

An Informal Report from The Archives of the History of American Psychology: 1965-1995

John A. Popplestone and Marion White McPherson

Abstract: *This informal account describes the beginnings, the development, and the current status of the psychology archives and in a dialogue form repeats the most common questions we are asked and gives our answers to them.*

Zusammenfassung: *Dieser informelle Bericht beschreibt die Anfänge, die Entwicklung und den derzeitigen Stand des Psychologischen Archives und beantwortet - in der Form eines Dialogs - die am häufigsten an uns gerichteten Fragen.*

The largest collection of materials documenting the history of social and behavioral sciences is maintained at the University of Akron, a state supported university of 27,000 students, in Akron, Ohio, USA. Within the University organization, the Archives of the History of American Psychology is a department in the university library system and historically almost all of its support has been university funding. The Archives was created by action of the university Board of Directors in October 1965.

In the 30 years since then the Archive has grown from nothing to more than 2000 linear feet (ca 613 meters) of processed, ready-for-scholarly-use documents and manuscripts. There are more than 25,000 printed books and a large collection of printed ephemera and other fugitive printed materials. There are more than 700 pieces of historic laboratory equipment, more than 3,000 photographs, more than 150 miles (241.5 kilometers) of research and didactic films, and several thousand psychological tests. But these statistics, like so many numbers, tell a story in only one language, spoken in a monotone without contextual, interpretative richness that can best come from direct experience - or, lacking that, by means of selected anecdotes.

In the Years since we began we have become a different institution, existing in different times, serving a different population and reflecting a different psychology. For openers, the collection policy announced in 1965 was embedded in the social and intellectual unrest of those times. (The Kent State Massacre only 12 miles away from the Akron campus will take place in 1970 during the second meeting of the Cheiron Society, which was on the Akron campus that Spring). We specified at that time that we would be interested only in North American psychologists, not European or other nationalities and not in psychiatry,

psychoanalysis or any other related field. This geographical restriction was not a narrow nationalism but only a means of limiting our horizon. We also said that our interest was in the whole field of psychology and in all psychologists. That is, we are not going to be elitist in terms of people and not hierarchical in ranking the many kinds of psychological activity.

One of the considerations here was that in those days most archival programs were in academic settings - which meant that academic psychologists were more likely to have a place that would be interested in their papers (the program at Harvard University was the exemplary example). But those psychologists who were employed in non-academic settings, particularly those in the independent practice of psychology were quite unlikely to have someplace where their papers would be protected.

Harry Hollingworth *did* deposit copies of his unpublished autobiography with the state of Nebraska Historical Society. I assume that Columbia-Barnard University did not have an archive program in 1956. But other copies of the autobiography, and the rest of his papers, and those of his wife - Leta Stetter Hollingworth - were still in his possession at death. We obtained them from his daughter, by his second marriage, and they are now in Akron, safe.

This policy, of rejection of elitist - hierarchical judgements, was in contrast to the older historical - archival stance which tended to be restricted to „important“ people, places, and events. In the spirit of the „60“s we were to be egalitarian reflecting a psychology that was pluralistic in content and diverse in membership. By and large we have stayed with this definition but we are now a little less interested in typical people - although they are still represented - and we are a little more sophisticated - we hope - in predicting what historians in the future are going to find of interest. What is called „important“ today will be of interest tomorrow. And the obscure tends to remain so.

One special collecting project was just terminated. We had six people selected as typical faculty members. Neither stellar nor obscure, and asked them to save whatever came across their desks, *everything* that a typical faculty member had to deal with in our times. Gradually most lost interest and dropped out but one conscientious person lasted through the full time from when the project was started until his retirement. This is a unique record, which we hope some historians in the future will find immensely interesting.

