full_address
Julia	US	1942-12-12_New_York_NY.pdf	11 West 10th Street, New York, NY
Julia	US	1942-12-16_New_York_NY.pdf	115 Washington Place, New York, NY
Julia	US	1950-02-02_New_York_NY.pdf	115 Washington Place, New York, NY
Julia	US	1944-02-08_New_York_NY.pdf	115 Washington Place, New York, NY
Julia	US	1950-03-20_New_York_NY.pdf	115 Washington Place, New York, NY
Fred	US	1940-12-20_Envelope_no_content_New_York_NY.pdf	1470 Parkchester Road, Parkchester, Bronx, NY
Fred	US	1941-08-30_Alexandria_LA.pdf	211 CA (AA) - Battery A, A.P.O #304, Ragley, LA
Fred	US	1941-08-13_Alexandria_LA.pdf	211 CA (AA) - Battery A, A.P.O #304, Ragley, LA
Fred	US	1941-09-10_Alexandria_LA.pdf	211 CA (AA) - Battery A, A.P.O #304, Ragley, LA
Fred	US	1941-08-20_Alexandria_LA.pdf	211 CA (AA) - Battery A, A.P.O #304, Ragley, LA
Fred	US	1941-04-08_Easter_Greeting_Midland_TX.pdf	33rd Searchlight Brigade - Battery 2, Midland, TX
Fred	US	1941-04-07_Midland_TX.pdf	33rd Searchlight Brigade - Battery 2, Midland, TX
Fred	US	1942-09-21_Brooklyn_NY.pdf	35 West 11th Street, New York, NY
Fred	US	1942-11-02_New_York_NY.pdf	35 West 11th Street, New York, NY
Fred	NA	1943-06-21_Africa.pdf	Africa

Table 2: Top ten addresses associated with the most letters.

Full Address	Count (Letters)
Camp Hulen, 211 CA (AA) - Battery A, TX	28
Compton Advertising, Inc., 630 Fifth Avenue, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY	26
New York, NY	10
Camp Mystic, Mystic, CT	9
115 Washington Place, New York, NY	4
211 CA (AA) - Battery A, A.P.O #304, Ragley, LA	4
Palacios, TX	4
Regional Hospital, Ward #1, Fort Belvoir, VA	4
Testing Machines Inc., 424 West 42nd Street, New York, NY	4
33rd Searchlight Brigade - Battery 2, Midland, TX	2

Creation of Text Files

While the original letters can be viewed in the [scans_processed_pdfs](#) folder, the text for each typed letter has been extracted using Tesseract Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and saved in a text file. Extracting text is important in increasing accessibility of the collection. These text files allow for the implementation of assistive technologies such as text-to-speech software, which allows those with visual impairments or other reading difficulties to engage with the letters. The extraction of the text also benefits archivists and researchers who want to efficiently explore the contents of historical documents.

The text files and PDF files have the same name but are different file types (.TXT for text and .PDF for pdf). The text files are stored in the [transcriptions](#) folder.

A Chronological Exploration of Fred & Julia's Travels

While many of the letters in the collection are written by Julia and describe her life in New York City, the collection more importantly showcases the chaos of the American soldier's life throughout the entirety of the war. Fred spent his time in the military working across business, logistics, defense, and intelligence roles within the United States. The glorification of combat war heroes obscures the important work done by the “behind-the-scenes” units of the military. The letters provide a more nuanced understanding of what the war was like for the army men who remained on U.S. soil and the types of defensive work that took place within both the United States and territories abroad.

The list in the following section is chronological exploration of Fred and Julia's respective lives. Below each location is a short summary and discussion of the information extracted from the letters associated with that place. Many addresses of military training centers and camps were discovered by examining letterheads, envelopes, and information within the letters.

