

∞ The Ward M. Canaday Center ∞

for Special Collections

The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

➤ **Brand Whitlock Letters, 1915**◀

Letters from Schoolchildren of Ghent, Belgium, March 1915

MSS-023

**Size:** 5 linear ft. (ca. 7000 items)

**Provenance:** No one seems to know for certain how this collection came to the University of Toledo Libraries. Lucille B. Emch, librarian from 1929 to 1979, believes that Ella Brainerd Whitlock gave the letters to the University before she began working there. This lack of knowledge regarding the collection's provenance explains part of the difficulty in assigning the proper name or main entry to the collection, although we can safely assume, because of Whitlock's connection to Toledo, that the letters were at one time in Whitlock's hands.

**Access:** Open

**Collection Summary:** This collection consists of approximately 7000 letters written by the schoolchildren of Ghent, Belgium, expressing thanks for American shipments of food and clothing following World War I.

**Subjects:** [Politics and Government](#) , [Social Welfare](#)

**Copyright:** The literary rights to this collection are assumed to rest with the person(s) responsible for the production of the particular items within the collection, or with their heirs or assigns. Researchers bear full legal responsibility for the acquisition to publish from any part of said collection per *Title 17, United States Code*. The **Ward M. Canaday Center for Special Collections** may reserve the right to intervene as intermediary at its own discretion.

**Processed by:** Paul Gifford May 1986

**Reformatted by:** Arjun Sabharwal, June 2009; last updated: June, 2014

**Brand Whitlock**  
**Letters, 1915**

**Introduction**

This collection consists of about 7000 letters written by schoolchildren of Ghent, Belgium, in March 1915. Nearly all addressed to the American people, they express thanks for recent American shipments of food and clothing. Many letters are painstakingly illustrated. Apparently part of a national campaign, the letters collectively or individually contain little of informational worth. Their value is primarily as evidence of the concerted effort of Belgian schoolchildren to send thanks to their benefactors. They also serve as attractive, even elegant, examples of letter composition, illustration, and handicraft taught in Belgian schools at the beginning of the 20th century. As such the letters have value as items for display.

There are no restrictions on the use of this collection.

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**Historical Note**

The German army invaded Belgium on August 3, 1914, and in three weeks controlled the country. War had a disastrous effect on Belgium, which imported 80 percent of its food. With the country's ports of entry closed, and demands on its reserves made by its occupiers, sources of food rapidly disappeared. Only a month later, Brand Whitlock, American minister to Belgium, described the grain shortage as "acute." Already hungry in the fall, the Belgians faced an even hungrier winter.

A domestic relief organization, the Comite Central de Secours et d'Alimentation of Brussels merged, under the sponsorship of the ministers of Spain and the United States, both neutral nations, but it soon realized that it could not fight the nation-wide famine certain to follow. An American engineer resident in Brussels, Millard K. Shaler, as representative of the Comite, went to London on September 26. He contacted members of the American Relief Committee and requested aid for Belgium. The A.R.C. had been formed to assist the repatriation of Americans stranded in Europe and had expected to return home once its task was accomplished. The American Relief Committee, however, was impressed favorably by Shaler's appeal. Herbert Hoover, a member of the Committee, took the case to the American ambassador to England. Eventually through negotiations it was arranged for supplies to be sent from the United States to the U. S. ambassador to England and by him to the U. S. minister to Belgium.

The Committee for Relief in Belgium was organized formally on October 22. Through delicate diplomacy, it managed to arrange for food to be sent to Belgium. By the end of February 1915, 182,000 metric tons of flour, beans and peas, maize, milk, rice, and other foodstuffs, as well as clothing, had arrived in Belgium. Famine, if not hunger, had been averted.

Although dominated by Americans, the Committee for Relief in Belgium was officially an international group, having citizens of the Netherlands and Spain on its governing board. Yet the letters in this collection are invariably addressed to the American people, American children, or to the "American Relief Committee."

It should come as no surprise that schools undertook a massive letter-writing campaign in March 1915. The C. R. B. had recognized the special nutritional requirements of children, and schools served as kitchens for the hungry children. American children sent boat-loads of gifts to their counterparts in Belgium. This spirited campaign was not limited to the schoolchildren of Ghent. Similar letters from other children survive in the manuscript collections of the Committee for Belgian Relief and the personal papers of its administrators. These are held by the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, in Stanford, California.

In his capacity as U. S. Minister to Belgium, Brand Whitlock (1869-1934) acted as liaison for the C. R. B. with the German occupiers. For the grateful Belgians, who celebrated Washington's Birthday in 1915 with fervor, Whitlock personified the American people. On March 17, 1915,

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precisely when the schoolchildren were writing their letters, the Belgian Minister at Washington sent William Jennings Bryan, U. S. Secretary of State, a letter on behalf of the Belgian government in which he praised and thanked Whitlock for his efforts. Whitlock received, or rather took custody, of the schoolchildren's letters, but he did so on behalf of the American people in his official capacity as U. S. Minister. His wife Ella Brainerd Whitlock, as her special interest, represented the United States in visits to schools and in efforts to aid Belgian children.

The object of the schoolchildren's gratitude was diffuse. "America" and "children of America" were the most common addressees. "American Relief Commission," the most precise and tangible group to which any were addressed, was used by a few. None, however, were addressed by the schoolchildren to Brand or Ella Whitlock personally. This fact creates confusion for the archivist in giving the proper name or main entry to this collection. Nevertheless, since these letters came to the collections of the University of Toledo presumably through the graces of Ella Whitlock, the accepted archival principle of provenance dictates that this collection be given the heading of Brand Whitlock.

