

Frances Elvira Owens
to
Samuel. R. Owens
February 16, 1942

Hunter Library MS 16.05-1-03-005

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For English 618: Research Methods in English
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Introduction to the Series

This transcription and its attendant annotations, explanatory material, and bibliography were prepared by students in ENGL 618: Research Methods in English, the required gateway class for the MA in English at Western Carolina University. The learning outcomes for this class include the following:

1. Conduct appropriate, effective, and ethical scholarship
 - a. Effectively find and use advanced research tools (handbooks, databases, guides, bibliographies, etc.) appropriate to a subject.
 - Students will be able to use a wide variety of such tools and evaluate those tools.
 - b. Find appropriate advanced research (print and electronic scholarship) and apply that research to specific disciplinary questions or issues.
 - Students will be able to find a variety of scholarship, evaluate both the appropriateness and rigor of that scholarship, and incorporate that scholarship correctly and effectively.
 - c. Develop accurate bibliographies and reference citations.
 - Students will be able to annotate, abstract, and cite materials following standard MLA format.
2. Understand the process by which the texts we use are made available.
 - Students will be able to conduct basic editorial work and evaluate the editorial work of others.

All work is presented as submitted by the students. While these students take great care with their transcriptions and annotations, errors are always possible. As these students learn throughout this class, good scholarship requires checking of sources and corroboration by authoritative sources.

It is hoped that the transcription and annotation of WCU Special Collections materials will be useful to the institution, students, scholars, and other patrons and users of WCU's Special Collections materials.

INTRODUCTION

Content Overview

This digital document is a transcription of the content included in HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005. HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005 includes a scanned image of a one-page handwritten letter from Mrs. Steven J. Owens to Samuel R. Owens dated February 15, 1942 (see Fig. 1).

wefebt me. Feb 15 -

My Dearest Son Sammie Boy -
a gain I will ~~try to~~ write you another letter
I guess this is a dogger. I have written to you
and no answer, if only I could get just a few
lines, I would be so happy. I have not heard a
thing from you only the telegram you sent at the
first of the war, if you get this letter
Please, try to write. I got a letter from Frank
yesterday, he is all right and wants to hear
hear from you he said to let him know.
we are all well, Mary and Charley has been home
for the week end and has just gone. they are both
teaching at Harris, NC, they have bought the old alley
place, and Dad is going to try to farm some on it, I'll
bet he dont make enough to feed a pig, on -
Ally is not much well he is on a St. Ignace diet he
has used of the stomach; but he is off on a job -
for defense work in Texas.
there is so much change has been made since you
was home I dont know how to write.
I hope and pray every day to hear from you
and for all the boys. May God Bless
all of you all, and that you will
get home safe a gain.
all ways your loving mother, Dad and me
Ps. and please write to me if you can.

Fig.1. Owens, Frances Elvira. 02/15/42 - 1 page letter from Mrs. Owens. HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005_01. Samuel Robert Owens Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005 also includes scanned images of the front and back of the envelope inside which the letter was enclosed (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).



Fig.2. Owens, Frances Elvira. 02/15/42 - 1 page letter from Mrs. Owens. HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005_01_a. Samuel Robert Owens Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.



Fig.3. Owens, Frances Elvira. 02/15/42 - 1 page letter from Mrs. Owens. HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005_01_b. Samuel Robert Owens Collection. Hunter Library Special Collections, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC.

The letter has dimensions of 8 ½ inches by 11 inches (21.5 cm by 27.7 cm); the envelope has dimensions of 7 inches by 3 ¾ inches (18 cm by 10 cm). Both the letter and the envelope are discolored from age and appear beige in color (see Fig. 1, Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). The letter and the envelope also bear some stains that are olive brown in color (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). The stains are especially prominent on the edges of the envelope (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3). The stains suggest that the envelope may have come into contact with water resulting in the formation of some slight mildew on the paper. The envelope also possesses an amber stain from the seal of the envelope where the glue has deteriorated over time (see Fig. 3). The letter is handwritten in cursive with variations in slant and alignment throughout the document (see Fig. 1). The envelope is addressed from Mrs. S.J. Owens, Webster, NC. The envelope is addressed to S.R. Owens, U.S.S. Canopus #6, Postmaster, San Francisco, California; this address is scratched out in grey pencil, crossed out with in red pencil, and stamped for return to sender (see Fig. 2). Additionally, the envelope is stamped for air mail (see Fig. 2). The envelope is dated by the post office at 10 a.m. on February 16, 1942 in Webster, NC (see Fig. 2). Also, the envelope is dated by the post office at 1 p.m. on August 31, 1942 in Webster NC (see Fig. 3).

