
Frederic A. Blank papers
1866-1991
(bulk dates 1917-1974)

Abstract: The papers of centenarian, World War I veteran, and retired wall covering entrepreneur Frederic Blank, spanning close to 150 years, illustrate the varied life of a twentieth-century businessman and provide important sample books of iconic mid-twentieth-century American wall coverings.
### Descriptive Summary

**Identification:** MSS 572  
**Creator:** Blank, Frederic A., 1890-1992.  
**Title:** Frederic A. Blank papers  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1866-1991  
**Bulk Dates:** 1917-1974  
**Extent:** 2.5 linear feet (3 boxes)  
**Language:** Materials entirely in English.

### Administrative Information

**Citation:** MSS 572, Frederic A. Blank papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.  
**Shelving Summary:** Boxes 1-2: Shelved in SPEC MSS record center cartons; Box 3: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes  
**Location:** Special Collections, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/  
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Biographical Note

Frederic A. Blank was born on Bastille Day, July 14, 1890, in the French border-town of Strasbourg. Over the course of the next century, Frederic Blank would immigrate to America, establish a successful import-export business, take the U.S. government to court over "antiquated" import/export laws, serve in the American military during the First World War, and develop and distribute a new brand of synthetic wall covering - Fabron - that is in many ways emblematic of the iconic style of mid-century America. By the time of his death in September of 1992, the 102-year-old Blank had, in his own words, "survived two world wars, two major depressions, and more than ten recessions."

Upon graduating from college in France, Frederic Blank left on a trip to America to visit former classmates. The 1908 trip was a graduation gift to the 18-year-old Blank from his parents. Once Blank arrived in New York City for his four-week visit, however, he did not want to leave. He quickly found a job as an office boy for William Hills, Jr., at Hills Brothers in New York and, within three years, had risen to office manager. In 1913, at the young age of 23, he founded Frederic Blank & Co., an import/export business that would allow him to make use of his knowledge of overseas markets and practices. This business venture became difficult with the outbreak of European war in 1914 and Blank was forced to disband his initially successful company.

Prior to American entry into the war Blank worked as an export manager for a Richmond, Virginia-based flour mill, The Dunlop Mills. In 1917 Frederic Blank joined the U.S. Army and was sent to field artillery officer training school at Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, where he spent the remainder of the war. With the end of European hostilities, Blank returned to his import/export business and revived Frederic Blank & Co.

As Frederic Blank & Co. continued to prosper as an import/export outfit, Blank branched out and began a relationship with a Swiss wall covering manufacturer in 1926. The Swiss product, named Salubra, was a synthetic, vinyl-based, wall-paper-like material that customers (mainly commercial in nature) could install on the interior walls of their buildings. The material was both washable and guaranteed to resist any color-fading. When importation of the Swiss material became difficult during the Second World War, Blank developed his own brands of the Swiss product, which he named Fabron, Permon, and Detron. From the early 1940s onward, Frederic Blank & Co. focused its energies on the development and distribution of its wall covering products to hospitals, movie theaters, universities, and businesses throughout the country.

Frederic Blank retired from the company in 1949 following a heart attack and moved to Wilmington, Delaware. Throughout the next forty-three years of his retirement, Frederic Blank remained very active; he followed American business trends, supported many political candidates, donated time and money to the causes he cared most about, and traveled extensively with his wife, Beatrice Cauffiel Blank, who passed away on August 11, 1989. Frederic Blank died just over three years later, on September 20, 1992.

Sources:


Additional biographical information derived form the collection.
Scope and Content Note

The papers of centenarian and retired wall covering entrepreneur Frederic Blank, spanning close to 150 years (1866-1991), are illustrative of Blank's long life and career. The collection includes materials related to three broad components of Blank's life: 1) his time served as a World War I field artillery officer-in-training at Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, 2) his career as an independent industrialist with the import/export business turned wall covering distributor Frederic Blank & Co., and 3) his personal life as a civic-minded and socially engaged French immigrant to the United States.

The collection contains news clippings, published books, U.S. court records, personal and professional correspondence, membership cards, articles, booklets, memoranda, pamphlets, wall covering sample books, metal printing plates, class notes and exams, business cards, passports, wall covering advertisements, maps, and periodicals. Though the collection is small - less than three linear feet - the diversity of the materials within the collection provides the researcher with a rounded glimpse of the varied life of a twentieth-century businessman and provides important sample books of iconic mid-twentieth-century American wall coverings.

The collection is organized into three main series. Series I. World War I, contains documents relating to Blank's time in the U.S. Army, specifically his training manuals from Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky (Folders 4-7). Additional material relates to his recollections about another Army facility, the Tobyhanna Army Depot in Pennsylvania (Folder 9).

