

# To Serve the Inquiring Scholar — The Search for the Titchener Papers

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A UNIVERSITY archives serves two masters whose fortunes are intertwined: the university and the world of scholarship. To them it owes the responsibility of preserving the memories and contributions of the men and women who have spent their lives in service to both. That the Cornell University Archives has felt this duty since its founding in 1951, the papers of Cornell scholars among its holdings bear witness. But, as collectors of manuscripts well know, fine collections are rarely acquired by passively sitting back and waiting for kind angels to deposit them on the doorstep. An active collecting program is necessary if a university archives is even to approach fulfillment of its responsibility. Cornell's recent acquisition of the E. B. Titchener papers is a case in point.

Edward Bradford Titchener (1867-1927), dean of American experimental psychology, was a dominant figure on the Cornell campus from his appointment as assistant professor of psychology in 1892 to his premature death in 1927. A scholar of international renown, an inspired teacher, and a rugged individualist, Titchener remains a bright star in a Cornell galaxy of great scholars and colorful personalities. Portly and dignified in full beard and Oxford gown, he delivered his dramatic introductory lectures in psychology in flawless rhetoric before two generations of awed undergraduates. The effect of his vast breadth of knowledge and magnetic personality was scarcely less pronounced upon his Ph.D. candidates, whom he trained rigorously in one of the country's most famous psychological laboratories. A pioneer in the establishment of psychology as an academic discipline in American universities, E. B. Titchener was a giant among his contemporaries, with a reputation that has given zest to the search for his papers.

The search began during the winter of 1960-61, when, in the

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course of a casual memorandum to the university Archivist, Prof. Frank S. Freeman of the Cornell psychology department mentioned a group of Titchener papers then in private hands. How often a word, a name, a phrase, sandwiched between matters of more immediate import, propels the collector into furious action! The woman whose name our informant gave has close ties with the university, and she willingly donated her holdings of some 200 pieces. Among the distinguished correspondents were two names that hinted at hidden treasure: William James and Hugo Münsterberg.

With that nucleus in the Archives, I began a systematic search for other papers. Since Titchener's family had left the area years before, I decided to cast a few lines in various directions, while at the same time trying to discover the whereabouts of his children. Again, Professor Freeman supplied the necessary information. When asked for the names of persons who might hold Titchener letters or have information leading to their location, he suggested three prominent scholars. Two of these men answered my query: Karl M. Dallenbach of the University of Texas and Edwin G. Boring of Harvard, both "Titchener Ph.D's." and afterwards close friends and colleagues of the master. Dr. Dallenbach promised his Titchener correspondence; and Dr. Boring, after consulting with Dr. Shipton of the Harvard Archives, allowed us to microfilm his.

To Dr. Boring must go a great deal of credit for the success of this project. He agreed to act as a friend of the court, and a faithful and effective friend he was, furnishing a full list of Titchener's doctoral students, the names of psychologists (or their survivors) who might have had correspondence with Titchener, and—most important of all—an introduction to Titchener's daughter, Mrs. Theodore Baird of Amherst, Mass., who held the major part of her father's papers. In addition, Dr. Boring inserted a news note in the *American Psychologist*, describing our project and urging cooperation.

A visit with Mr. and Mrs. Baird in their Amherst house, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, was most pleasant and successful. Mrs. Baird liked the idea of permanently preserving her father's papers, and within four months of our talk her complete holdings were donated to Cornell.

Meanwhile, with the list of Titchener's doctoral students before me, I wrote 54 letters asking for correspondence, notes, reminiscences, and other relevant material. The answers trickled

in over a period of many months. Naturally, there were sad tales of lost files and overtidy housekeepers. A goodly number of people, however, responded with valuable donations, and all gave hearty approval to the project. Some donors, now in their twilight years, requested that we reproduce their gifts and return the originals. I recall especially the Japanese psychologist who sent us letters from his home in Osaka; we copied and returned his "precious treasures."

