



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the May Mandelbaum Edel papers, 1928-1996

Adam Fielding

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	May Mandelbaum Edel papers
Date:	1928-1996 (bulk 1928-1964)
Identifier:	NAA.2005-27
Creator:	Edel, May M. (May Mandelbaum), 1909-1964 Edel, Abraham, 1908-2007
Extent:	4.58 Linear feet (5 boxes)
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.
Summary:	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 Bachiga (Bakiga) in Uganda, and Jewish families in Brownsville, New York.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

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

Related Materials

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

The May Mandelbaum Edel papers are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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 Bufuka (with the Bachiga people) 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

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

Scope and Contents

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.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 7 series:

Series 1: Research, circa 1930s - circa 1960s; Series 2: Writings, 1933-1995; Series 3: Writings By Others circa 1920s-1966; Series 4: Personal Files, circa 1950s-1967; Series 5: Student Files, 1928-1935; Series 6: Correspondence, 1932-1996, undated; Series 7: Professional Files, 1929-1963;

Selected Bibliography

1934 co-editor and translator with Ernest Kalibala. *Customs of the Baganda*. By Sir Apolo Kagwa. New York: Columbia University Press.

1937 *The Bachiga of East Africa*. In *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*. Margaret Mead, ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

1939 with Walter Cline, Rachel S. Commons, Richard H. Post, and L.V.W. Walters. *The Sinkaitk or Southern Okanagon of Washington*. Leslie Spier, ed. General Series in Anthropology No. 6. Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Co.

1939 *The Tillamook Languages*. Monograph of the International Journal of American Linguistics. 10(1). New York: J. J. Augustin.

1953 *The Story of People: Anthropology for Young People*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

1955 *The Story of Our Ancestors*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

1957 *The Chiga of Western Uganda*. New York: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.

1959 with Abraham Edel. *Anthropology and Ethics*. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C Thomas.

1965 *African Tribalism: Some Reflections on Uganda*. *Political Science Quarterly* 80: 357-372.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Chiga (African people)
- Indians of North America -- Plateau
- Jews
- Kru (African people)
- Language and languages -- Documentation
- Northern Bullom language
- Okanagan

Cultures:

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

Types of Materials:

- Correspondence
- Field notes
- Lecture notes
- Manuscripts

Names:

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

Places:

Brownsville (New York, N.Y.)
Uganda

Container Listing

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

1 Linear foot

Scope and Contents: 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

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Series 2: Writings, 1933-1995 (bulk 1933-1965)

1 Linear foot

Scope and Contents: 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 Notes: in <i>The Monist</i> .
Box 3	The Customs of the Baganda, 1934 Notes: 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 Sinkaietk or Southern Okanagon of Washington, 1938 Notes: In <i>General Series in Anthropology</i> , no.6
Box 3	Stability in Tillamook Folklore, 1944 Notes: In <i>Journal of American Folklore</i> , 57(224).
Box 3	The Story of Our Ancestors, 1966, 1962 Notes: 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
Notes: Hebrew and Indonesian language versions of the book.

Box 3 World Book Encyclopedia, 1963, 1958-1959

Box 3 Untitled manuscript, circa 1930s

Box 3 Manuscript fragments, circa 1930s - circa 1940s

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Series 3: Writings By Others, circa 1920-1966

0.1 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: 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 Baxakxafela." 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, 1943, 1929
Box 3	Brown, G. Gordon, 1933
Box 3	Bunzel, Ruth L., 1966
Box 3	Holy Bible, circa 1927 Notes: Probably a gift to Edel from May Langley. Includes inscription.
Box 3	Hunter, M., 1933
Box 3	Mead, Margaret, 1961, 1950, 1948, 1937-1938, 1933
Box 3	Schapera, Isaac, 1933

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Series 4: Personal Files, circa 1950s-1967

0.1 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: 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

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Series 5: Student Files, 1928-1935

2 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: 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 Notes: 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 Notes: 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

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Series 6: Correspondence, 1932-1996, undated

0.5 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: 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

1.1: Edel, May Mandelbaum, 1932-1991, Undated (bulk 1932-1959)

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	General correspondence, 1977, 1960s, 1991
Box 5	General correspondence, Undated

1.2: Edel, Abraham, 1953-1996

Box 5	Condolence letters, 1964
Box 5	International African Institute, 1964-1996
Box 5	Joans, Barbara, 1982-1986
Box 5	Little, Brown and Co.: Ancestors, 1953, 1963-1964, 1977
Box 5	Little, Brown and Co.: Story of People, 1972-1981
Box 5	Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 1986-1988
Box 5	University of Washington, 1966-1967, 1987-1988
Box 5	General correspondence, 1976-1986

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Series 7: Professional Files, 1929-1963

0.25 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: 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, 1960, 1956
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, 1961, 1940, 1935, 1929-1930

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