The second (and by far the largest) series details Blank's business career and his company, Frederic Blank & Co., in particular. The company, which started out in New York as an import/export business in 1913, went on to become a supplier of synthetic wall coverings to mid-century businesses and industries across the nation. Much of the material included in this series is trade advertising and sample books that hail from this later period in the company's development. Also included are several trade articles written by Blank that appeared in publications such as Direct Reflections, Sales Management, and Hotel World (Folder 13). Earlier materials include two large transcripts from U.S. circuit court cases in which Blank was involved. The first, Warner Moore and Thomas L. Moore, Dunlop Mills, Warner, Moore & Co. vs. Steamship "Sif," Jacob R. Olsen, details a case in which Blank testified as export manager for The Dunlop Mills (Folder 10). The latter case, Frederic Blank against United States of America and the International Mercantile Marine Corporation, arose out of a dispute that Blank had with a shipping company (Folder 11).

The final series pertains to Blank's personal life. A good deal of this material consists of Blank's personal correspondence with politicians, newspapers, and benefactors during his later years of retirement (Folder 35). A few folders of material reflect his strong anti-union position; his views stemmed, in large part, out of a boycott of Frederic Blank & Co. by the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America that occurred early on in his career (Folders 37-41). Other items of particular interest in this series are two of Blank's passports from the early twentieth century (Folder 34). As an international trader, Blank had cause to travel extensively prior to and following the First World War. He obtained his first U.S. passport in 1913 prior to becoming an American citizen. This passport - the low-numbered #188 - was signed by then-Secretary of State William Jennings Bryant.
The three series of this collection include material that would be of interest to many different researchers. The first series is of particular use to individuals wishing to research artillery officer training programs, Camp Zachary Taylor, or those with an interest in published handbooks, textbooks, manuals, and learning aids for World War I officers. The second series includes materials that may be useful to both scholars of industrial design, interior decorating, printing processes, and color theory as well as those with a much broader interest in American businesses from the 1910s to 1960s. The personal memorabilia found in the final series helps tie the collection together and provides a nice glimpse into the interests of Frederic A. Blank - immigrant, soldier, industrialist, and businessman.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**


**Corporate Names**

Frederic Blank & Co.

**Topical Terms**

Wall coverings--United States--20th century--Sources.

Military training camps--Kentucky--Louisville--20th century--Sources.

World War, 1914-1918--Personal narratives, American.

**Geographical Terms**

Camp Zachary Taylor (Ky.)

**Form/Genre Terms**

Clippings.

Books.

Judicial records.

Correspondence.

Membership cards.

Articles.

Pamphlets.

Memorandums.

Sample books.

Notes.

Advertising.

Maps.

Printing plates.
Passports.

**Occupations**

Businessmen.

Soldiers.
Arrangement

I. World War I, 1897-1990
II. Business Life, 1920-1974
III. Personal Life, 1866-1986
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. World War I, 1894-1990

Instructional memoranda, 1917-1918 [Box 1 F1]


Notes (I), 1917-1918 [Box 1 F2]
Blank's personal notes from officer training classes held at Camp Zachary Taylor

Notes (II), 1917-1918 [Box 1 F3]
Blank's personal notes from officer training classes held at Camp Zachary Taylor

Manuals and texts

Elements of Algebra, 1894 [Box 1 F4]

Manual of Interior Guard Duty, 1914 [Box 1 F5]

Engineer Field Manual, 1917 [Box 1 F6]

Military Field Note Book, 1918 [Box 1 F7]

Miscellaneous correspondence and publications, 1918-1920 [Box 1 F8]
Contains a letter sent from Marie A. Dunlop Moore to Blank at Camp Zachary; a postcard of a WWI soldier; the pamphlet "The Red Triangle at Camp Zachary Taylor, The Army YMCA"; a card entitled "Flag Signal Instructor" illustrating U.S. Army and Navy Semaphore Code and Morse Code; and the Pictorial Section of The Bayonet (September 6, 1918) including information on African-American recruits. Also contains three

Tobyhanna Army Depot, 1985-1990 [Box 1 F9]

Blank's reminiscences about training at the Tobyhanna Military Reservation while a member of the 1st New York Artillery Company in the early 1910s. Also included are letters from Blank to Alice Schreyer, former Assistant Director of Libraries at the University of Delaware, further explaining the Tobyhanna material that he donated to Special Collections.

**Series II. Business life, 1920-1974**

Dunlop, Mills, Warner, and Moore vs. Sif, 1917 [Box 1 F10]

Transcript of the case *Warner Moore and Thomas L. Moore, co-partners, doing business under the firm name and style of Dunlop, Mills, Warner, Moore & Co., Proprietors vs. Steamship "Sif," her engines, etc., Aktieselskabet Jacob R. Olsen*

Frederic Blank vs. U.S.A., 1920-1925 [Box 1 F11]

Transcript of the case *Frederic Blank, et. al Against United States of America and the International Mercantile Marine Corporation*. This case arose when a ship on which Blank was exporting codfish did not unload its cargo in Greece in a timely manner resulting in a loss in value of the fish. The shipping company was deemed not liable due to the Harter Act of 1893 that stipulated that vessels could alter their course during times of war. Blank appealed the case.

