

M. Louise Baker papers

1107

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

5/13/13

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
Creator	Baker, Mary Louise, b. 1872-d. 1962
Title	M. Louise Baker papers
Call number	1107
Date [inclusive]	1879-1955
Extent	5 linear feet
Language	English
Abstract	<p>During her employment as museum artist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology from 1908-1936, M. (Mary) Louise Baker established an international reputation as the preeminent archaeological artist of her time with unmatched technical skill in scientific illustration. Her work at the University Museum included paintings of Maya pottery for limited edition folio volumes; paintings and reconstructions of Ur of the Chaldees? royal tombs findings for Sir C. Leonard Woolley and of the Palace of Merenptah at Memphis, and a reconstructed drawing of the Piedras Negras Lintel 3. She spent much of her career dividing her time between the positions of museum artist and as art teacher at the George School in Bucks County, PA. A life-long Quaker, M. Louise Baker was born in Alliance, Ohio, on August 4, 1872. At the age of 19, she came to Pennsylvania to complete her education. By 1900, she had decided to concentrate on art and enrolled at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art. Early in her career, Baker was a free-lance artist for commercial illustrations and children?s magazines. She also did scientific drawings for archaeologist Clarence B. Moore at the Academy of Natural</p>

Sciences in Philadelphia. In 1908, she was hired by Dr. George Byron Gordon at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. During her career as an archaeological artist, Baker traveled to parts of the world where women never ventured unattended. The M. Louise Baker collection spans the years from 1889 to 1962 and contains her unpublished autobiography; 54 detailed diaries from 1889 to 1960; sketches, commercial art, illustrated stories and poems for children's publications from her early career; scrapbooks which she compiled; drawings and paintings. A large portion of the collection, including Baker's unpublished memoir, family photographs, scrapbooks, and diaries, was donated to the Penn Museum Archives in 2011 by Baker family members after a connection with Museum Research Associate Dr. Elin Danien. It is housed in ten archival boxes, plus additional drawings and paintings housed in the Oversize Plans and Drawings Collection and other examples of Baker's work relating to Ur and Egypt on display in Museum exhibit galleries. The Penn Museum owns over 500 works by Baker, including all her work for the Maya Pottery publications, much of it unpublished.

Biography/History

M. (Mary) Louise Baker spent much of her career dividing her time between positions as museum artist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and teaching art at the George School, a Quaker boarding school in Bucks County, PA. During her employment as museum artist at the University Museum from 1908-1936, Baker established an international reputation as the preeminent archaeological artist of her time. Her unmatched technical skill in scientific illustration was used to document artifacts in detailed pen and ink, charcoal and watercolor drawings and paintings, which were both scientifically valuable and also exquisite art. Her drawings and paintings are distinctive in their unusual three-dimensional quality. Most are signed with her distinctive M.L.B.

M. Louise Baker was born in Alliance, Ohio, on August 4, 1872. A life-long Quaker who always used "thee" and "thy," she was descended from Quaker families who had settled in Chester County, PA at the time of William Penn and later migrated to Ohio by covered wagon during the 1800's. At the age of 19, she came to Pennsylvania to complete her education and then taught in several one-room schools in Chester Country. By 1900, she had decided to concentrate on art and enrolled at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art, later the Philadelphia College of Art. She also studied at the Academy

of Fine Arts under William Merritt Chase and Howard Pyle. During her early career years, she was a freelance artist, doing commercial illustrations; submitting stories, poems, and illustrations for children's magazines; teaching art part-time at the George School; and doing scientific drawings for archaeologist Clarence B. Moore at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

In 1908, she was interviewed and hired by Dr. George Byron Gordon of the University of Pennsylvania Museum to draw and paint watercolors of the Maya pots at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, then of all of the University of Pennsylvania's Maya pottery. She soon was given the title Museum Artist, and continued in this role until 1936, creating illustrations for Museum publications and exhibits, as well as models, replicas, and even restoration work. Desiring to serve at the end of World War I, she was accepted, despite her precarious health history, to work in Quaker relief for over a year in France. She worked with French women refugees to help them create an embroidery industry and was responsible for over 800 women. It was here that she met Irish Quaker fellow relief worker Constance Allen and began their lifelong close friendship and relationship.

