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Citation

Holden, Harley P. 1971. The collecting of faculty papers. Harvard Library Bulletin XIX (2), April 1971: 187-193.

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The Collecting of Faculty Papers

Harley P. Holden

By votes of the Harvard Corporation in March 1938 and February 1939, rules and regulations were established for the use of archival material and other manuscripts in the Harvard University Library and provision was made for the preservation of official files, records and documents throughout the University. Thus, through these acts of the Corporation, legitimacy was established for the Harvard University Archives, an archives which had, in fact, already existed for nearly two centuries. The latter act, of February 1939, provided that the archives of the official activities of the University officers and offices are the property of the University and that these records created at the University may not be destroyed without the permission of various University officials. It was also decided about this time, although not by an official vote of the Corporation, that the Archives would attempt to collect and preserve the unofficial papers of its tenured faculty. It is toward only one of the collection and preservation functions of the Harvard University Archives that this paper is directed, the collecting of faculty papers.

It is not known when the first collections of faculty papers were acquired at Harvard. Certainly, a few collections had found their way into the Harvard College Library before the University had either an archive or a rare book and manuscript library. We have collections of the papers, both personal and academic, of Harvard's first presidents, the seventeenth-century divines and Hebraists, Henry Dunster and Charles Chauncy, as well as some occasional papers of all the subsequent presidents. Our earliest significant collection for a faculty member is that of the manuscript diaries and meteorological notebooks of John Winthrop, not John Winthrop the Colonial governor but the teacher and scientist who served as Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at Harvard from 1738-1779. The papers of Winthrop, a correspondent of Benjamin Franklin and other scientists of his era, almost ended up in Texas. In the late 1930's

the library of one of Boston's oldest learned societies was sold to a university in Texas. When Clifford K. Shipton, then Archivist, learned that the Winthrop Papers were headed for Texas, he practically hijacked them from the train.

Possibly the most voluminous collection of correspondence which we have is that of Edwin G. Boring, a professor of psychology at Harvard for nearly half a century. Professor Boring was a very active correspondent and deposited with us, a few years before his death, a collection of over one hundred thousand letters sent and received. Boring was very active and respected in his field and generous in the terms providing for the future use of his papers. They can now serve as an agreeable complement to the papers of Boring's mentor, Edward Bradford Titchener, the dean of American experimental psychology, whose papers are deposited at Cornell.

The faculty papers deposited in the Harvard University Archives prior to 1940 might be termed a happy accident. Since 1940, however, we have made an effort to obtain the papers of all officers of instruction who have Corporation appointments without limit of time — that is, tenured professors. Note, that I do not say that we have made a determined effort. The constant pressure of space and the lack of ample trained staff have made our efforts less than determined. Nevertheless, over the past thirty years we have acquired more than seven hundred collections of faculty papers, ranging in volume from a few pieces to the above-mentioned Boring collection which fills more than one hundred Hollinger boxes. These faculty papers now cover over one-third of a mile of shelf space.

Periodically, letters are addressed to the members of the Harvard faculties. These vary somewhat in content but usually contain information on:

1. The importance of the papers of past generations of Harvard professors as an historical record.
2. The kinds of papers that we are interested in — diaries, correspondence, lecture notes.
3. What we are not interested in — income tax returns, unorganized research notes, manuscripts of published works.
4. Restrictions, privacy, and literary rights.
5. The inclusion of a clause in the will leaving the papers to the University and, wherever possible, the literary rights.
6. The transfer of major segments during the professor's lifetime (but the transfer of single items is discouraged).

These points are included in a form letter sent to approximately one thousand officers of the University, accompanied by a pamphlet briefly describing the functions, collections, and use of the Archives. I have occasionally heard comment from professors that they tend to ignore such impersonal contact and even resent it. Nevertheless, we do receive fairly frequent telephone calls or letters from retiring and retired professors or their widows, who have had little or no previous contact with the Archives during their careers other than receipt of our form letter.