Boycott of Blank & Co., 1934-1935 [Box 1 F12]

Materials related to the boycott of Salubra and Tekko undertaken by the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers of America due to the belief that the wall coverings were products of Germany. The products were accepted as being Swiss-made in 1935 and the boycott was rescinded.

Trade articles by Blank, 1927-1943 [Box 1 F13]

Color theory, 1920s-1930s [Box 1 F14]

Information on color theory. Includes a copy of *Baumann's Color Guide* by Paul Baumann.

Wall covering sample books

- Salubra Sample Book, 1928 [Box 1 F15]

- Fabron Sample Book (I), 1927 [Box 1 F16]

- Fabron Sample Book (II), 1927 [Box 1 F17]
Permon Sample Books, 1924 [Box 2 F18]

Permon Sample Books, undated [Box 2 F19]

"A Coordinated Presentation of Fabron, Permon, and Medium-Gage Permon" (I), 1959 [Box 2 F20]

"A Coordinated Presentation of Standard-Duty Fabron, Heavy-Duty Permon, and Super-Duty Permon" (II), 1961 [Box 2 F21]

"A Coordinated Presentation of Standard-Duty Fabron, Heavy-Duty Permon, and Super-Duty Permon" (III), 1962 [Box 2 F22]

Permon Fabron (I), 1963 [Box 2 F23]

Permon Fabron (II), 1965 [Box 2 F24]

Permon Fabron Detron, undated [Box 2 F25]

Metal printing plates for wall covering patterns, undated [Box 2 F26]

5 items

Advertising for wall coverings

Tri-fold brochures, 1932-1960s [Box 2 F27]

A selection of tri-fold brochures about Frederic Blank & Co.'s wall covering products. Many include samples of Permon, Fabron, and/or Detron.

Large brochures, 1935-1960s [Box 2 F28]

Print advertisements, 1920s-1974 [Box 2 F29]

Tear sheets of the company's print advertising.

Advertising mailers, 1930s-1960s [Box 3 F30]

Hanging and Specifications, 1954 [Box 3 F31]

Explanatory material on how to hang Permon and Fabron and information on the architectural specifications of Permon.

Examples of wall coverings use, 1946-1963 [Box 3 F32]
Real estate listing for Blank's house, noting the fact that the rooms were decorated with Fabron and Salubra. Notes on an additional corporate project indicating product selection and highlighting potential problems for installing over existing wall coverings.

Miscellany, undated [Box 3 F33]

Series III. Personal life, 1866-1986

Passports, 1913-1924 [Box 3 F34]

3 items

Contains two of Blank's passports (1913 and 1924) with multiple stamps from his journeys. Also includes Blank's letter to the Department of State indicating his intent to pursue citizenship, 1913.

Correspondence, 1918-1986 [Box 3 F35]

Includes "issue mail" and political letters from Gov. Pierre S. du Pont IV, the U.S. Works Progress Administration, Senator John J. Williams, Eugene J. Keogh, Robert L. Donovan, Charles C. Lockwood, Cardinal Spellman, and Louis Kissling. Also contains a number of form letters from Presidents and political candidates that Blank supported, including Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

Programs and invitations, 1914-1975 [Box 3 F36]

About Unvarnished, 1941-1980s [Box 3 F37]

Material originally laid in Blank's copy of Unvarnished by Philip Zausner.

Philip Zausner, Unvarnished: The Autobiography of a Union Leader (New York: Brotherhood Publishers, 1941)., 1941 [Box 3 F38]

Philip Zausner, Unvarnished: The Autobiography of a Union Leader (New York: Brotherhood Publishers, 1941). Inscribed to Blank by the author. Dust jacket has been removed to oversize material. Zausner was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers of America, District No. 9 at the time of their boycott of Salubra and Tekko imported by Frederic Blank & Co.


Unions, 1957-1973 [Box 3 F40]
Series III.

Contains articles on trade and teachers' unions, labor, the Mafia in unions, and labor violence. Also contains Blank's membership card for and a pamphlet about the organization Americans Against Union Control of Government.

Thomas E. Dewey, 1954-1971 [Box 3 F41]

Clippings and material related to Thomas Dewey that were originally laid in a copy of Dewey's Twenty Against the Underworld. Blank's copy of the first edition was removed from this collection for cataloguing.

Miscellany, 1866-1965 [Box 3 F42]

A variety of personal miscellany, including: a tear sheet from Godey's Lady's Book (1866); a hand-drawn sofa design; an 1889 reprint of The New York Daily Gazette of May 1, 1789; tear sheets from The New York Times, October 22, 1956; reprints of the Gettysburg Address, the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence; and other material.