

Grover Cleveland Bergdoll Papers, 1921-1942

Manuscript Collection 185

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Chester County Historical Society
West Chester, 19380
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Summary Information:

Collection Title: Grover Cleveland Bergdoll Papers

Collection Numbers: Ms. 185

Dates of Collection: 1921-1942

Box Numbers: 1 box, 14 folders

Repository: Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA 19380

Language: English and German

Biography:

Grover Cleveland Bergdoll was born in the Bergdoll "Castle" in West Philadelphia on October 17, 1893; he was the third of five children. His father, millionaire Louis Bergdoll Jr., was a brewer and when he died in 1896, his wife Emma Bergdoll took over the brewery. As a youth Bergdoll and his brother Erwin enjoyed racing cars, which resulted in several speeding tickets. In 1911 Bergdoll was fined \$350 for concealed weapons. In 1912 Bergdoll bought a Wright Brothers' airplane and terrorized the area with it; the airplane is now in the Franklin Institute. On July 20, 1917 Bergdoll received a notice to report for the draft and he disappeared. He was found hiding in the "castle" on January 7, 1920 and was sentenced to five years in jail for draft evasion. Just two months later he escaped while leading military officials to an area in which he said he had buried gold. Erwin Bergdoll was also a draft dodger, but turned himself in in 1920 and served two years and ten months in Leavenworth.

Bergdoll made his way into Germany by way of Canada. While in Germany in 1921 he escaped from a kidnapping attempt and in 1923 he shot and killed another attempted kidnapper. In 1926 he entered a German sanitarium and married the gardener's daughter, Berta Francks in Russia. The couple had five children while in Germany; Alfred, Emma, Mina, Bubi, and Vega. In 1935 Berta arrived in the United States and pled for clemency for her husband. Bergdoll arrived back in the U.S. in 1939 and was court marshaled. After 19 years on the run, Bergdoll was sentenced to eight years in Fort Leavenworth for desertion and escape. While Bergdoll was in Fort Leavenworth, Berta gave birth to their sixth child, Berta. Bergdoll was granted an early release in February of 1944 due to good behavior.

After his release, Bergdoll and his wife had their final child, Grover. The Bergdoll family lived on their Harmony Hill farm in Downingtown; however several years after he was released the family moved to the Richmond, Virginia area. Bergdoll died on January 27, 1966 at Westbrook Psychiatric Hospital of "chronic degenerative brain disease."

Resources Used:

CCHS Newspaper Clippings

Related Materials:

Photograph collection

Collection Scope and Content Summary:

The collection consists of personal letters from Bergdoll to his wife and correspondences between Bergdoll's former lawyers in Germany. There are copies of the letters in German and some of the letters are translated into English. The collection also contains legal documents concerning several cases in which Bergdoll was involved and one legal document pertaining to Erwin Bergdoll. A scrapbook of newspaper clippings about Bergdoll is also included. The years of the collection range between 1921 and 1942.

Collection Arrangement:

Arranged by date

Collection Content:**Scrapbook**

Scrapbook contains newspaper clippings featuring the Bergdoll family, especially Grover Bergdoll. Scrapbook was compiled by Emma Bergdoll.

Folder 1: 1921 E. Bergdoll Document

April 4, 1921. Draft of a legal document concerning Erwin R. Bergdoll.

Folder 2: 1926-1931 Untranslated German Letters**Bergdoll, Grover Cleveland, 1 letter**

- June 12, 1926. Untranslated copy.

Marum, Ludwig and Dr. Albert Nachmann, 5 letters

- October 1, 1927. Untranslated copy.
- November 12, 1927. Untranslated copy.
- December 10, 1927. Untranslated copy.
- January 11, 1928. Untranslated copy.
- April 16, 1931. Untranslated copy.

Wurtt District Court, 3 letters

- December 29, 1928. Untranslated copy.
- May 16, 1929. Untranslated copy.
- May 22, 1929. Untranslated copy.

Zeiss, Karl, 1 envelope

- September 11, 1926. Untranslated copy sent to Grover Bergdoll.

Folder 3: 1926-1940 Translated Letters**Bacarat, Dr. G.J., 1 letter**

- December 11, 1940. Bill to Thomson & McGinty for translation services.

Beitter, Dr., 1 letter

- June 21, 1929. Sent to Zeiss concerning the German Post Office's help in serving Bergdoll his documents. Translated by Dr. G.J. Bacarat.

Marum, Ludwig and Dr. Albert Nachmann, 6 letters

- Undated. Sent to Bergdoll informing him of a payment summons being sent to him. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.
- January 4, 1926. Untranslated note to Zeiss with translated list of expenses. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.
- April 14, 1926. Receipt stating that Marum received \$5,000 from Bergdoll. Translated by Dr. G.J. Bacarat.
- October 12, 1927. Sent to Zeiss with the response attached dated November 7, 1927. Both letters concern the whereabouts of Bergdoll. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.
- November 19, 1927. Two copies. Sent to Zeiss, requesting Bergdoll's address. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.
- January 2, 1929. Note to Zeiss informing him that they have sent him a copy of a letter they sent to Bergdoll. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.