At Mystic Seaport in the state of Connecticut, there is a pavilion devoted to an exhibit called „Neptune's Attic“. They explain that although their collecting policy is now very specific and focused it was not always thus and all sorts of interesting, but irrelevant things, have washed ashore - as it were - and ended up

there. This *exotica* is „Neptune’s Attic“. We could almost do the same thing from some of the surplus things we have found embedded in the papers of psychologists. For example, a large collection of items related to Edward Muybridge, the early photographer of movement; a collection of California wine bottle labels; a lock of Rosalie Rayner’s hair; the altimeter of Wolfgang Köhler; and an 8-ball which a speaker liked to place on the podium before beginning his remarks while behind it. (We were almost offered Einstein’s brain but wiser counsel prevailed. Actually we would have declined since he was not an American psychologist.) We have the complete records of obtaining a degree from a Florida diploma mill, from application, through dissertation to the final conferring of the Ph.D. in counseling psychology with subsequent membership in APA. We are still trying to represent the whole of psychology and the diversity of the people who do psychology but we also recognize that the task is different today from what it was 30 years ago. For openers there are simply many more psychologists in whom we have to be interested than there were extant then.

To underline this, and using APA as the example, in 1965 there were 23 divisions, in 1994 there are 50. The field has grown and diversified. The 23,500 APA members of 1965 are overwhelmed by the more than 75,000 who belong today.

There are also many more archival programs today than there were 30 years ago. Then it was a rare university, hospital or clinic that had an archival program, now many institutions do. And they stand ready to help preserve records that would have perished, except for us, 30 years ago. Today many can receive excellent care at home. We still feel that we can give a psychologist special treatment and understanding but we also are happy to learn that a collection is well housed elsewhere when we do not receive it.

J.E. Wallace Wallin, was 93 years old at the time of his death in 1969. He left his papers to the University of Delaware, his alma mater. An appropriate bequest. However, we had a call from the archivist at Delaware one day asking us if we might be interested in accessioning the Wallin papers. His reason was that they simply could not make any sense out of them, there seemed to be no order with which they could deal. What he was really saying was that the papers of this psychologist did not fit the usual archival expectation. Partly because they were psychological and partly because of Wallin’s career and personality. My answer was that we would take on Wallin if the family agreed with the transfer. Wallin’s daughter did agree and the transfer was made. Later she came to visit Akron, we showed her the inventory and the gray boxes which held her father’s papers and she was pleased.

Another anecdote indicates the special quality of care that we can give. One of our student workers came to us one day with a typescript and the question of just what did she have

there. How should the inventory describe it. She said „It seems to be the start of a novel or perhaps a short story“. And then read, „this little boy seems to be sitting at a table. There is a violin on it and the little boy is thinking about ...“

From the beginning the Akron archives saw its mission as providing protection and service where it would otherwise be missing. There was never an intention to try to dominate the field, to corner the market of manuscript materials in psychology. But in those early days there were fewer resources available to psychologists and we had to do more for the field simply because no one else was helping us. In the first years, in particular, there were repeated horror stories when we arrived too late. „Dad burned everything.“ Or, „I just could not keep all that stuff so it was thrown out“. „When mother went into the nursing home we closed the house down and those things must have gone then.“ That sort of destruction is probably not going on today.

Thirty years ago we were novices and Akron was an obscure midwestern university which housed an archive which was unknown and, in fact, most psychologists did not understand that the writing of history requires the preservation and use of primary sources.

A common misunderstanding in those early days was to hear us talk about „papers“ and have our listener respond with the collected reprints of published research articles. That sort of thing does not happen anymore, although psychologists are still amazed and somewhat apprehensive, when they consider that the historian is dependent upon what has survived by chance as data. All that has changed. The Psychology Archives at The University of Akron is well known, internationally. Which is, of course, why the University has supported this very special, elitist enterprise all these years.

Very early, one of our archival consultants explained, „In the „20“s a university that wanted prestige built a bell-tower. In the „60“s they founded an archive. (And he added, somewhat sinisterly, that the cost is about the same).

At one point the then vice-president for academic affairs told us it used to be that when I went to meetings of academic vice-presidents people would look at my badge and say, „Oh, Akron, where the rubber comes from“. But now they look at my badge and say, „Oh, Akron, where the psychology archives are.“ We knew then that our budget was safe.

Of course not all academic administrators have been supportive.

The Dean of the College of Liberal Arts once said to one of us, „You know John, when I encounter a scientist who is knowledgeable about the history of his discipline I know that

I am dealing with an incompetent." He later presided over JAP's demotion as department head and subsequent troubles.

Almost a thousand people have actually donated things to us. And many more have received brochures and other mailings, we have tried to be visible. Doing things like chairing the APA Task Force on Centennial Celebrations helps to keep the Archives at Akron conspicuous by the visibility of its Director.

