

[Anne Penland Papers](#)

PENLAND, ANNE, 1885-1976.

Anne Penland papers, 1852, 1914-1973 (bulk 1917-1919)

1 box (.25 cubic feet)

#M-0149

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Anne Penland, nurse anesthetist, was born January 22, 1885 in Asheville, North Carolina to William Henry and Mary H. Blair Penland. She graduated from the Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing (later the Columbia University School of Nursing) in 1912. Upon graduation she was hired as a head nurse by Presbyterian Hospital. She studied anesthesia – probably at Presbyterian – and by 1914 was listed in the hospital's annual report as its anesthetist.

In May 1917 Penland left for France as a nurse with U.S. Base Hospital No. 2, a unit largely made up of Presbyterian Hospital personnel. It was assigned to take over General Hospital No. 1 of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) stationed at Étretat, France, in northern Normandy. Because of this the Presbyterian unit is sometimes referred to by that designation. To add to the confusion, the hospital was originally organized as American Red Cross Hospital No. 1. Nevertheless, its official U.S. Army title was Base Hospital No. 2. Though staffed by Americans, the majority of the hospital's patients continued to be British servicemen.

Twice, from July 22-September 11, 1917 and August 7-October 11, 1918, Penland was part of a detachment from Base Hospital No. 2 that served as a casualty clearing station at the front. In 1917 they were stationed near Poperinge, a Belgian municipality situated on the French border. In 1918, due to the rapidly advancing Allied front, they were based at several places but largely near Villers-Bretonneux (Somme Department) and Grévillers (Pas-de-Calais Department).

Penland was the first nurse-anesthetist seen by the British on the Western Front since anesthesia in the Royal Army Medical Corps was administered by physicians. Though RAMC physicians at first objected to the idea of a nurse giving anesthesia, Penland's proficiency soon won them over. They asked her to teach surgical anesthesia to their own nurses in order that they could relieve the physicians who were doing this work for more urgent surgical and medical tasks. Subsequently, Penland trained several British, Australian and New Zealand nurses in anesthesia.

Upon her return to the U.S. in 1919, Penland returned to Presbyterian Hospital where she remained chief nurse anesthetist until her retirement in 1952. She also founded a school at Presbyterian to train nurse-anesthetists. She died September 2, 1976 at Paramus, New Jersey survived by a niece and nephew.

This biographical note was based on Penland's obituary in the Presbyterian Hospital-Columbia University School of Nursing Alumnae Magazine (v.73, no.1, Fall/Winter 1976/77); information on Ancestry, accessed May 25, 2017; and from her World War I diary.

SCOPE AND CONTENT: Correspondence, a transcript of a diary, a notebook, newspaper clippings, certificates, and photographs documenting the nursing career of Anne Penland. The bulk of the collection dates from her years as a nurse in France during World War I.

Penland's wartime letters written to her family from France make up the bulk of the collection. There are approximately 27 letters written from May 1917, when she was waiting to go overseas, to Jan. 1919 when she left France to return to the United States. She writes about food, weather, and general conditions at the hospitals. However, she generally refrains from mentioning her opinions of fellow nurses and physicians and tends to downplay the danger she faced at the front.

Her diary dating May 14, 1917 – January 28, 1919 is much franker about the conditions she faced and the personalities which with she interacted. Unlike the letters, which appear to have been largely written at Étretat, some of the most interesting diary entries were made by Penland while working at the Casualty Clearing Stations on the Western Front. Among other incidents, she records in considerable detail their attempt to save the life of the severely wounded Revere Osler, Sir William Osler's only child, and his subsequent death in August 1917. The diary here is only a transcript made by Penland's niece, Anne Penland Folger Decker; the original was donated by Dr. Decker to the Imperial War Museums in Great Britain.

Other items in the papers include a notebook of what appears to have been the operations Penland participated in as nurse-anesthetist at Presbyterian Hospital, 1914-1917; a photograph of Penland with her first three anesthesia students, 1918; and photographs of her with fellow nurses and family members. The only item not related to Penland is a bill of sale for Esther, a female slave, who was purchased in 1852 by Milton Penland, presumably an ancestor of Penland.

ACCESS: Open without restrictions. Columbia University does not hold the copyright to the diary.

LANGUAGE: English.

PROVENANCE: Gift of Anne Penland Folger Decker, niece of Anne Penland, 2017 (accession #2017.007); the transcript of the journal was received in electronic form from Luann Nelson of Asheville, North Carolina, who had received it from Dr. Decker (accession #2016.022).

RELATED RECORDS: Archives & Special Collections has several other collections related to Base Hospital No. 2. These include the [George Emerson Brewer scrapbook](#); [F. Esther Fortune papers](#); [Elspeth A. Gould diary](#); [Fred Junkin Hinkhouse diary](#); Anne K. Williams' unpublished memoir, [The First Six Hundred](#); and an almost complete set of the Base newspaper, [The Dooins](#). In addition the department holds the published diary of fellow Base Hospital nurse, Ella Mae Bongard, *Nobody Ever Wins a War: the World War I Diaries of Ella Mae Bongard*, R.N

(Ottawa: Janeric Enterprises, 1997) as well as correspondence of physician A.M. Pappenheimer, *Letters from Etretat: Recollections & Letters, 1917-1922* (Seattle: Grampus, 1989).

Subjects

Anesthesiology.

Nurse anesthetists – United States – History.

Nurses - France - Diaries.

Penland, Anne.

Presbyterian Hospital (New York, N.Y.)

Slaves – North Carolina.

United States. Army. Hospital, no. 2.

United States. Army Nurse Corps - Diaries.

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

World War, 1914-1918 - Hospitals - France - Étretat.

World War, 1914-1918 - Medical care - France - Étretat.

Military Medicine – World War I.

Nurse Anesthetists – history.

Bills of sale.

Diaries.

Photographs.

**Anne Penland
Papers, 1852, 1915-1973**

Box Folder

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| 1 | 1 | Certificates: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1915; United Daughters of the Confederacy, 1920 |
| | 2 | Certificate of membership, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, 1961 |
| | | Correspondence while overseas with Base Hospital No. 2, Étretat, France |
| | 3 | April – May, 1917 |
| | 4 | June, August, 1917 |
| | 5 | Sept. – Dec., 1917 |
| | 6 | Jan. – May, 1918 |
| | 7 | July – Oct., 1919 |
| | 8 | Nov., 1918 – Jan., 1919 |
| | 9 | Correspondence to Penland, 1919, 1927, 1973, and undated |
| | 10 | Documents relating to the purchase of “the Negro girl Esther,” by Milton P. Penland, April 1852 |
| | 11 | Empty envelopes, 1917-1918 |
| | 12 | Helen Young to William Penland (father of Anne), 1918 |
| | 13 | Illustrations, undated |
| | 14 | Newspaper clippings, 1917-18, 1923 and undated |
| | 15 | Notebook of cases, July 1914 – May 1917 (anesthesia cases?) |
| | 16 | Notes, miscellaneous, undated |
| | | Photographs |
| | 17 | Penland at Étretat, undated; Penland with her first three anesthesia students, 1918 |
| | 18 | Penland with family and friends, 1940s-1960s |
| | 19 | Penland with nurses, c.1910s-1936 |
| | 20 | Transcript of her World War I diary, May 14, 1917 – January 28, 1919.
Transcription and notes by her niece, Dr. Anne Penland Folger Decker, ;
additional notes by Stephen E. Novak, Head, Archives & Special
Collections (91 pages) |