About the Letter

As indicated by the envelope, the letter was sent by Mrs. S.J. Owens (also addressed as Mrs. Steven J. Owens, Frances Elvira Owens or Frances Elvira Alexander Owens) from Webster, North Carolina to S.R. Owens (also addressed as Samuel Robert Owens or Samuel R. Owens). The letter is part of an ongoing correspondence between mother (Mrs. Owens) and son (Samuel Owens).

Following the death of her first husband, John Edward James, Frances Alexander married Steven Owens. Together, Frances and Steven Owens raised ten children – one of whom was from her previous marriage.¹ In 1918, she gave birth to Samuel Owens, their second youngest child. The Owens family then relocated from Greenville, SC to Webster, NC. After graduating from the Webster School in North Carolina, Samuel Owens enrolled in the United States Navy, which stationed him at the Cavite Naval Yard in the Philippines at the beginning of World War II. He was a crew member of the USS Canopus, a submarine tender of Submarine Squadron 20. During his service on the USS Canopus, Samuel Owens was captured by the Japanese as a prisoner of war (POW) in the Fukouaka camp. He was reported as Missing in Action until, more than a year after his capture, the Red Cross released his name amongst a list of POWs. Upon his return home, he was awarded a Silver Star and a Bronze Star for his service in the Navy. Samuel Owens continued his military service in the Navy until 1958, when he was honorably discharged. After his honorable discharge, he returned home and enrolled at Western Carolina College (now Western Carolina University), from which he graduated in 1961. After graduating, he worked as a math and science teacher until retiring in 1980. He later died in 1995, at the age of 77.²

The letter opens and closes by addressing Mrs. Owens's growing concern in regard to Samuel's failure to respond to her previous letters. In the opening, Mrs. Owens emphasizes the number of letters that she has written, for which she has received no response. She then urges Samuel to respond, expressing her anxiety over the matter. Mrs. Owens continues the letter by

¹ See "Frances Elvira Alexander Owens" for more biographical information about Frances Owens.

² See "World War II in WNC: About This Collection" for more biographical information about Samuel Owens.

providing brief updates about the status of several of Samuel's siblings, as well as his father. Finally, she concludes, reiterating her unease and imploring him to respond.

Although Mrs. Owens repeatedly states that Samuel has not responded to her letters, another letter in the Samuel Robert Owens Collection suggests that he attempted to do so. HL_MSS16-05_1_03_004 includes a scanned image of a one-page handwritten letter from Samuel R. Owens to Mrs. S.J. Owens, as well as scanned images of the accompanying envelope. The envelope is dated January 28 1942. However, the envelope is unstamped and lacks a return address, which may be why Mrs. Owens did not receive the letter. Two other possible reasons why Mrs. Owens did not receive the letter are elucidated in Captain E.L. Sackett's *The Canopus*. In Chapter 6 of *The Canopus*, Sackett explains that Commander Francis Bridget selected 130 men for the "Naval Battalion," which he took for "field training" at Longoskawan Point in January. Samuel may have been amongst these men. Additionally, in Chapter 8, Sackett explains that submarines failed to deliver mail to and from marines through distribution centers in the "south." As indicated by Sackett in Chapter 7, the failure to deliver mail affected the crew of the *Canopus*, who were detached and incorporated into the 4th Regiment of the Marines in January. This may also explain why the envelope for HL_MSS16-05_1_03_005 is marked "Return to Sender by Order of Navy Dept" (see Fig. 2).

