Guide to the May Mandelbaum Edel papers, 1928-1996

by Adam Fielding

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## Collection Overview

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<th>Repository</th>
<th>National Anthropological Archives</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Creators                    | Edel, Abraham, 1908-2007  
Edel, May M. (May Mandelbaum), 1909-1964 |
| Title                       | May Mandelbaum Edel papers        |
| Dates                       | 1928-1996                         |
| Bulk Dates                  | 1928-1964                         |
| Quantity                    | 4.58 linear feet, 5 boxes         |
| Abstract                    | May Mandelbaum Edel (1909-1964) taught anthropology at Brooklyn College and the New School for Social Research, and founded the Anthropology Department at Rutgers University in 1960. She conducted fieldwork in Washington; Oregon; Uganda; and Brownsville, New York. The collection consists of field notes, lecture notes, language notes, manuscripts, books, correspondence, teaching materials, conference files, and personal papers. Included are lecture notes taken from courses with Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, and extensive field notes for her work with the Okanagan Indians in Washington, the Chiga in Uganda, and Jewish families in Brownsville, New York. |
| Language                    | The collection is predominantly in English. Some of the language notes are in Bullom, and others could be in Tillamook and Salish. There are some books and papers in Hebrew, Dutch, Indonesian, and French. |

## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

These papers were donated to the National Anthropological Archives by May Mandelbaum Edel's daughter, Deborah Edel, in 2005.

### Related Material

The Bullom and Kru materials complement three tape recordings, apparently of these same individuals, and said to have been "collected by Franz Boas," that are deposited in the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University.

### Processing Information

Processed and encoded by Adam Fielding, 2014

### Preferred Citation

May Mandelbaum Edel papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution
Restrictions on Access

The May Mandelbaum Edel papers are open for research.

Ownership & Literary Rights

Contact the naa@si.edu for terms of use.

Biographical Note

May Mandelbaum Edel was born on December 1, 1909 in New York. As a student at Barnard College, she took graduate anthropology classes at Columbia University under Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. She continued her graduate studies at Columbia University and was awarded her Ph.D. in 1940. Her first fieldwork experience was with the Okanagan in 1930, and in the following year she conducted linguistic research among the Tillamook. As a fellow of the National Research Council, she traveled to Western Uganda in 1932 and stayed in the village of Chiga where she did ethnographic work. In 1934 she married philosopher Abraham Edel, whom she would later collaborate with on the book *Anthropology and Ethics*. She taught anthropology at Brooklyn College and at the New School for Social Research, and in 1960, founded the Anthropology Department at Rutgers University. May Mandelbaum Edel passed away on May 23, 1964 at the age of 54.

Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Born on December 1 in New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>B.A. from Barnard College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Field research in Washington among the Okanagan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Field research in Oregon among the Tillamook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Field research among the Chiga in Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Married Abraham Edel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Field research among Jewish families in Brownsville, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Professor, New School for Social Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Founded the Anthropology Department at Rutgers University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Died of illness on May 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scope and Content Note

The papers of May Mandelbaum Edel document her student and professional career as an anthropologist. The collection consists of field notes, lecture notes, language notes, manuscripts, books, correspondence, teaching materials, conference files, and personal papers. Some of Edel's lecture notes reflect courses taken with Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. The language notes include vocabulary lists, and are for Bullom, and possibly Salish and Tillamook. There are also extensive field notes for her work with the Okanagan in Washington, the Chiga in Uganda, and Jewish families in Brownsville, New York. Writings include annotated drafts of manuscripts on the Chiga of Uganda as well as an annotated draft of her book *The Story of People*. Correspondence includes letters from Franz Boas and Ernest B. Kalibala. Also
included is correspondence for Abraham Edel regarding Edel's published works and the donation of her papers.