The changes in the field of psychology and the changes in the salience of the archives have been accompanied by a third set of changes which have taken place in the field of the history of psychology. In 1965 there were 234 charter members of the APA Division of the History of Psychology. Today the Division has more than a 1,000 members, almost a 5 fold increase.

In 1969 a second forum for history research (and fellowship) came when The Cheiron Society was organized, originally around the core of the alumni of a workshop in the history of psychology. Cheiron was created as an interdisciplinary society originally named „International Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences“ which forms the difficult acronym ISHOBS and fostered the shift to Cheiron. There is also a Cheiron-Europe and members of both societies attend both meetings. Cheiron is dominated by psychologists with an interest in the history of the field, both in North America and Europe. Recently the Forum for the History of Human Science was founded in December 1988 as an interdisciplinary group „to promote scholarship in the history of the social and behavioral sciences“. The organizational meeting took place at the 1988 History of Science Society annual meeting and it sought affiliation status with HSS as an Interest Group. We may expect that FHHS will prove to have a membership with a dominant component of trained professional historians with an interest in the history of psychology while Division 26 will be professional psychologists with an interest in the history of the field. Cheiron seems to be - mostly - psychologists acting like historians.

The arrival of the historians is changing the field. Psychologists writing about psychology are generally friendly and tolerant of their field and its problems but the outsider looking in is sometimes hostile, negative, and even seems to see psychology as an enemy. These people take Foucault seriously. However, they are a highly sophisticated group that adapt techniques and bring new points of view to the field. One of these people describes himself as a member of the loyal opposition. Perhaps that says it as well as anything else.

Over the years, many of the questions we are asked have stayed the same.

Question #1

What kind of permanence does the Archives have? Will it outlast your enthusiasm and interest? Will the Archives go on? How can we be sure that the administration at Akron will continue to support the Archives?

The answer to this good, reasonable question has remained the same over the years. How can anyone give a guarantee that anything will be permanent. Who would have thought that the Merrill-Palmer institution would close its doors? And, on a larger field, who would ever have predicted the collapse of Marxist-Leninism and on such a vast scale? When The University of Akron administration and Board of Directors established the Psychology Archives it was, of course, with the intention that it was permanent. Archives like the term „perpetuity“. A Archivists project of this sort with its national and international attention needs to be done well. If it were to be abandoned national and international opprobrium would replace praise and regard. They know this. Currently The University of Akron continues to be generous. In February 1994 we began a move from our scattered storage and work areas into a single space which combines storage and work areas adjacent to each other.

This new location is in a completely remodeled, former department store and our new quarters have excellent security, very good temperature and humidity controls and greatly increased storage space. We foresee many years of residency in these excellent quarters.

Since 1989 there has been a flurry of personnel changes but now in 1994 we seem to have reached stability again. The roster now includes JAP with full-time assignment to the archives. Sharon Ochsenhirt is also full-time as an archival associate. Both of these people hold the designation of Certified Archivist from the Society of American Archivists, two out of only 26 in the state of Ohio. MWMcP continues as a „volunteer“ in daily attendance despite her official retirement in December 1989. We continue to have effective student help carrying out clerical tasks and preparing finding aids.

At Akron AHAP is a part of the scene. This is not to say that all members of The University of Akron community are friendly. I have mentioned the Dean of Liberal Arts who we endured from 1970 to '77. Or the just demoted Librarian who was not friendly at all. But his idea was not to abandon but merely to control. At one time the graduate students in the Department of Psychology were circulating a petition asking the administration to close down the Archives but nothing came of that. Through it all there does not seem to have ever been any real attempt to close down or weaken the Archives.

But if intake were to be halted tomorrow and the staff ceased the preparation of finding aids there would still be the main collection, safe and secure, ready to

be consulted by any scholar who wished to see it. Only the most dire circumstances would mean that the whole staff would be dismissed. Even then it would be possible to transfer the holdings to some more benign environment. In the same way we need to consider that probably most or even all of the holdings of AHAP would have perished if we had not been there, willing and able to gather them in and be protective.