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**Scope and Content**

All of the letters in this collection were written in the second and third week of March 1915 by schoolchildren---mainly those in the primary grades---in public and private schools of Ghent (Flemish Gent, French Gand), Belgium. Most bear the Flemish headings Huldeaan Amerika (Homage to America), Dank aan Amerika (Thanks to America), or other similar headings. The letters are grouped together by class and then by school. The language of most of the letters is Flemish; others are in French and a few in English.

As one might imagine, the appearance of the handwritten letters tends to be formal. The younger students apparently copied models provided by their teachers. Older students wrote letters individually, yet those letters closely resemble each other in appearance---on identical stationery, in a similar format, and probably in content as well.

One remarkable feature of these letters is the high level of skill displayed in the decoration and illustration on many of them. Although the bulk of the decorated letters, as we might expect, show merely a pedantic style, a few are done with a virtually professional Art Nouveau hand.

The researcher might find honest, personal accounts of hunger in the letters useful for his or her research on assistance to Belgium. But that researcher is far more likely to come to conclusions based on the collection as a whole rather than on single items within the collection. Furthermore, certain decorated letters demonstrate the pains which Ghent schoolteachers and pupils took in order to express gratitude to the Americans for the relief they provided.

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**Folder List**

Box	Folde r	
1		Primary schools, public and private, mixed and boys
		Acacienstraat
	1	1e-4e Studiejaa ren
	2	5e-6e Studiejaaren
	3	Begoniastraat
		Bommelstraat
	4	1e-3e Studiejaaren
	5	4e-6e Studiejaaren
	6	Callier
		Capucij nerstraat
	7	1e-5e Studiejaaren
	8	6e-ge Studiejaaren
	9	Rue du Casino
	10	Congo straat
	11	Eendrachstraat
	12	Geitestraat
2		Groendraf
	1	1e-2e Studiejaaren
	2	3e-6e Studiejaaren
		Groot Meerhemlaan
	3	1e-3e Studiejaaren
	4	4e-6e Studiejaaren
		Hippolyte Lammenstraat
	5	1e-4e Studiejaa ren
	6	5e-8e Studiejaaren
		Joseph II straat
	7	1e-2e Studiejaaren
	8	3e-6e Studiejaaren
	9	Kleine Ram
		Kortrijksche straat
	10	1e-3e Studiejaaren
	11	4e-6e Studiejaaren
	12	Muinkbrugstraat -1e-6e Studiejaaren
	13	Nieuw Begijnhofstraat -Hoogere graad
	14	Nieuwpoortstraat
	15	Olmstraat
	16	Palmboomstraat -1e-2e Studiejaaren
	17	Rijhovelaan -3e-6e Studiejaaren
		Roodelijvekensstraat
	18	1e-3e Studiejaaren
	19	4e-6e Studiejaaren

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- 3 Primary schools, public and private, mixed and boys'  
St. Machariusstraat  
1e-2e Studiejaaren  
1 3e-4e Studiejaaren  
2 5e-6e Studiejaaren  
3 St. Pietersnieuwstraat  
1e-3e Studiejaaren  
4 4e-6e Studiejaaren  
5 St. Pieters-aalst  
6 Sasschepoortstraat  
7 Slijpstraat  
1e-4e Studiejaaren  
8 5e-8e Studiejaaren  
9 Spanoghe  
1e-2e Studiejaaren  
10 3e-6e Studiejaaren  
11 Tarbotstraat  
12 Volderstraat – 1e, 5e-6e Studiejaaren  
13
- 4 Van Crombrugghe  
1 1e-3e Studiejaaren  
2 4e-6e Studiejaaren  
Nr. 16  
3 (1 of 2)  
4 (2 of 2)
- Primary schools, public and private, girls  
5 Akkergemlaan  
Dendermondschen steenweg  
6 1e-2e Studiejaaren  
7 3e Studiejaar  
8 4e-Ge Studiejaaren  
Drongen steenweg  
9 1e-3e Studiejaaren  
10 4e-6e Studiejaaren  
11 Rue des foulons  
Froebel straat 2  
12 1e-3e Studiejaaren  
13 4e-6e Studiejaaren  
Meulestede  
14 1e-4e Studiejaaren  
15 5e-6e Studiejaaren  
16 Yskelderstraat
- Higher and other schools  
11 Institut Laurent -8e Studiejaar

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- 5 Higher and other schools
- 1 Institut Wagener
  - 2 3e-5e Studiejaaren
  - 2 6e-9e Studiejaaren
  - 3 Lagere Hoofdeschool Bedijnhofplaats
  - 3 1e-7e Studiejaaren
  - 4 8e-9e Studiejaaren
  - 5 Lagere Hoofdeschool Juffrouwen Van Hulthemstraat
  - 5 Lagere Hoofdeschool Van Monckhovenstraat
  - 6 drawings
  - 7 letters
  - 8 Bewahrschool Latijntjestraat
  - 9 Beroepsschool Carels
  - 10 Ecole professionnelle communale pour jeunes filies - Section
  - 11 commerciale
  - 12 Stedelijke Huishoudkundige Beroepsschool voor Meisjes
  - 13 Stedelijke Normalschool voor Onderwijzeressen
  - Vaksschool van het Boek