We have a more personal letter that we send, for instance, to the widows of deceased professors requesting that they consider the Harvard University Archives as a depository for the private papers of their late husbands and stressing the importance of such papers to future biographers dealing with the great scholars of the past. The widow is allowed to place reasonable restrictions on the use of the papers but is urged to authorize the Archives to make them available to scholars. She is assured that unless literary rights are formally transferred to the University, as we urge, the literary heirs will be consulted concerning publication.

We do, of course, attempt to procure the personal papers of the man as well as his professional output. As Maynard Birchford has said in his very useful publication, *Scientific and Technological Documentation*, "Personal papers relate a man's academic career to his total interests and constitute an important historical record. They offer intimate contact with a mind and a personality." This intimate contact is sometimes rejected by the family. Some thirty years ago, Dr. Shipton wrote to the son of a well-known philosopher asking for his father's private papers to add to the professorial papers already on deposit with our collections. The son replied that the private correspondence between a father and his sons, or his wife, was not intended for the public and should never, in the case of this philosopher, be published or pawed over. Dr. Shipton replied to the professorial son, saying that he appreciated his point of view in regard to his father's papers but that history proceeds on the assumption that every scrap of evidence regarding such a man is of importance:

In writing history or biography, we take the point of view that such a man, by his greatness, has forfeited the right to personal obscurity. When his public work and published thoughts are of such importance to the world at large, the light which may be thrown upon them by his personal correspondence

and his private diaries assumes a special importance which we feel overrides the question of his modesty. Of course, families to whom these great men were father or brothers can rarely see the material in this light, although they would readily admit the validity of the historians' practice, if the private papers of Plato or Spinoza were involved.

Dr. Shipton ended his letter by saying, "I haven't much hope of convincing you to this point of view, but I state it to explain my original request." There the two sides stood and stand. The philosopher's son, I regretfully report, was not convinced. He died many years ago, an elderly man, and the grandson is now, in his turn, an elderly man. The papers are still not at Harvard.

Aside from our periodic form letter and our letter to the widows of the recently deceased academicians, we make, as I mentioned above, an effort but not yet a determined effort to collect faculty papers. What is needed is a large staff with sufficient time for making personal contacts. This, we do not have.

We are, however, receiving some help from the natural sciences. Several years ago, feeling, perhaps rightly, that their area was more neglected than the social sciences and the humanities in the collections of the University Archives, a few of the natural scientists at Harvard offered to assist the Archives in drawing up a list of those whose papers a committee of their peers felt most worthy of preservation. They offered also to communicate with these scientists on a personal basis and, in some instances, to arrange for the transfer of the material. This procedure is already proving so productive that it is our hope, within the next year or two, to seek more aggressively and personally the papers of Harvard's outstanding humanists and social scientists.

The foregoing account of how we obtain collections of faculty papers at Harvard may suggest questions as to what we do with them once we have them. Most collections are transferred to us from the professor's office or former office and occasionally from his home. Unless there is a competent secretary or knowledgeable widow available to supervise the transfer, a member of our staff does so. Many years ago we learned not to trust the alphabetical or chronological abilities of the Harvard Department of Buildings and Grounds, which is engaged to do the actual transporting of the materials.

Once a collection is received it is stored in one of our *non*-temperature-and-humidity-controlled rooms in the lower depths of Widener Library to await processing. Occasionally a collection may wait more

than a year for processing. Currently, however, we are only two months in arrears.

The archivist assigned to process the papers of a particular individual studies our file of newspaper clippings, memorials and other biographical material generally available within the Archives. He also studies the Harvard College Library Card Catalogue under the individual's name, or a published bibliography if one exists, to distinguish more easily between published and unpublished manuscripts and to correlate more satisfactorily these manuscripts with other material in the collection.

As mentioned above, we are particularly interested in correspondence, diaries, and lecture notes, but not in tax returns, unorganized research notes, manuscripts of published works, and other work papers. In processing a collection, we keep in mind the principles of provenance and *respect des fonds* but do not hesitate, when necessary, to create order out of chaos.