To fulfill his dream of a limited edition portfolio book of the finest examples of Maya pottery, Gordon sent Baker on travels to Europe and to Central America to locate and draw Maya pottery pieces in both private and museum collections. During a leave of absence from the George School, she made arduous journeys alone to Mexico and Central America and visited Europe twice in 1933-34. Her paintings of Maya pottery were featured in the limited edition folio volumes, "Examples of Maya Pottery in the Museum and Other Collections," edited by G. B. Gordon, volume I, and J. Alden Mason, volumes II and III, published by the University of Pennsylvania Museum between 1925 and 1943. During her career as an internationally known archaeological artist, Baker traveled to parts of the world where women never ventured unattended. Louise Baker also worked in the British Museum, Baghdad and Iraq with Sir C. Leonard Woolley on the Ur of Chaldees' royal tombs findings. She did the first reconstruction of the Bull-Headed Lyre from Ur.

Baker's Museum works included a 57" X 42" watercolor painting which illustrated a theoretical restoration of the throne room in the Palace of Merenptah at Memphis, based upon the precise measurements and plans of excavation director Clarence Stanley Fisher, and the three-dimensional model of the Merenptah throne room on display in the Lower Egyptian Gallery. Her work in the Museum included much restoration drawing. In 1935 and 1936 she worked on a reconstructed drawing of the badly defaced stone Maya Lintel 3, of rare archaeological value, excavated from Piedras Negras. Much of the sculpture was missing, and a number of figures were uncertain. She successfully defended her reconstruction of the original artist's intentions. This project was her "swan song" to end her 30 years of service as staff artist at the Museum. Louise Baker suffered lifelong health problems and battled serious eye problems all of her life. The eye problems required several surgeries and periodic enforced periods of rest. With her eyesight failing and the Museum in Depression era financial difficulties, she retired from the Museum in 1936 and then the George School in 1938. She and Constance Allen retired to Wallingford, PA. By 1949 she was completely blind. The two lifelong friends spent their final years at the Hickman House in West Chester, PA and Louise Baker died in 1962, just before her 90th birthday.

Scope and Contents

The M. Louise Baker collection spans the years from 1889 to 1962 and contains her unpublished autobiography; 54 detailed diaries from 1889 to 1960; sketches, commercial art, illustrated stories and poems for children's publications from her early career; scrapbooks which she compiled relating to her positions as art teacher at the George School, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Museum Artist for the Penn Museum; materials regarding her extensive work for the Museum's limited edition publication "Examples of Maya Pottery in the Museum and Other Collections," edited by G. B. Gordon, volume I, and J. Alden Mason, volumes II and III, (The University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1925-1943); and drawings and paintings. The collection consists of xxxxx linear feet of material, divided into the following seven series: personal; autobiography; poems, stories, illustrations; correspondence; Penn Museum; diaries; drawings.

A large portion of the collection came to the Penn Museum Archives after Louise Baker's family members found the FAMESI (Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies) website on Baker by Penn Museum Research Associate Dr. Elin Danien, who has been researching the life and work of Baker, hoping to write a book on her life and achievements. Baker's grand-nephew and grand-niece contacted Danien, and made the family materials available to her. In 2011 her grand-nephew Alan Noble donated Baker's unpublished memoir, family photographs, scrapbooks, and the invaluable 54 detailed diaries to the Penn Museum Archives.

The original order was maintained for the diaries, dating from 1889 to 1960, which Baker had meticulously labeled by month and year, and numbered. Sketches, news clippings, etc. which were inserted into individual diaries were pulled and placed in a folder immediately following that diary with the sub-heading "ephemera." Baker's chapter order was maintained for her unpublished autobiography, as was her order for "Goose Feathers" and other scrapbooks.