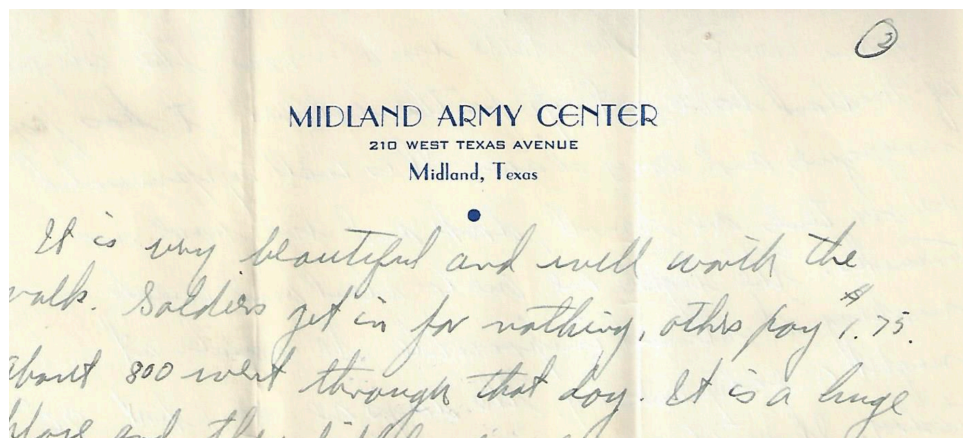



Figure 1: Screenshot of [letter](#) written on April 10, 1941 in Midland, Texas showing the address of the Midland Army Center.

my address is -
2nd Lt. 2.
Company A, 15TH Battalion
S. P. R. D
Greenville, Pennsylvania.

Love
Fred.

Figure 2: Screenshot of letter written on April 14, 1943 in Greenville, Pennsylvania illustrating that Fred was stationed at “S.P.R.D,” or the Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot.


ORDNANCE SCHOOL
ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND
MARYLAND

June 5

Dear Mother -
This is just a hurried note to
say I arrived in North Africa O.K.

Figure 3: Screenshot of letter written on June 5, 1943 indicating that Fred arrived safely in North Africa. This letter is one of many that is written on Aberdeen stationery, which Fred seemed to have attended for his Ordnance training.

Interactive Map & Letter Viewer

Follow along with the places discussed below via [this](#) interactive map and letter viewer.

Julia

1. Mystic, CT

In July and August of 1927, Julia sent letters from Mystic, CT, writing on Camp Mystic stationary. Camp Mystic was a summer camp for girls.

2. New York, NY

In February of 1932, Julia sends a letter to her mother. The return address is labeled as Compton Advertising, Inc., located on 630 Fifth Avenue. There are many more letters sent from New York. On February 2, 1950, she writes that she has a new job “with a fund-raising out-fit - right now working on a campaign to raise money for a university in Japan.” She then begins to send some letters on stationary labeled “The Japan International Christian University Foundation, Inc.” She then writes on August 19, 1950 that she got a temporary job at The New York Times as the “secretary to Hanson Baldwin, military Affairs Analyst for the Times.” On September 6 she writes (on NYTimes stationary) that she got a permanent job there working for “Mr. Brown,” or Francis Brown.

Fred

1. New York, NY

On November 2, 1942, Fred sent a letter to his mother with the return address as “SGT. W. F. Bachelder on 35 W. 11 St., New York City.” On November 2, 1942 Fred writes about how he has been working as an adviser at the Boys Club of New York to a group of boys between the ages of 12 and 16.

2. Camp Hulen (near Palacios, TX)

On January 20th of 1940, Fred writes a letter to his mother from Camp Hulen, where he is part of the 211th Anti-Aircraft Artillery (211th CA[AA] Regiment). According to the Palacios Historical Society (“Camp Hulen 1925 - 1946,” n.d.):

in 1940 the United States War Department took over the base as an Anti-Aircraft Replacement Training Center because the camp’s location permitted impact areas for spent projectiles in the surrounding bays. The base provided an antiaircraft training for national guard units from across the country.