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**Arrangement**

This collection is arranged in 7 series:


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**Names and Subject Terms**

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:
- Language and languages--Documentation
- Northern Bullom language

Cultures:
- Chiga (African people)
- Indians of North America--Plateau
- Jews
- Kru (African people)
- Okanagan Indians

Types of Materials:
- Correspondence
- Field notes
- Lecture notes
- Manuscripts

Names:
- Benedict, Ruth, 1887-1948
- Boas, Franz 1858-1942

Geographic Names:
- Brownsville (New York, N.Y.)
- Uganda
Selected Bibliography


Series 1: Research, circa 1930s - circa 1960s

1 linear foot

This series consists of May M. Edel's research files, primarily from her time as a graduate student at Columbia University. Materials include handwritten and typed field notes; typescript drafts of reports; note cards; and miscellaneous unsorted papers, some of which might be lecture notes that were mixed in.

Subjects include her fieldwork in Washington with the Okanagan, 1930; fieldwork with the Chiga in Uganda, 1932-1934; and fieldwork with Jewish families in Brownsville, New York as part of the Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures Project, 1947.

Please note that some of the Okanagan files are in fragile condition.

Files are arranged alphabetically by fieldwork subject. General research notes are filed at the end.

Box 1  Brownsville, New York field notes, circa 1947
Box 2  Okanagan field notes, 1930
Box 2  Uganda field notes, 1932-1934
Box 2  Research notes, circa 1930s - circa 1960s
Series 2: Writings, 1933-1995 (bulk 1933-1965)

1 linear foot

This series contains the writings and related documents of May M. Edel. The files consist of handwritten and typescript drafts of manuscripts, some of which are annotated; copies of her books and articles, including some in other languages; and some related correspondence.

Files are arranged alphabetically by title. Untitled manuscript and manuscript fragments are filed at the end.

Box 3  
African Tribalism, 1965

Box 3  
African Tribalism: correspondence, 1965

Box 3  
The Bachiga, circa 1957

Box 3  
The Bachiga of Uganda: correspondence, circa 1954

Box 3  
The Chiga of East Africa, 1958

Box 3  
The Chiga of Uganda, 1933, 1995

Box 3  
The Chiga of Uganda: preface, 1995

Box 3  
The Chiga of Western Uganda: typescript annotated draft, circa 1957

Box 3  
The Confrontation of Anthropology and Ethics with Abraham Edel, 1963 in The Monist.

Box 3  
The Customs of the Baganda, 1934  
2 copies of the book.

Box 3  
The Customs of the Baganda: typescript annotated draft, 1934

Box 3  
The Customs of the Baganda: notes, circa 1934

Box 3  
On Punitive and Non-punitive Ancestors in Africa, 1960

Box 3  
Property Among the Ciga in Uganda, 1936

Box 3  
The Sinkaiietk or Southern Okanagon of Washington, 1938  
In General Series in Anthropology, no.6

Box 3  
Stability in Tillamook Folklore, 1944  
In Journal of American Folklore, 57(224).

Box 3  
The Story of Our Ancestors, 1962, 1966  
Dutch and Japanese language versions of the book.

Box 3  
The Story of People: typescript annotated draft, circa 1953

Box 3  
The Story of People, 1953  
Hebrew and Indonesian language versions of the book.

Box 3  
Box 3  Untitled manuscript, circa 1930s
Box 3  Manuscript fragments, circa 1930s - circa 1940s
Series 3: Writings By Others, circa 1920-1966

0.1 linear feet

This series consists of writings by others. The papers by Ruth Benedict include a lecture on primitive mythology from 1929. The document from Ruth L. Bunzel is a detailed obituary of May M. Edel from *American Anthropologist*. The document from Isaac Schapera is “Preliminary Report on Field Investigations Among the Bakxatla Baxakxfafela.” The writings by Margaret Mead consist of published works along with papers from the Research in Contemporary Cultures and the New York Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions.

This series is arranged alphabetically by author or title.

Box 3 Benedict, Ruth, 1929, 1943
Box 3 Brown, G. Gordon, 1933
Box 3 Bunzel, Ruth L., 1966
Box 3 Holy Bible, circa 1927
   Probably a gift to Edel from May Langley. Includes inscription.
Box 3 Hunter, M., 1933
Box 3 Mead, Margaret, 1933, 1937-1938, 1948, 1950, 1961
Box 3 Schapera, Isaac, 1933
Series 4: Personal Files, circa 1950s-1967

0.1 linear feet

This series contains May M. Edel's personal papers, and consist of an address book and papers regarding her estate.