Baker's autobiography consists of eight chapters, which cover her life from her childhood in Ohio to her retirement years at her "Four Winds" home in Wallingford. The series on Baker's personal life includes biography and family history, photos of family artifacts, news clippings including her art teaching career at the George School in Bucks County PA, official documents, photographs of herself and family members, receipt books, and scrapbooks she compiled.

The Poems, Stories, Illustrations series includes "Goose Feathers Plucked by M.L.B., 1910-1947," publications, miscellaneous items from diaries, and scrapbooks. "Goose Feathers" includes Baker's stories and illustrations for publication in children's magazines, her personally designed Christmas cards, and the series of Christmas cards which she designed for the University Museum. The scrapbook(s) in this series contain additional published children's stories and illustrations by Baker.

Baker's correspondence is divided into her two main employments at the George School and the Penn Museum, Personal "Family, Personal "Miscellaneous, and her correspondence with Leonard Woolley, with whom she worked on the Ur of the Chaldees tomb findings. Additional Baker correspondence can be found in the Archives' Directors Office Correspondence files of George Byron Gordon, 1910-1928, and Horace H. F. Jayne, 1929-1940, the two Museum directors under whom Baker worked.

The Penn Museum series deals primarily with the Maya Pottery publication, for which Baker traveled extensively in Central America and Europe to paint outstanding examples of Maya pottery. Found in Maya Pottery Book files are correspondence, news clippings, photographs, plates and drawings lists; notes, drawings, and rubbings; miscellaneous publications. Other Penn Museum files include museum print brochures, news clippings and photographs, Piedras Negras Lintel 3 news clippings, and Ur, Iraq news clippings.

One of the highlights of the collection is Baker's 54 detailed and meticulous diaries, handwritten and spanning the time from January 1889 to June 1960. Diaries #30 and #32 are missing. In her later years, as Baker lost her eyesight and her health worsened, diary entries were dictated. The diaries are housed in chronological order in boxes 4-10 of the collection.

Included in the Drawings series of the M. Louise Baker collection are cards, commercial art, two early sketchbooks, and photocopies of sketches from the originals located in Diaries'Ephemera files. In addition, extensive original drawings and paintings done by Baker for the Museum are housed in the Oversize Plans and Drawings Collection, and other examples of her work relating to Ur and Egypt are also on display in Museum exhibit galleries. The Penn Museum owns over 500 works by Baker, including all her work for the Maya Pottery publications, much of it unpublished. Watercolors of archaeological artifacts make up most of the collection, but it also includes maps, archaeological reconstructions, illustrations of expeditions, and drawings for children. Most of the original water colors for the Ur publications are housed at the Birmingham Museums, England.

Administrative Information

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Controlled Access Headings

Form/Genre(s)

- Diaries
- Drawings (visual works)

Personal Name(s)

- Allen, E. Constance
- Baker, Mary Louise, b. 1872-d. 1962
- Fisher, Clarence Stanley, 1876-1941
- Gordon, G. B. (George Byron), 1870-1927
- Mason, John Alden, 1885-1967
- Wooley, C. Leonard, Sir, b. 1880-d.1960

Subject(s)

- Art history
- Maya Art

Autobiography

Collection Inventory
Autobiography.

	Box
Ten Years Agrowing, 1936.	1
Chapter II "Cross Currents", 1936.	1
Chapter III "New Horizons", 1936.	1
Chapter IV "Sunshine & Shadow", 1951.	1
Chapter V "A Tangled Skein", 1951.	1
Chapter VI "Wanderlust", 1953.	1
Chapter VII "Further Afield", 1954.	1
Chapter VIII "Four Winds Wallingford", 1958.	1

Personal, 1894-1955.

