

Guide to the John Breon Papers

YCAL MSS 1



by Tina Evans

August 1987

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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 See also: Oversize, Box 15, folder 246 | 1949-84, n.d. |
| | 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 See also: Oversize, Box 15, folder 247 | 1942-76, n.d. |
| 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), f. 246 | Miscellaneous | |
| b. 15 (Oversize), f. 247 | Photographs: Alfonso Ossario | |
| b. 15 (Oversize), f. 248 | Stein, Gertrude: scrapbooks | 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)