

The Organization and Publication of the Frank B. Gilbreth Papers

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IN THE history of modern industrial engineering few names are more honored than that of Frank B. Gilbreth. Gilbreth's genius flowered in his original contributions to the science of motion and time study. Without question, his was a pioneering work in the field of industrial engineering. For some years since his death in 1924 his working papers have been in the library of Purdue University's Industrial Engineering Library. There, arranged and classified according to his own filing methods, they have been available to scholars. Because of their historical significance and value these papers have been recently edited and microcopied. They are reproduced on microfilm, of which positives can be purchased.¹ This is an account of what was done to make these papers available to the world of scholarship.²

The archive on microfilm contains Gilbreth's important publications in scientific and other periodicals, materials from short courses he gave at industrial firms and universities, his notebooks, business correspondence, press releases on his activities, and some letters to his wife and children. Also there is a Master's thesis submitted to the University of California by Ellen Hawley Jones, entitled "Life of Frank B. Gilbreth and His Contributions to the Science of Management." The microfilm publication of this analysis and account of Gilbreth's work was included on the advice of his wife and collaborator, Lillian M. Gilbreth. Mrs. Gilbreth gladly consented to the microcopying of the papers and provided guidance in selecting and editing them. Without her help it would have been impossible to complete the publication.

At the outset it was decided to arrange the papers as Gilbreth had arranged them. He invented his own filing system, which he called the N File. All materials were filed and cross-checked ac-

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¹ The Selected Papers of Frank B. Gilbreth: The Gilbreth Records, N File, 4 reels. The Micro Photo Division of Bell and Howell Co., 1700 Shaw Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44112.

² Supervision and organization of the project were undertaken by John M. Moriarity, Director, Purdue University Library; Esther Schlunt, head, Reference Administration, Purdue Library; and the author.

ording to the first entry made in the N File. The problem for the editors was the exclusion of material that did not show the development of his ideas and the conduct of his experiments. Because he recorded and annotated his work, the record has been reproduced without alteration. From the papers one can study the growth of his ideas and methods. The student is afforded an excellent idea of how Gilbreth created, how his mind worked. In order to insure this possibility, the N File has been kept as the index and is the finding aid for the 5,000 entries microcopied.

The task of eliminating correspondence and material not bearing directly upon Gilbreth's research and study was undertaken by James H. Greene, professor of industrial engineering at Purdue. Professor Greene directed the work of assistants who were familiar with motion and time study and the broad field of industrial engineering. When the skills of the librarian were called for, they were provided by the library staff of the university. A little over a year was necessary to organize and prepare the papers for publication.

Funds for editing were found in the budget of the Purdue Library. It was decided that the university would not subsidize the photocopying itself, and a commercial publisher agreed to undertake the responsibility for sales and profit risk. It was felt, however, that because of the special nature of the papers and their limited appeal some notice should be sent by the Purdue Library to those who might be interested. A list was compiled of archives, libraries, research institutions, industrial firms, and individuals who would have a particular interest in acquiring the papers. Thus the project was made attractive to the publisher, and he was assisted in finding a ready market. Those who might be particularly interested were notified of the project and the publication by a letter sent from the university library. The arrangement has worked out to the satisfaction of all parties.

One of the problems encountered was the physical task of photocopying. After file drawers had been inspected and the N File index prepared, there remained the task of photocopying both printed material and manuscripts. Fortunately Purdue had laboratories and space available for photocopying. It was decided, however, not to disorganize or to risk loss of the files by transporting them from the room in which they were housed. The publisher brought his cameras, at his own expense, to the Gilbreth collection and there photocopied the papers. The task was accomplished in 2 days, without endangering the original material in any way.

Another problem that appeared was the task of placing target frames in correct sequence. It was suggested that two indexes be

published. One would be the N File and the other would be a more conventional listing of material. It was feared that the N File would not be understood without the conventional guide to accompany it. The second index was not made, however, because the N File best preserved the flavor of Gilbreth's mind; and with a few minutes' examination a reader could familiarize himself with its meaning and organization. The original material could best be presented by letting it appear unaltered. The targets, prepared by the library staff, follow the N File entries. They were typewritten and then photocopied after insertion in the material at appropriate places.

The reproduction of the Gilbreth papers may suggest to archivists and librarians a form to follow in creating publications of their own. Key considerations were: (1) the inclusion of a first-rate historical appreciation of the man and his work, (2) a rigid adherence to the form and content of the papers in the order established by the authors, and (3) the use of the index designed and created by the author. The editing—what there was of it—was naturally left to people who know the field of industrial engineering. The expertise of the librarian was brought in when appropriate. It took cooperation, hard work, and some staff funds to prepare the papers for publication. Purdue believes that it was a worthwhile project and looks forward to further publications of this kind when possible.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ARCHIVES

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