In a January 28, 1941 letter, Fred notes that he worked in the canteen at at Camp Hulen. He disliked the work of the Regimental Exchange and asked to be transferred to a different position. He notes that although he learned a lot about business from his work in the canteen, he “hated to think that I might spend a year in the Army and know very little about military life.” Thus, he decides to return to a searchlight battery. In this same letter he starts to discuss a three day trip to Mexico that he took with other army men, but most of that discussion was cut out. He officially returns to the battery almost two months later, writing on March 16, 1941 that he has finally been transferred. On July 20, 1941 he notes that he is working in the supply room.

He writes again from Camp Hulen in October 1940 and continues to write from there throughout 1940 and 1941.

3. Camp Edwards (near Bourne, MA)

In October 1940, Fred sent letters from Camp Edwards (10/14) and Camp Hulen (10/28). His return address from Camp Edwards was “211 Court Artillery (anti-aircraft),” confirming that Fred was involved in the anti-aircraft unit. A photograph housed on Digital Commonwealth called “WW2 training at Camp Hulen, Texas. 211th Anti-aircraft artillery, Massachusetts National Guard” allows us to deduce that Fred enlisted as part of the Massachusetts National Guard (“Ww2 Training at Camp Hulen, Texas. 211th Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Massachusetts National Guard,” n.d.).



Figure 4: WW2 training at Camp Hulen, Texas. 211th Anti-aircraft artillery, Massachusetts National Guard. Courtesy of the Marstons Mills Historical Society Photograph Collection & Digital Commonwealth..

4. Galveston, TX

On October 29, 1940 Fred sent a telegram from Galveston to his mother wishing her a happy birthday.

5. Midland, TX

Fred sent a telegram on April 7, 1941 saying that he will be in Midland for 6 weeks and could be reached at "Searchlight Battalion 33rd Brigade Battery Two." He writes one letter on Hotel Scharbauer (located in Midland) stationary and two others on Midland Army Center (210 West Texas Avenue) stationary.

6. Alexandria, LA

Letters from August and September of 1941. The return addresses for these letters say "Ragley" Louisiana. On August 30, 1941, he notes that he is writing from a national forest. Explaining his work, he says that

"we have no personal contact with the 'enemy' at all. An anti-aircraft regiment is partly defensive and experimentally offensive. Hence we are in a 'no mans land' when it comes to our proper function."

Fred was most likely based either at Camp Claiborne or Camp Livingston, which are both part of the Kisatchie National Forest near Alexandria.

7. Houston, TX

Fred sent a telegram on October 10, 1941 saying "I am now a civilian. Received a discharge tonight. Will visit in New Orleans a day and plan to arrive home Monday or Tuesday." Telegram was sent from the Western Union in Houston.

8. Holyoke, MA

Letter from Julia to her mother in April 1942 while her mother is in Forest Hills, Long Island (Queens neighborhood).

9. Fort Jay, NY

Letter from Fred on September 15, 1942.

10. Brooklyn, NY

Sent from the War Department, New York Port of Embarkation, Office of the Port Quartermaster (1st Avenue & 58th Street).

11. Greenville, PA

Letter sent on April 14, 1943 on "Ordnance School, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland" stationary. His return address is "Company A. 15th Battalion, S.P.R.D., Greenville, PA." This return address indicates that Fred was at the Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot, later renamed Camp Reynolds, in Greenville, PA.

12. Alexandria, VA

Writing from a train leaving “Pittsburgh” (probably Pittsburgh since he wrote from Shenango the prior month). He doesn’t know where he is going but thinks he will be at a camp and then will be sent overseas. He wrote on May 5, 1943 that

“When I volunteered in 1940 I did so because I believed I would like the army and also because I believed a job would have to be done. I miscalculated in the time [?] and came home after a year. I gave civilian life a try but after Pearl Harbor couldn’t make a go of it. After spending a year in New York I realized that only actual military work was cut out for me and I applied for O.C.S. Now I find myself on the way to the other side. Don’t feel sorry for me as it is what I want.”