Question #2

„Is the collection on microfilm“ and „Are you on computer“ are two similar questions still being asked. Microfilm is not really seen as a solution to any of our problems. First it is impermanent. It fades, gets a disease and generally does not have the kind of permanence that paper and ink possess. Also, a confidential item in a file can be pulled from a box before the box is given to a scholar, and returned when it goes back on the shelf, regaining its position in the collection.

We are especially careful about confidential material. The donor may stipulate that certain items are to be closed under various conditions and may also specify the level, or time, when they may be inspected, copied or quoted. Or we may decide that some material is simply too sensitive - for the present - to be public. We maintain that you do not lose your privacy simply by being dead. And your associates and family have the same rights. Since we are not a governmental agency, like the Library of Congress, we may restrict access, and our legal department is even more touchy about these things than we are.

A folder can be „pulled“ from a gray box before it is turned over to the patron, but a few frames of microfilm cannot be concealed, everything on the reel is there to be inspected. Lastly there is an aesthetic side to all this. People like to hold in their hand the real document, the thing itself, and staring at a ground glass screen is not the same thing. So we have no expectation, at the present, to go to microfilm. The saving in space would be the compelling reason to use it and we do not feel that this has come yet.

Computerizing the inventory and the other finding aids would be feasible if the collection were larger, it may in fact be large enough now, but the other side of the equation, the number of visitors does not justify the expense which would be required to build a data base. We simply do not have enough use made of the collection to make computerizing it cost effective.

Question #3

A favorite, still being asked, is the „How did you ever get an idea like this?“ said with an inflection that says „how come a dork like you is able to come up with

something so splendid?" JAP has answered this question so frequently that it seems redundant to answer it again but perhaps we should

In 1965 we were both identifiable as clinical psychologists, our teaching and research were concerned with personality, mental retardation, and psychometrics. Teaching was in the clinical area. But the head of the department asked JAP to teach the History of Psychology course, which was far from his main interests and not an area of special expertise. But, on the other hand we are not afraid of history, or of the past either. In 1965 after about four years of teaching a course in history one of us complained that there was a very low standard of what passed for research in the field and predicted that unless the historians began to use primary sources and had archival material available there would never be a field of respectable historical writing. A mutual friend had been involved in the recent establishing of the Archives of American Art and that interesting project probably helped to suggest a psychology archives. (Also we were reminded many years later of an article in *American Psychologist* signed „Historiophile“ which urged a psychological museum. To which Boring wrote an endorsement. But that was not in consciousness at the time). (And at this time neither the Rafi Khan nor the David Boder „museum“ attempts were known to us).

In any case, the Dean, who was an historian, authorized pursuit of the possibility, visits to the archives of Labor History and American Art in Detroit were helpful, and the influential support of Robert I. Watson sped things along and in October 1965 The University of Akron Board of Trustees authorized the Archives of the History of American Psychology and at the same time created the University Archives.

AHAP came into being without released time, without a budget, with space limited to a desk in a library office, with a part time student assistant and some handsome letterhead. We had the good wishes of many, but not all, of the university administrators.

Question #4

„How come in Akron?" The suggestion is that the American Midwest is as remote from civilization as is Baffin Land or the upcountry of Belize. West Coast people feel it should be on the West Coast and East Coast residents think it should be in either Washington or New York. In fact with modern methods of travel and communication it can be anywhere. In this case our willingness to do the work and the University's willingness to provide housing and money settled the issue.

Question #5

Journalists - and some others - ask „What is the most interesting request you have had?“ We have several favorites. One is our participation in the Ellis Island restoration project. The concept was to allow the modern visitor to experience vicariously what the arriving immigrant experienced. So you can go through an evocation of the physical and the psychological examinations. But it seems the staff were not able to find the psychological tests that had been given. Manuals and descriptions abound the actual objects did not. Then the Ellis Island exhibit staff encountered a friend of ours who suggested that they try Akron. They did and we had the tests - in fact we had enough extras that we could lend Ellis Island what they needed. We have not been out to see the restored station but an article in LIFE magazine did illustrate the „Ship Test“ we loaned them, although it did not give us credit. So we are awaiting the chance to see it. Neither of us have an Ellis Island experience in our families, we came in by another route, but this does mean that we now can share some of this part of the history of America with so many others.