This series is arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 3 Address book, circa 1950s
Box 3 Estate, 1964-1967
Series 5: Student Files, 1928-1935

2 linear feet

This series contains lecture and language notes from May M. Edel's student years at Barnard College and Columbia University. The materials are primarily handwritten notes on paper or notecards, with much of it unorganized. Some of the lecture notes are from courses taught by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. It is possible that some of Edel's teaching and lecture notes are also mixed in with this material. The language notes include the Bullom language. The other languages are unidentified, but it is probable that Salish and Tillamook are included. Some of the material consists of vocabulary lists.

Files are arranged alphabetically by type.

Box 3  Bullom language in Sierra Leone, and possibly other languages, 1929
        Includes language notes about the Bullom language and "The Bolum Language: A Preliminary Analysis," written for Franz Boas, May 1929. For the paper, Edel worked with an informant from the Island of Dema, Sierra Leone.

Box 4  Kru, Liberia, Boas, Herkovits, 1928
        Edel's analysis of Kru kinship. Includes typewritten letters (apparently from Boas or Benedict) to Melville Herskovits discussing the style of kinship analysis contained in the report. Edel's informant was probably Thorgues Sie, whose manuscript "A Sketch of My Education Career" accompanies Edel's papers.

Box 4  Language notes, circa 1928 - circa 1934

Box 4  Lecture notes: Boas and Benedict, circa 1928 - circa 1932

Box 4  Lecture notes: Mead, Margaret, 1935

Box 4-5 Lecture notes, circa 1928 - circa 1932
Series 6: Correspondence, 1932-1996, undated

0.5 linear feet

This series contains the correspondence of May M. Edel and Abraham Edel. May M. Edel's correspondence includes personal and professional letters. Professional correspondents include Franz Boas, Bertha Cohen, and Ernest B. Kalibala. Subjects include her field work and writings.

The correspondence of Abraham Edel includes letters regarding May M. Edel's death in 1964; publishing issues with Little, Brown and Co. regarding her books; reprints of her other writings; and the donation of May Edel's papers to the University of Washington and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

This series retains previously arranged correspondent files which are arranged alphabetically. Other correspondence is arranged chronologically.

Subseries: Edel, May Mandelbaum

Subseries: Edel, Abraham


Box 5
Correspondence regarding Anthropology and Ethics, 1958-1959

Box 5
Boas, Franz, 1932-1933

Box 5
Cohen, Bertha, circa 1930s

Box 5
Eleanor [?], circa 1930s

Box 5
Family, circa 1930s

Box 5
International African Institute, 1948-1956

Box 5
Kalibala, Ernest B., 1932, circa 1970s

Box 5
Langley, May, circa 1930s

Box 5
Nelson, Elsa and Marta Spencer, circa 1930s

Box 5
General correspondence, 1930s

Box 5
General correspondence, 1940-1950s

Box 5

Box 5
General correspondence, Undated

1.2: Edel, Abraham, 1953-1996

Box 5
Condolence letters, 1964
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 5</th>
<th>International African Institute, 1964-1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 5</td>
<td>Joans, Barbara, 1982-1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5</td>
<td>Little, Brown and Co.: Story of People, 1972-1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5</td>
<td>Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1986-1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 5</td>
<td>General correspondence, 1976-1986</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Series 7: Professional Files, 1929-1963

0.25 linear feet

This series contains papers related to Edel’s professional life. Included are clippings, conference materials, a copy of her curriculum vitae, and teaching files.

The files are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 5  Clippings, circa 1930s - circa 1950s
Box 5  Conference announcements, 1960-1962
Box 5  Conference on Anthropology and World Affairs, 1963
Box 5  Curriculum vitae, 1943
Box 5  International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, 1956, 1960
Box 5  National Research Council Fellowship: Africa, 1932-1933
Box 5  Supper-Conference for Anthropologists, 1946
Box 5  Teaching files, circa 1940s - circa 1950s
Box 5  Teaching files, 1959-1961
Box 5  University files and employment applications, 1929-1930, 1935, 1940, 1961