Some years ago Kimball Elkins, who is now Curator of the Harvard University Archives, prepared an informal guide for the processing of the private correspondence and papers of faculty members. It embodies the following principles for the processing and general weeding of collections:

1. Files of official correspondence are retained indefinitely.
2. Files relating to such routine matters as letters of inquiry from prospective students, requests for transcripts and copies of letters asking for reprints, may be considered candidates for destruction.
3. Duplicate letters and papers and printed matter, unless an integral part of the correspondence file, should not be retained.
4. Duplicate and printed matter is not worth removing unless it will reduce by at least one the number of containers used.
5. Single copies of processed material and circular letters, more commonly essential to the meaning of a file than printed matter, should be retained.

When the files of correspondence and other papers have been weeded and the order determined (should the file have been in a chaotic condition), the files are transferred to acid-free Permalife folders. If the file is large and the information required on each folder wordy, this particular step is deferred until a slack period in staff activities. All files are stored in gray Hollinger boxes of half-size, regular size, and legal size as required. A few smaller pieces and individual reports are at present stored in folders not meeting proper archives standards. We hope that this can be changed in the future.

Harvard long ago abandoned the practice of keeping in the Archives a copy of every work published by a professor. We do try to maintain a reprint file on active faculty, transferring the file to the general library collection upon the death of the professor. A desirable practice, however, is to retain permanently a file of published articles for the men whose papers become a permanent part of an archives collection. As supplements to the correspondence files and the biographical material, these reprints, according to Maynard Birchford, help to create a kind of intellectual autobiography.

We have indices to only a few of our collections, primarily the papers of Harvard Presidents Charles W. Eliot and A. Lawrence Lowell. These two indices were prepared by biographers and have been generally satisfactory except for the unfortunate arrangement of some of the Eliot papers into categories of "interesting" and "not interesting" and "famous" and "not famous." As a rule, we believe that indices should be made by the archivist who processes the collection. Unfortunately, the volume of collections received at the Harvard University Archives in a year, as compared with the size of the staff and its multiple duties, makes it impossible for us, at this time, to do more than make shelflist entries for our collection of faculty papers.

Once these collections of faculty papers are in their acid-free folders and Hollinger boxes and properly arranged on the shelves, we must face the realities of their use. As mentioned in our sample letter to a professor's widow, the Harvard Archives does allow reasonable restrictions to be placed on a collection of an individual's papers by his family. I shall not volunteer to define *reasonable*. Actually, it has been our experience that the requested restrictions are few and acceptable. We generally ask that the Archives staff be authorized to make the papers available to qualified scholars at our discretion and assume this to be the wish of the literary heirs unless we are otherwise instructed. Of course, unless the literary rights are formally transferred to Harvard University, publication of manuscripts of letters, or of excerpts from them, is forbidden without permission from the heirs.

The criteria for determining whether or not a scholar is qualified to use a collection are, with us, quite nebulous. We do not require letters of recommendation and base our judgment of the individual's suitability almost solely on a brief interview. Each user of manu-

script material is required to fill out an application for the examination of manuscripts. Our recently revised form embodies the following requirements:

1. The applicant must make a specific statement concerning his purpose in using the manuscripts.
2. Permission to examine a manuscript does not include permission to publish the contents.
3. Permission to publish must be requested, in writing, from the Archivist.
4. The applicant understands that the University Archives makes no representation that it is the owner of the common law copyright or literary property.
5. The applicant understands that it is his responsibility to obtain permission to publish from the literary heirs.
6. Any reproduction is made solely for the convenience of the applicant and must be returned upon completion of his work.
7. Any reproduction may not itself be reproduced without permission of the Harvard University Archives.
8. The applicant agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the University and its employees from any claims made by the owners of the literary property, resulting from the use of the manuscripts.

When permission is requested to publish material in our collections in which the descent of literary ownership is doubtful, we send a letter to the applicant granting permission in so far as the rights of the Harvard University Archives are concerned. We further state that we make no representation that the University is the owner of the common law copyright or that it has any knowledge as to the claimants of such copyright.

In the foregoing I have described how just one university handles its collections of faculty papers, including the acquisition of the papers, their processing, and the regulations concerning their use. There are other ways that some of this work might be done, possibly more effectively and efficiently. Within, however, the perennial limitations of budget and, consequently, staff and time, we have found that the method has worked satisfactorily at Harvard for over thirty years.

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