In another - not particularly psychological - experience we were asked to make available some of the genealogical charts which had been prepared by the staff of the Vineland Training School and published as „The Jackson-Whites“. The genealogies of the Jukes family and the Kallikak family were once offered as evidence of the familial occurrence of social inadequacy. The Jackson-Whites are another such family, just not as well-known as the Kallikaks and the Jukes. We received an inquiry from a professional genealogist who had been hired by the „Ramapough Mountain Indians, Inc. „A Tribal Organization““ who were trying to „achieve acknowledgement by the federal government as an Indian tribe“. The genealogist asked to be allowed to examine the charts since they were believed to be able to „provide important information on the ancestry of our tribal members“. These quotations are from a letter urging us to allow the genealogist to have access, which came from, „Ronald Redbone Van Dunk Chief, Ramapough Mountain Indian Tribe“. We were very happy to give access, once our legal department gave us clearance, and I wrote to Chief Van Dunk to assure him of our cooperation.

I have never before written to an Indian Chief and none of the manuals I consulted told me what the correct salutation is. They do prescribe for The Queen of England and the Pope, but not an American Indian Tribal Chief. We have no idea how valid the Claims of the Ramapough Indians are but it was nice to do something for the Indians more concrete than just have the usual white, European-origin, liberal, guilt feelings.

Question #6

A similar inquiry is „What is your favorite or most valuable - or most important collection?“ Well, „The Papers of Henry Herbert Goddard“ are very large, he was an important figure and there is a lot of traffic in them. „The Donald K. Adams Papers“ reflect the Gestalt movement and get a lot of use. „The Papers of Barbara Strudler Walston“ will reflect many of the current, cutting edge, kinds of things happening in psychology now. She was involved, a participant in many activities. In fact the extent of her involvement and the recency of events has decided us on the indefinite postponement of preparing her papers for use. They are just too new and involve too many people on the contemporary scene.

As I have examined this question of what collection seems most important the real answer is „Whatever one is most recent“. We acquired the papers and the films of Rene Spitz on July 24-27, 1990. This is a very large collection, 1,320 pounds of paper and 2,080 pounds of film. (We have these figures since the collection was released by The University of Colorado in Denver and came to Akron via Air Freight, in two shipments for security. And, since we shared the cost of shipment with the people in Colorado, we know the exact poundage.) Spitz is probably most easily identified as a psychoanalyst and psychiatrist of European background and the work usually identified with his name is the anaclitic depression and hospitalism. But he was a member of APA from 1956 to his death in 1974. And was, at one time, frequently cited by psychologists. The collection begins in Europe before 1938 and there are psychoanalytic materials from the pre-Hitler era in which historians of psychoanalysis say that the records are very sparse. He seems to have had a wide correspondence with many workers in personality, child development, and early studies of psychopathology in children. The films, particularly GRIEF are still in demand, particularly by people in television production.

Another recent accession is a magnificent gift of printed books which has been added to the almost 25,000 volumes which have been given to AHAP over the years. Solomon and Florence Diamond gave a collection of the most important publications of Wilhelm Wundt in 1992 and followed this in August 1994 with a library of 1,897 books, including many rare volumes. The appraiser called this „the finest library of pre-scientific psychology books in the world“.

Question #1 Revisited

What of the future? The Archives has always been a „Mom and Pop operation“ but Mom has retired although she comes to work everyday as a „volunteer“ and

Pop has reached an age where the responsible thing to do is locate a successor who can learn on the job while the founders are still able to pass their accumulated wisdom and experiences.

The search must begin soon to find the Successor.

The following are available from the Archives:

Accession Policy of Psychology Archives Collection. Bierce Library - The University of Akron. Revised, 1994.

Archives of the History of American Psychology. Bierce Library - The University of Akron. General brochure. Revised, 1994.

The Archives of the History of American Psychology: Procedural Guide. AHAP Staff. 40 pages + appendices (24 pp). January, 1992.

A Guide to the Retrieval and Use of Archival Materials at the Archives of the History of American Psychology. 1994.

Problems and Procedures in Oral Histories at the Archives of the History of American Psychology. Bierce Library - The University of Akron. First Issued 1967/Revised 1989.

Recognition of the Archives of the History of American Psychology. Agenda Item and Resolution of the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association. August, 1982.

Correspondence should be directed to:

Prof. Dr. John A. Popplestone, Archives of the History of American Psychology, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio 44325. USA.