

Personal Data From University Archives

By WALTER RUNDELL, JR.

WHEN discussing personal papers in university archives, one immediately faces the question of which records belong where. Should personal papers be in such a repository, or do they belong in a manuscript collection? As we all know, the collecting patterns of many institutions have been fortuitous, not logical or systematic. We—and by we I mean all those with a stake in preserving the past in the form of original sources, archivists, curators, and historians alike—should certainly foster the role of reason in building research collections and should therefore support the policy of university archives acquiring materials obviously related to the institution. But we must always be alert to the possibility of important sources being lost if some repository—logical or not—does not latch onto them. Consequently, university archivists should practice their profession in its widest dimension, guiding original sources to appropriate institutions whenever possible but rescuing the perishing if necessary.

In developing university archives there should be guidelines for collecting, processing, maintaining, and publicizing materials that reflect a true picture of the life of the university. Certainly part of this picture can be derived from personal papers of individuals closely associated with the university. These will be mostly from the faculty and administration, but there could be cases when benefactors, members of governing bodies, former students, or others closely associated with the institution might logically place their papers in a university archives. Such papers should naturally shed some light on significant intellectual and administrative activities occurring on campus.

Speaking from the standpoint of a history professor and researcher, I trust that university archivists are always alert to significant campus events. For instance, something highly important may happen, which, because of its nature, would not be represented in routinely

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collected records. A case in point was the nationwide campus unrest in the wake of the Kent State University and Jackson State College massacres last May. Many institutions of higher learning experienced upheavals of unprecedented dimensions, but how much of this will be systematically reflected in university archives? I am happy to report that the alert archivist at Iowa State University, Stanley Yates, immediately recognized the opportunity to document the activities on our campus with a series of taped interviews. Perhaps his doctoral training in the history of the French Revolution sensitized him to the potentially explosive nature of the campus agitation. In any event he interviewed key faculty members, administrators, and leaders of the student protest, getting their firsthand reactions to the academic upheaval during those troubled days. Not all oral history projects of university archives will be that dramatic, nor do we hope them to be; but archivists must be aware of the possibilities of supplementing textual records of campus activities with verbal accounts, for in many cases the latter type of documentation (with all its evidential limitations) is the only kind obtainable.

The most rewarding information to be found in personal papers in university archives, it seems to me, concerns the intellectual activities of the faculty. The university archivist should make consistent efforts to collect the papers of faculty engaged in productive research and publication. Since scholarly involvement is manifest in their publications, it is likely that the personal papers of those faculty members reflect considerable intellectual activity in the form of correspondence with fellow practitioners of the discipline, research notes, drafts of manuscripts and speeches, and the like. If the individual has been active in professional organizations, correspondence files labeled "Society of American Archivists," "Organization of American Historians," or "American Chemical Society" may contain significant information about the organizational life of those professions. Thus, when Maurice M. Vance undertook research at the University of Wisconsin on the life of Charles Van Hise, famous geologist and president of the university, he found the Van Hise papers at the on-campus State Historical Society to be his major resource. The book that resulted is *Charles Richard Van Hise: Scientist Progressive* (Madison, 1960). Someone inevitably will write a scholarly biography of an even more celebrated academician, Linus C. Pauling. Anticipating that day, I hope that the California Institute of Technology Archives has the Pauling papers ready for the researcher. The large number of such possibilities should challenge university archivists.

Of course, university archivists should not consider that all worth-

while faculty intellectual activity emanates from those who publish—although surely a good percentage of it does. On all campuses there are teachers who have not been eager to “produce” and whose careers consequently have not advanced as rapidly as those of publishing scholars. Papers of nonpublishing professors may contain considerable data about the internal life of the institution because such individuals frequently build their careers on committee work. Though this work can be the bane of scholars’ existence—Walter Prescott Webb once said that God so loved the world that He sent not a committee to save it—academic committees are inevitable. Their records, whether in committee files or professors’ papers, tell something significant about the way universities operate. In addition, nonpublishing professors may well have engaged in important intellectual pursuits that for some reason were not reported in print; their papers should evidence such work.

If personal papers in university archives are to represent something of the institution’s intellectual life, in this day of academic mobility the question naturally arises how long should a person be associated with the university before the archivist seeks the acquisition of his papers. For this question, I am afraid, there is no pat answer. Again, following the logical collecting procedures alluded to earlier, personal papers should be in the repository with which the individual had the longest association; if the papers reflect far more of the individual’s own intellectual pursuits than of the life of the institution, as is often the case, it usually does not matter which university houses the papers. The important thing is that some archivist take responsibility for securing the collection, lest it be lost. In many cases professors begin depositing papers in their university’s archives or manuscript collections long before retiring, and some even leave their papers at institutions from which they have departed (usually amicably). From a professor’s standpoint, such practices can make a great deal of sense. If he is mobile, he may not want to move important noncurrent files from one location to another, especially if his university has a well-developed archival program that enables him to retire subsequent additions to his collection.

