

## Finding Aid to the Donald C. Fraser Papers

### Fraser, Donald C., 1913-1973

Donald C. Fraser papers, 1941-1945

1 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 291

---

[Biography](#)

[Scope and Content](#)

[Box and Folder List](#)

### OVERVIEW

**Links:** Finding Aid to the [Donald and Irene Fraser Photograph Collection](#)

**Access:** The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

**Provenance:** Donated by Palmer Forness, 2004 (Acc. 2720).

**Property rights:** The Institute for Regional Studies does not own the property rights to this collection.

**Copyrights:** The Institute does not own the copyrights.

**Citation:** [Identification of item]. Donald C. Fraser Papers, MS 291. Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

### BIOGRAPHY

Donald C. Fraser was born on May 2, 1913, the son of G. Angus and Dorothy Beatrice (Waldron) Fraser of Fargo, North Dakota. Donald had two siblings; an older brother, Simon W. Fraser, and younger sister, Mildred (Mrs. Mathew Tindall). His father served in the U.S. Army during the Spanish American War (1897-1899) in the Philippines, and in the National Guard from 1891 to 1932. G. Angus Fraser established Cass County Abstract Company in 1910.

Donald enlisted as a private in the National Guard in 1929 at the age of 17. He attended North Dakota Agricultural College, graduating in 1935 with a BS in education. He married Irene Graber, in 1938. Donald worked as a sales manager at the Ford Tractor Company in Fargo from 1940 to 1941 when his National Guard unit was activated. Donald served in World War II, rising from second lieutenant to major in the 188<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. During his service, Donald wrote his wife faithfully. Some of these letters appeared as articles in the *Fargo Forum*, and often his wife or father would read his letters at service and auxiliary group meetings. When Donald's National Guard unit was activated in 1941, Irene became a "camp follower," as many of the early letters reveal. Once Donald left for England in December 1943, Irene returned to Fargo and worked for her father-in-law at Cass County Abstract Company. The 188<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion landed in Normandy on D-Day plus 6 and fought their way through France, Belgium, and Germany. Major Fraser returned from Europe in October of 1945.

In 1950, Donald was elected to a four year term as Fargo City Commissioner, but only served for two years. He resigned after his National Guard unit was activated to serve in Korea from January 1951 to October 1952. After serving as a commissioned officer in World War II and the Korean War, Lieutenant Colonel Fraser was nominated as Fargo Postmaster by President Harry S. Truman. He held this position until 1971, when he was appointed U.S. Postal Service Field Manager covering North Dakota and portions of Minnesota.

Irene (Graber) Fraser was born July 12, 1910 in Indiana. She held several different jobs prior to marriage; at one time she worked as a switchboard operator, a general office clerk, and became head of the direct shipping department, working full time from 1925 to 1938, and part time from 1938 to 1941. When her husband's National Guard Unit was activated, Irene moved to be near him. She worked at the Main Post Exchange in Fort Lewis, Washington from 1941 through 1943. Once he was deployed to England in 1943, Irene moved back to Fargo and worked at Cass County Abstract Company from 1956 to 1978, eventually becoming President of the company. Irene and Donald had no children. Donald C. Fraser died on October 5, 1973, and Irene Graber Fraser died June 4, 2001.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

The Donald C. Fraser papers consist of correspondence covering his service in World War II, from April 1941 to October 1945. These letters have been arranged chronologically and consist almost entirely of letters written to his wife. Occasionally Donald included other letters he received from family and friends for his wife to read. Also included is one letter Donald wrote to his church. Most of the letters are typed; however, some are handwritten. The envelopes are also included with the letters. In addition to these letters, Donald periodically corresponded via V-Mail. V-Mail letters were written on special forms, photographed, put on film, and then reproduced at post offices in the United States.

The letters dated April 1941 through part of December 1943 were written while Donald's unit was in training in Montana and California. From late December 1943 through early June 1944, Donald was stationed in England, preparing for the invasion. Donald's letters dated mid-June through early August 1944 were written mostly in Normandy and as they moved throughout France. In mid-August Donald

wrote from Belgium, and then moved into Germany, where he was mostly located for the duration of the war. After VE-Day, Donald was stationed in Kolleda, Germany and then Lampertheim, Germany until he was discharged and returned to the United States.

Although censorship restrictions limited what he could say, the Fraser letters reveal how he and his fellow soldiers felt about the war and the importance they placed on victory. His letters dated June 6 and June 7, 1944 described the British citizens' reaction to the invasion, the impressive scale of the invasion itself, and why he was fighting. As he served in England, France, Belgium, and Germany, Fraser recorded his impressions of local lifestyles and the Europeans' reactions to liberation. In one poignant letter dated July 20, 1944, Fraser recounted the story of how French citizens of Cherbourg dealt with women who fraternized with German soldiers. In the letter dated July 31, 1944, Fraser depicted a very close encounter with what turned out to be several companies of German soldiers. In later correspondence, Fraser described his experience touring concentration camps.

While many of the letters pertain to Fraser's war experiences, they also contain a great deal of personal information. Donald was not able to keep letters he received from his wife, but he did answer her specific questions. It is apparent that she asked for advice on everything from work in the abstract business to keeping the family car in good condition. Donald and Irene obviously had a very close relationship. He often addressed the letters "Dear Pal," or "Dearest Irene," and closed with "Love, Your old man Don." These letters are loving, playful, wistful, and supportive.

Through these letters, Donald and Irene also discussed local and national politics. The 1944 election posed significant problems; Donald revealed the soldiers' frustrations as they decided how to handle the absentee soldier vote. His letters disclosed that he was a registered Republican and enthusiastic Wendell Willkie supporter.

Since family members needed a written request in order to send packages to soldiers, Donald devoted several paragraphs to listing items he would like to receive. Donald also collected many artifacts throughout England, France, Belgium, and Germany. In these letters, he often listed everything he had been sending home so that Irene would know if the censors were removing them. He collected coins and paper currency, patches and pins from German uniforms, bottles of perfume and alcohol, and many other items. He also filmed his surroundings and sent them home.

These letters are a prime source for researching World War II from the soldier's perspective. They reveal insight into daily life, major operations, and the stress war places on families.

## **SEPARATION RECORD**

Seven photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Fraser and the Graber family processed as Institute Photograph 486.

**BOX AND FOLDER LIST**

| <b>Box/Folder</b> | <b>Contents</b>                       |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1/1               | Finding aid and biographical material |

**Correspondence Series**

|      |                 |
|------|-----------------|
| 1/2  | 1941, April     |
| 1/3  | 1941, May       |
| 1/4  | 1943, April     |
| 1/5  | 1943, May       |
| 1/6  | 1943, June      |
| 1/7  | 1943, July      |
| 1/8  | 1943, November  |
| 1/9  | 1943, December  |
| 1/10 | 1944, January   |
| 1/11 | 1944, February  |
| 1/12 | 1944, March     |
| 1/13 | 1944, April     |
| 1/14 | 1944, May       |
| 1/15 | 1944, June      |
| 1/16 | 1944, July      |
| 1/17 | 1944, August    |
| 1/18 | 1944, September |
| 1/19 | 1944, October   |
| 1/20 | 1944, November  |
| 1/21 | 1944, December  |
| 1/22 | 1945, January   |
| 1/23 | 1945, February  |
| 1/24 | 1945, March     |
| 1/25 | 1945, April     |
| 1/26 | 1945, May       |
| 1/27 | 1945, June      |
| 1/28 | 1945, July      |
| 1/29 | 1945, August    |
| 1/30 | 1945, September |
| 1/31 | 1945, October   |
| 1/32 | Undated         |