	Box
Biography, M. Louise Baker.	1
Family Artifacts (Photos of).	1
Family History.	1
News Clippings.	1

Penn Museum

News Clippings, George School.		1
Official Documents, 1894-1935.		1
Photographs, Family.		1
Photographs, M. Louise Baker.		1
Receipt Books, 1894-1898.		1
Scrapbooks (1 of 2).	2	1
Scrapbooks (2 of 2).	2	1

Penn Museum.

		Box
Maya Pottery Book--Correspondence.		3
Maya Pottery Book--Correspondence--Personal.		3
Maya Pottery Book--News Clippings.		3
Maya Pottery Book--Photographs (1 of 2).		3
Maya Pottery Book--Photographs (2 of 2).		3
Maya Pottery Book--Plates and Drawings--Lists--Drafts.		3
Maya Pottery Book--Notebooks.		3
Maya Pottery Book--Notes, Drawings, Rubbings.		3

Poems, Stories, Illustrations

Maya Pottery Book - Miscellaneous Publications.	3
Museum Print Brochures.	3
Piedras Negras--Lintel 3--News Clippings.	3
Ur, Iraq--News Clippings.	3

Poems, Stories, Illustrations.

	Box
"Goose Feathers Plucked by M.L.B. 1910-1947" (1 of 2).	2
"Goose Feathers Plucked by M.L.B. 1910-1947" (2 of 2).	2
Miscellaneous from Diaries.	2
Publications.	2
Scrapbooks.	2

Correspondence.

	Box
George School.	3
Penn Museum.	3
Personal--Family.	3
Personal--Miscellaneous.	3

Diaries

Woolley, Leonard.	3
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Diaries.

	Box
Diary - No. 1 Jan - July 1889.	4
Diary - No. 2 July 1889 - Apr. 1890.	4
Diary - No. 3 May - November 1890.	4
Diary - No. 4 Nov. 1890 - August 1891.	4
Diary - No. 5 August 1891 - February 1892.	4
Diary - No. 6 February - October 1892.	4
Diary - No. 6 February - October 1892 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 7 October 1892 - June 1893. Contains program for Whittier Entertainment, Oct. 29th, 1892 .	4
Diary - No. 7 October 1892 - June 1893 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 8 June 1893 - October 1893.	4
Diary - No. 8 June 1893 - October 1893 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 9 Oct. 1893 - February 1894.	4
Diary - No. 9 Oct. 1893 - February 1894 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 10 February - June 1894.	4

Diaries

Diary - No. 10 February - June 1894 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 11 June 1894 - April 1895.	4
Diary - No. 11 June 1894 - April 1895 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 12 April 1895 - Feb 1896.	4
Diary - No. 12 April 1895 - Feb 1896 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 13 February - December 1896.	4
Diary - No. 13 February - December 1896 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 14 - Dec. 1896 - July 1897.	4
Diary - No. 14 - Dec. 1896 - July 1897 - Ephemera.	4
Diary - No. 15 July 1897 - March 1898.	1 5
Diary - No. 15 July 1897 - March 1898 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 16 March - August 1898.	5
Diary - No. 16 March - August 1898 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 17 August 1898 - May 1899.	5
Diary - No. 17 August 1898 - May 1899 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 18 May 1899 - September 1900.	5
Diary - No. 18 May 1899 - September 1900 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 19 September 1900 - April 1901.	5

Diaries

Diary - No. 19 September 1900 - April 1901 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 20 April 1901 - June 1902.	5
Diary - No. 20 April 1901 - June 1902 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 21 June 1902 - October 1903.	5
Diary - No. 21 June 1902 - October 1903 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 22 October 1903 - August 1904.	5
Diary - No. 22 October 1903 - August 1904 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 23 August 1904 - January 1906.	5
Diary - No. 23 August 1904 - January 1906 - Ephemera.	5
Diary - No. 24 January 1906 - August 1907.	6
Diary - No. 24 January 1906 - August 1907 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 25 August 1907 - April 1909.	6
Diary - No. 25 August 1907 - April 1909 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 26 April 1909 - Sept. 1911.	6
Diary - No. 26 April 1909 - Sept. 1911 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 27 Sept 1911- Sept 1913.	6
Diary - No. 27 Sept 1911- Sept 1913 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 28 September 1913 - July 1915.	6