Editorial Decisions

This document is a diplomatic edition of the manuscript. Some explanatory notes have been included in the transcription for clarity in regard to idioms, terms, phrases and syntactical constructions that are specific to the Southern Appalachian dialect. Explanatory notes have also been included in the transcription for contextualization as concerns references to people, locations, events and texts. However, errors and anomalies in grammar, syntax, punctuation and spelling have been maintained from the original document. The errors and anomalies have been maintained for three reasons. The first reason is to respect the authority of the original document. Accordingly, alterations were restricted exclusively to annotations that address errors and anomalies which substantially affect comprehensibility. The second reason is due to the belief that the errors and anomalies reflect demographical information about Mrs. Owens. For instance, the errors and anomalies may reflect her education level, which may be linked to her broader socioeconomic status. Likewise, the errors and anomalies may reflect the Southern Appalachian dialect, which is prominent in Webster, North Carolina, where she resided. The final reason is due to the belief that the errors and anomalies reflect information about Mrs. Owens's emotional state as she penned the letter. For instance, the errors and anomalies may be the result of distress and confusion incited by the unexplained cessation of correspondence from her son following his deployment to the Philippines by the United States Navy during World War II.

Webster NC.³ Feb 15

My Dearest Son. Sammie Boy⁴ –

a gain I will try to write you another letter I guess this is a dozen. I have written to you and no answer⁵. if only I could get just a few lines. I would be so happy. I have not heard a thing from you only the telegram you sent at the first of the war.⁶ if you get this letter Please, try to write. I got a letter from Frank⁷ yesterday. he is all right and wants to hear from you he said to let him know we are all well. Mary⁸ and Charly⁹ has been home for the week end and has just gone. they are faith teaching¹⁰ at Harris NC¹¹. they have bought the old alley place. and Dad is going to try to form some¹² on it. I ll bet he dont make enough to feed a pig on¹³ – Floyd¹⁴ is not much well he is on a special diet he has ulcer of the stomach. but he is off on a job for defense work in Tenn.¹⁵ there is so much changes been made since you was home I dont know how to write¹⁶. I hope and Pray evry day to hear from you and for all the Boys. May God Bless and keep you all, and that you will get home safe a gain.

all ways your loving Mother¹⁷ Dad¹⁸ and Nell¹⁹

PS. And please write to me if you can.

³ Webster, NC is a small town located near NC Highway 116; it is located about 5 miles northwest of Western Carolina University and about 50 miles southwest of Asheville, NC. See “Webster, NC” for map.

⁴ Familial nickname for Samuel Robert Owens, frequently used in his mother’s correspondences.

⁵ Consult the “About the Letter” section of “Introduction” within this document for more information.

⁶ Reference to a Western Union Telegram received by Mrs. Samuel J. Owens as sent from Samuel R. Owens on December 18, 1941 in Manila, Philippines. See Samuel Robert Owens HL_MSS16-05_1_02_001 for telegram.

⁷ Reference to Frank Jurdan Owens, Samuel Robert Owens’s brother. See “Frances” for genealogy.

⁸ Reference to Mary Kathryn Gray, Samuel Robert Owens’s sister. See “Frances” for genealogy.

⁹ Reference to Charles Baxter Gray, Samuel Robert Owens’s brother-in-law. See “Mary” for genealogy.

¹⁰ Faith teaching refers to religious instruction, most likely pertaining to the doctrine of the United Methodist Church; Charles and Mary Gray were both members of Gray’s Chapel United Methodist Church, where they are buried. See “Charles” for genealogy and biographical information.

¹¹ Harris, NC is a small town located near US Route 221; it is located about 60 miles southeast of Asheville, NC. See “Harris, NC” for map.

¹² To “form some” is a local idiom that signifies the act of gaining or making a profit.

¹³ “Don’t make enough to feed a pig on” is a local idiom that signifies a failure to generate a substantial amount of money.

¹⁴ Reference to John Floyd Owens, Samuel Robert Owens’s brother. See “Frances” for genealogy.

¹⁵ Reference to the civilian defense programs created by the Tennessee State Defense Council. See Spinney for more information.

¹⁶ May also be understood as “I don’t know how to convey them all.”

¹⁷ Reference to Frances Elvira Owens, Samuel Robert Owens’s mother. See “Frances” for genealogy.

¹⁸ Reference to Steven John Owens, Samuel Robert Owens’s father. See “Frances” for genealogy.

¹⁹ Reference to Nell Frances Edwards, Samuel Robert Owens’s sister. See “Frances” for genealogy.

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