In choosing the repository for his papers a professor should consider the professionalism of the archives. He should ask whether the institution is prepared to care for his material properly, as well as its other collections. Is the institution’s budget adequate for processing and maintaining collections and providing finding aids? Does the budget provide sufficient staff to provide for researchers’ needs and other archival responsibilities? If personal papers are placed in university archives, or in any other repository for that

matter, they should be available to serve scholarship. Availability is not just a matter of on-site accessibility to the materials; it also includes properly publicizing the materials to the research community. Donors ought to place personal papers in a university archives or in any other repository for the purpose of research; consequently, there should be no restrictions on access to the papers. For an individual to deposit papers for reasons other than research is narcissistic and should not be encouraged. Naturally, there may be occasions when immediate access to a collection is impossible, but any restrictions should be minimal. Archivists should seek donation to the public of the common law literary property inherent in the papers, along with the documents themselves. By so doing they insure that scholarship will be served, not personal vanity.

The importance of publicizing research materials would be hard to belabor. University archives must accept the responsibility for providing in-house finding aids to its collections and for publishing information about its holdings. If there are sufficient funds to publish a comprehensive guide to the archives, it should be done. If that is not feasible, the archives should certainly make periodic reports to the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections. Such reports printed in the annual volume of NUCMC can serve as a guide to a collection, provided that the repository faithfully keeps its reports current.

Because so many archivists are trained historians, the following comments about the ways historians use university archives may sound gratuitous, but I merely want to suggest the types of projects for which researchers can profitably investigate personal papers in your collections. After biographical studies, perhaps the most obvious example would be the history of the university itself. Papers of professors and administrators contribute a considerable amount of information about the quality of academic life. Indeed, papers of former students and trustees might likewise shed light on that subject. Institutional histories abound these days, and if your university has not had its story told, be prepared to supply personal papers to researchers, who will probably be campus historians. Professionally trained historians should have the wit to research the archives, but sometimes information or public relations offices handle university histories. In such cases the investigators may not understand the need to use archival sources, wishing to rely instead on yearbooks, newspapers, and catalogs. It then becomes the archivist's responsibility to explain the necessity for using primary sources. Students of intellectual history and of administrative history will naturally seek data from personal papers. If a professor was significant in his field, his papers could reveal how he formulated and

promulgated his ideas, as well as the various stages of their acceptance. The administrative historian can learn from personal papers how various procedures contributed to the institution's efficient or turbulent operations. The papers would quite likely reveal whether the administrative structure of the university promoted an atmosphere conducive to scholarly endeavor or whether scholarship flourished despite administrative conditions. For example, personal papers in the University of Texas Archives are bound to reflect the great turmoil of the 1944 Rainey controversy and its consequent toll on the creative energies of the faculty. Historians of science and technology find personal papers an invaluable source. Since much scientific innovation has academic roots, the notes and research reports of scientists constitute primary sources for those seeking to explain the development of scientific theories and practices in a given period. Similar examples of historians' uses for personal papers could be cited, but these few should indicate the wealth of possibilities.

Although this panel focuses on personal papers in university archives I should feel remiss in my duty as a historian not to mention in closing other types of records that would be of value to a potential researcher in such repositories. Departmental records constitute an extremely valuable source, but in my visits to university archives I have rarely found any kind of records management program that involved the regular retirement of departmental records to the archives. Minutes of governing boards; files from the offices of the president, vice presidents, and deans; and financial records, including those for athletics, should periodically be placed in the archives. Records of relations with regional and disciplinary accrediting agencies, such as the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the American Medical Association, and the American Library Association, furnish important information about the university since self-study reports are usually prepared before an accreditation visit. The archives should collect printed programs from all musical and dramatic presentations on campus and brochures from art shows. Because of the nature of the arts, such programs may constitute the most important textual documentation of their activities. Files of the campus newspaper, yearbook, and other regular or occasional publications—literary, social (fraternal and independent), or humorous—should be kept. The archives should have files of still and moving pictures that document campus activities. Certainly there should be a photographic record of faculty members and administrators. Honorary and other professional organizations on campus should also deposit their records in the university archives.

The aim of university archives should be to collect data that accurately and fairly represent the total life of the institution. When the archivist is alert to his responsibilities and gets support from the administration and faculty in fulfilling them, he can render invaluable services to researchers seeking to find in universities—institutions whose importance as intellectual and social barometers is manifestly increasing—answers to fundamental questions about the perplexing nature of our society.

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