13. North Africa

Writes from North Africa a month after the letter from the train leaving Pittsburgh (June 5, 1943), saying that “this is just a hurried note to say I arrived in North Africa O.K and well and happy.”

14. Africa

One letter is labeled simply “Africa” (6/21/1943). He writes that “the part of Africa that I am in is quite different in [?][?] than you probably imagine” and that there are “cultivated fields” and “an orange grove.”

15. Italy (Florence, Bari, & Cecina), Tunisia (Tunis), and Algeria (Oran & Algiers)

A month after he wrote from North Africa, he was in a new job, writing on July 11, 1943 that

“I am at last out of my previous job and am now doing works that is interesting and that I like...I am out of Ordnance and back into the work I did in New York...The work is interesting, vital, and as usual takes up all my time and gives me odd hours. I consider myself very fortunate; not only am I out of training troops, but back into my first choice for work.”

While he does not say where he is at the time of writing, he hints that he is probably in a French-speaking North African country, noting that “I am now living in a hotel in town. It isn’t much, third grade French” but that it has “a view of the Mediterranean.” Fred later discloses that he was in Algeria and Tunisia while in Africa.

Fred writes November 9, 1944 that “I am still here in Italy, in the hospital, feeling fine...” He discusses his recovery from hepatitis. He also says that

“we are now allowed to tell you where we are and were. You probably know that I landed in **Oran**, went from there to **Tunis**, then back to **Algiers**, from there to **Bari, Italy**, then up the land to **Florence**...I left Florence and came to **Cecina**, a town south of Leghorn. Now I am in a hospital right on the coast a few miles south of Cecina. Soon I hope to be in America.”

On May 18, 1944, Fred writes that he has “moved out into the country and have started to reap the benefits of fresh air, sunshine, etc. already.” The camp is mostly British, and he describes the daily tea-time ritual to which he has become accustomed. He is glad to have been moved, writing that

“I can’t tell you much about the work but it is interesting. It is not quite so much at the key of things as before but I made up my mind that I rather have pleasant surroundings, good health and nerves and a cool place to work than be at headquarters with all the high rank, confusion and such. I’ve tried them both and find this much the best. I’ll write more about it when I have been here longer.”

16. **Camp Robinson, AR**

Letter written on March 19, 1945. Was not signed.

17. **Fort Belvoir, VA**

In July 1945, Fred writes from the Army hospital at Fort Belvoir. In this letter he also writes that

“My interview by OSS was unrevealing as everything depended whether or not I could be sent out of the country and the doctor would not say yes until I had been examined here. I don’t think they will pass me for overseas duty so don’t worry.”

He was still at Fort Belvoir when Japan surrendered (August 14, 1945) and writes a letter on August 15 (on American Red Cross stationery) about his surprise and happiness about the war ending.

Conclusion

The Bachelder Family Letters provide insight into the day-to-day life of a soldier in World War II. The letters indicate that Fred Bachelder served in a wide variety of roles, as he was constantly transferred to different camps and assigned to new battalions. The locations and dates of the letters proved integral in associating the letters with relevant historical events. For example, while at Shenango, Fred sent his mother his address, which indicated that he was part of the 15th Battalion. Shortly thereafter – during the summer of 1943 – he began writing from “North Africa,” which allowed us to deduce that he was part of the 15th Engineer Battalion that traveled to Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco as part of Operation Torch and the Tunisia Campaign (“15th Engineer Battalion (United States),” n.d.). Interesting information about both civilian and military life during this time period can be gleaned from these letters, which serve as primary source materials which prove important for further World War II research. By making the text accessible, researchers and historians can quickly access specific letters that pertain to their research questions and focuses. Future manual transcription work can be done to make the handwritten letters more readable, allowing for the complete collection to be examined by anyone and everyone interested in learning more about the experiences of this Holyoke family.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Penni Martorell and the staff at Wistariahurst for providing us with the scans and information about the collection. Thank you to Professor Nick Horton for his guidance, feedback, and technical assistance throughout the semester.

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