



History of Anthropology Newsletter

Volume 8
Issue 2 *Fall 1981*

Article 4

1-1-1981

Papers of the Archaeological Institute of America, 1879-1954

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SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

I. PAPERS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, 1879-1954

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In the century since its founding in Boston in 1879, the Archaeological Institute of America has played a significant role in supporting and publishing, through the American Journal of Archaeology and other outlets, archaeological research in all parts of the world. Beginning as the organization of Boston men of gentility and art under the powerful influence of Charles Eliot Norton, within two decades the Institute sprouted additional local chapters in Baltimore, New York, and Washington, then metamorphosed after the turn of the century into a loose constellation of enthusiastic, largely autonomous societies across the country, from St. Louis to Los Angeles, Santa Fe, and San Francisco. As the New England men lost their dominance, the focus of AIA archeology spread as well from the classical Mediterranean region to the New World, the Middle East, China, and elsewhere.

Organizationally the Institute has been anomalous. Never having affiliated with a major university or having established a museum to serve as a central gathering place, it has remained structurally decentralized, to a great extent dependent on local branches for sustenance. One consequence of this condition has been that the Institute's official records have not found a permanent home, having until recently been stored in various repositories. Last year the AIA records and correspondence, running from 1879 to about 1954, were removed to the Archeology Museum at Colgate University, where I have been ordering them for proper storage and, ultimately, use by scholars.

The Institute papers consist chiefly of the incoming and outgoing correspondence of the organization's primary officers--president, secretary, treasurer, members of the executive committees--as well as the official minutes of national meetings, committee meetings, etc. Within the major division by presidency (Norton, Low, Seymour, White, etc.), the papers are organized either by specific projects (e.g., Assos in the 1880s), major groups of correspondence with individuals, or major institutional changes in the AIA itself (e.g., founding of the School of American Archaeology in Santa Fe under Hewett, 1906-1912). Taken as a whole these records will help to fill in the social and financial side of the development of American archeology, for they contain clear and complete records of personal and institutional support networks, of institutional growth and decline, of disagreement over the promise of various regions of the world as archeological and historical resources, and of the biographies of significant figures, such as Norton and Edgar Lee Hewett. In particular the development of the AIA's schools in Rome and Athens, and the early work in these regions, is exceedingly well documented.

The AIA papers will be ready for use when finally deposited in a university or museum archive, hopefully in the near future. In the interim scholars should address their inquiries to Dr. Robert H. Dyson, AIA Committee on Archives, Archaeological Institute of America, 53 Park Place, New York 10007.