Unknown, 3 letters

- Undated. Not addressed. Letter stating that the matter is possibly being handled secretly by the Consul. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.
- April 14, 1926. Not addressed and the signature is illegible. Note stating what Bergdoll promises to pay. Translated by Dr. G.J. Bacarat.
- December 29, 1927. Sent to Marum concerning Bergdoll's whereabouts and the money he owes. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.

Wurtt District Court, 1 letter

- January 21, 1929. Sent to Karl Zeiss informing him that the Court Order of Payment was returned by the Post Office because Bergdoll is on a trip. Translated by Dr. G.J. Bacarat.

Zeiss, Karl, 2 letters

- December 26, 1926. Application for the Issuance of a Payment Summons. Sent to Wittenburg District Court Heilbronn. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.
- May 12, 1929. Requesting a second summons to be served on Bergdoll. Sent to Wittenburg District Court Heilbronn. Translated by Bernard Weinberg.

Folder 4: 1926-1942 Papers on Appeal

[1926-1940]. Supreme Court Papers on Appeal booklet. Case: Albert Nachmann and Johanna Marum against Grover Cleveland Bergdoll.

1942. Subpoena for Judge Ludwig Jaffey. Case: Nachmann against Bergdoll.

Folder 5: 1929 State of Baden

April 2, 1929. Opinion/decision of members of Presiding Committee of the Chamber of the State of Baden. Translation. Case: Marum and Zeiss against Bergdoll.

Folder 6: 1939-1942 Bergdoll Letters**Bergdoll, Grover Cleveland, 5 letters**

- May 16, 1939. Sent to Berta Bergdoll. Informs her that he was about to get on a ship for New York when he saw in the newspaper that the bill to keep him out of the United States had been passed. He is going to get advice as to what to do.
- August 4, 1940. Sent to Berta from Governors Island, N.Y. He advises her on running the farm, collecting rent and mortgages, and handling the help. He also advises her on legal issues. He wishes he could help her and build the business.
- September 3, 1941. Sent to Berta from Fort Leavenworth. Bergdoll is unsure whether she received an important letter containing legal information. He is buying her a plane and wants her to renew several magazine subscriptions. He asks about baby Berta and thinks he will be out of jail soon.
- January 7, 1942. Sent to Berta from Fort Leavenworth. Bergdoll advises her on farming. He writes about the cold weather and illnesses. Wishes to see a picture of their baby Berta.
- October 4, 1942. Sent to Berta from Fort Leavenworth. Bergdoll advises her on running the farm and legal matters. He asks about the children. He thinks the end of the war is coming soon and it will bring more business to the farm for meat. He believes he is getting out of jail soon.

Folder 7: 1940 ABA Journal

March 1940 issue of *American Bar Association Journal* addressed to J.C. Thomson, Esq.

Undated. Unfinished letter to Hon. Charles Evans Hughes, Chief Justice of the United States in response to an address in the *American Bar Association Journal*, page 203.

Folder 8: 1940 Weinberger Letters

Weinberger, Harry, 2 letters

- March 5, 1940. Letter to Mr. Thompson asking to receive a copy of a stipulation concerning his motion and Bergdoll's affidavits. He also enclosed a copy of the letter he sent to King & King of Washington.
- March 5, 1940. Letter to Mr. Sheilds of King & King concerning the due dates for the application for the Writ of Certiorari.

Brief in Support of the Petition (Writ of Certiorari)

Folder 9: 1940 Legal Opinion

September 17, 1940. Opinion of John C. Knox, D.J. Case: Bergdoll vs. Lieutenant General Hugh A. Drum, et als.

Undated. Message about meeting with Colonel Marion W. Houze

Undated. Message to Mr. Thomson from JW about Fordham Law Library

Undated. Scrap paper with notes on Governors Island, Atlantic Branch, U.S. Disciplinary Barracks.

Folder 10: 1940 Examination Order

November 1940. Order for examination before trial of defendant.
Case: Zeiss against Bergdoll.

Folder 11: 1940 Thomson Deposition

November 1940. Deposition of Joseph C. Thomson on the whereabouts of Bergdoll (prisoner). Case: Zeiss against Bergdoll.

Folder 12: 1940 Nachmann Examination

November 29, 1940. Examination before trial of Albert Nachmann transcript.
Case: Nachmann and Marum against Bergdoll.

Folder 13: 1940 [?] Scrap Papers

Not dated. Four pieces of scrap paper with notes pertaining to trial.

Folder 14: 1942 Foreign Funds

United States Treasury Department, Washington: March 30, 1942. Documents Pertaining to Foreign Funds Control.