Diaries

Diary - No. 28 September 1913 - July 1915 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 29 July 1915 - March 1919.	6
Diary - No. 29 July 1915 - March 1919 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 31 July 1919 - November 1920.	6
Diary - No. 31 July 1919 - November 1920 - Ephemera.	6
Diary - No. 33 - December 1921 - May 1923.	7
Diary - No. 34 - May 1923 - April 1925.	7
Diary - No. 34 - May 1923 - April 1925 - Ephemera.	7
Diary - No. 35 - April 1925 - June 1926.	7
Diary - No. 36 - June 1926 - May 1928.	7
Diary - No. 36 - June 1926 - May 1928 - Ephemera.	7
Diary - No. 37 - May 1928 - November 1929.	7
Diary - No. 37 - May 1928 - November 1929 - Ephemera.	7
Diary - No. 38 I - November 1929 - June 1932.	7
Diary - No. 38 I - November 1929 - June 1932 - Ephemera.	7
Diary - No. 38 II - February - October 1931 - Central America.	7
Diary - No. 38 II - February - October 1931 - Central America - Ephemera.	7
Diary - No. 39 - June 1932 - March 1934 - Europe & Baghdad.	8

Diaries

Diary - No. 39 - June 1932 - March 1934 - Europe & Baghdad - Ephemera.	8
Diary - No. 40 - March 1934 - April 1936.	8
Diary - No. 40 - March 1934 - April 1936 - Ephemera.	8
Diary - No. 41 - April 1936 - December 1937.	8
Diary - No. 41 - April 1936 - December 1937 - Ephemera.	8
Diary - No. 42 - December 1937 - October 1939.	8
Diary - No. 42 - December 1937 - October 1939 - Ephemera.	8
Diary - No. 43 - October 1939 - July 1941.	8
Diary - No. 43 - October 1939 - July 1941 - Ephemera.	8
Diary - No. 44 - June 1941 - June 1942.	8
Diary - No. 44 - June 1941 - June 1942 - Ephemera.	8
Diary - No. 45 - June 1942 -April 1943.	9
Diary - No. 45 - June 1942 -April 1943 - Ephemera.	9
Diary - No. 46 - April 1943 -January 1945.	9
Diary - No. 46 - April 1943 -January 1945 - Ephemera.	9
Diary - No. 47 - February 1945 - November 1946.	9
Diary - No. 47 - February 1945 - November 1946 - Ephemera.	9
Diary - No. 48 - March - September 1947.	9

Drawings

Diary - No. 48 - March - September 1947 - Ephemera.	9
Diary - No. 49 - August 1948 - April 1949.	9
Diary - No. 49 - August 1948 - April 1949 - Ephemera.	9
Diary - No. 50 - April 1949 - May 1951.	9
Diary - No. 50 - April 1949 - May 1951 - Ephemera.	9
Diary - No. 51- May 1951- December 1952.	10
Diary - No. 51- May 1951- December 1952 - Ephemera.	10
Diary - No. 52 - December 1952 - Feb. 1955.	10
Diary - No. 52 - December 1952 - Feb. 1955 - Ephemera.	10
Diary - No. 53 - February 1955 - Oct. 1957.	10
Diary - No. 53 - February 1955 - Oct. 1957 - Ephemera.	10
Diary - No. 54- October 1957 - June 1960.	10
Diary - No. 54- October 1957 - June 1960 - Ephemera.	10

Drawings.

	Box
Cards and Envelopes, 1920-1931. Holiday cards and envelopes.	10
Commercial Art.	10

Drawings

Sketchbooks (1 of 2). Drawing Book, 1897.

10

Sketchbooks (2 of 2). Drawing book, 1900.

10

Sketches--Miscellaneous.

10