Other leads also were exploited, and a notable result of these was the microfilming of a fine series of correspondence between Titchener and Robert M. Yerkes of Yale, through the gracious cooperation of Dr. Yerkes' widow and daughter.

On the subject of filming, our general policy is to reproduce papers privately held, even though they may be promised to other archival or manuscript depositories. When they are actually in such institutions, however, we feel that reproduction is unnecessary. To mention a few examples, we are quite sure that there are Titchener letters in the J. McKeen Cattell papers in the Library of Congress, the William James papers in the Houghton Library, and the Hugo Münsterberg papers in the Boston Public Library; but we intend merely to suggest to researchers that they examine these collections.

Although most of Titchener's extant correspondence and other papers are now in the Cornell Archives, the job is not finished. I have compiled, from the original acquisition and from Mrs. Baird's donation, a list of names that will involve more queries, more searching, more detective work, more thrills and disappointments. Our inquiries have gone to Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and New Zealand. The trail will lead far afield from psychology, for the mind of Edward Titchener, a man of sweeping interests, penetrated many subjects. He was, for example, an expert in numismatics, often a consultant on ancient and modern manufactures, and a connoisseur of rare art pieces. Thus, to provide the materials for a complete portrait of this many-sided genius, all paths must be followed, no matter how faint the way or how vague the clue.

Upon Titchener's death, E. G. Boring wrote: "A century hence it will be possible to say just where his psychology belongs in the history of science."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the history of science has come of

<sup>1</sup>E. G. Boring, "Edward Bradford Titchener: 1867-1927," in *American Journal of Psychology*, 38: 506 (Oct. 1927).

age as a special field of study, a development that enhances the research value of the Titchener papers. We look forward to the day when we shall receive a letter that begins, "I am preparing a biography of the American psychologist, Edward Bradford Titchener, and I am inquiring . . ."

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***How Valuable It Would Have Been!***

So often we regret the passing of a great man, and possibly more so if he has not written an over-all account of his life and times. As a case in point, the passing of Solon J. Buck this year, without having prepared an autobiography, was a great loss. Summaries of his achievement which have appeared from time to time are inadequate. Biographical sketches of any distinguished man are useful, but the large majority, of necessity, are only a recital of accomplishments; they lack the intimate details of personal philosophy, struggles, methods, and victories which one expects to find in an autobiography.

As to Dr. Buck's archival activities, *Who's Who in America* merely states that he was director of research and publications of the National Archives and secretary of the National Historical Publications Commission, 1935-41; Archivist of the United States, 1941-48; visiting professor of Archives Administration, Columbia University, 1938-39; chairman, U. S. Delegation to 14th International Federation for Documentation, 1938; representative of the U. S. at International Conference of Expert Archivists, Paris, 1948, under UNESCO auspices; member Society of American Archivists and International Council on Archives; and editor of the publications of the National Archives.

How valuable an autobiography by Dr. Buck would have been! He was a scholar of the first order, a precise person, especially in the fields of historical research and archival administration. He was an everlasting reader of professional literature in the archival field and knew its leading people, here and abroad. He developed numerous important archival concepts, such as that of records administration—a continuous evaluation of all public documents for the purpose of preserving those which have permanent value and disposing of the remainder after they become non-current.

Had Dr. Buck written an autobiography he could scarcely have avoided the inclusion of sage advice to historians and to archivists. Almost without doubt he would have related numerous conversations, now lost forever, about the development of an archival system for this country. He was the first person in the United States to emphasize the importance of the training of archivists to do their job and the first in this country to teach courses in archival work—at Columbia University, for graduate students, and then at the National Archives for the staff. He could have told a fascinating story about how he conceived this pioneer idea and the course content, and what he learned by conducting the instruction on both a graduate and an in-service basis.

—HOMER T. ROSENBERGER, "They Have Shared Their Adventures,"  
*Cosmos Club Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 10, p. 4 (Oct. 1962).