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Archives on the History of Anthropology at the University of Chicago

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SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

ARCHIVES ON THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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Working on a biography of Robert Redfield for the Columbia University Press series, "Leaders of Modern Anthropology," I have been impressed by the excellent organization, accessibility, variety and richness of the documents in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library. With the cooperation of the anthropology department, the library is further improving the collection. Albert M. Tannler, of the Department of Special Collections, should be consulted for further information.

Robert Redfield's papers are the richest single body of material in the collection. They have been sorted in folders and filed in 88 archive boxes. Ruth Solie, who has Master's degrees in both anthropology and library science, worked for a full year on the collection, writing a 91 page Guide that provides a sophisticated summary of Redfield's career and of the subjects covered by the papers as they relate to his career.

The Redfield papers document his association with institutions from the AAA and the Carnegie Institution of Washington to the United World Federalists and Wenner-Gren Foundation. His correspondence with colleagues records the whole range of professional and intellectual issues they raised with him between the early 1930s and 1958. Margaret Redfield has also deposited personal family letters which are particularly interesting because he wrote them while engaged in field research, or while away from home to attend conferences and committee meetings. They often describe in a witty manner the details of these activities, and they reveal intimate aspects of Redfield's character.

Field notes, diaries, maps and other research materials from Tepoztlan, Yucatan and Guatemala are filed by topic and chronological order. The historian can trace Redfield's collaboration with Alfonso Villa-Rojas, Sol Tax and numerous other associates. His methods of working are fully documented by research proposals, summary reports for funding agencies, manuscripts and publications. The historian can study in detail the transformation of projects as research progressed from field work to published articles and books.

Milton Singer has added 17 boxes of papers on the project which he and Redfield directed together, the Comparative Study of Cultures, funded by the Ford Foundation. Thus, 105 archive boxes are devoted to Redfield's work. This project lasted from 1951 to 1958, and the correspondence, reports and manuscripts reveal how Singer and Redfield collaborated with many specialists in Islamic, Chinese and Indian civilizations (and some students of Latin America, or scholars like Harry Hoijer). Their work

encouraged social scientists and scholars in the humanities to see and use the possibilities of complementary research.

The Redfield papers include more than I have been able to study or use for the small biography I am working on -- for example, many boxes of teaching materials and student papers. For historians with other interests they could be studied in relation to other materials relating to the history of anthropology at Chicago, beginning with the papers of Frederick A. Starr (1859-1933), the first anthropologist at the University. Starr arrived when the University opened in 1892 and retired in 1923. His diaries, notebooks and scrap books document travels and interests in Mexico, Africa, Europe and the Orient. The Newberry Library also owned papers on Starr, and has transferred its holdings recently to the Department of Special Collections at the University. Starr failed to establish significant research or a graduate program at Chicago during his tenure, but he was a popular undergraduate teacher, sought newspaper publicity, and was decorated by various governments. Starr's papers provide material to study the much neglected field of kitsch anthropology during a most interesting period, 1892-1920.

When Fay-Cooper Cole (1881-1961) took a job at the University in 1924, replacing Starr, he expected to initiate a strong graduate program and to separate anthropology from sociology (where it had been tentatively housed from 1892). Cole hired Edward Sapir the following year, and Robert Redfield in 1927, and in 1931, Radcliffe-Brown. Cole established a genial, mutually supportive atmosphere within the department, and good working relationships with the sociologists. This, too, gave Chicago a distinctive climate for the development of anthropological scholarship. The separate department was formed in 1929, and the 34 boxes of departmental papers in the library archives cover the period from 1929 to the early 1950s. Described in a 21 page Guide, they contain Cole's correspondence as department chairman (1929-46), documents on archaeological projects, general correspondence, and copies of undergraduate and graduate examinations. Student papers on graduate examinations for several years immediately after W. W. II are also included in this collection, which is uneven and official in tone, but hopefully will be fleshed out with additional documents still in departmental files.

Finally, Sol Tax has promised the library his papers and has begun turning them over. All of the correspondence, memos, reports and manuscripts of the Darwin Centennial celebration are available in 11 boxes (this was a good example of Tax's originality and skill in arranging large scholarly meetings). Also, the records of Current Anthropology, starting with the process by which Tax initiated the journal and carrying through the whole period of his editorship, are available for study in 142 boxes: 40 boxes contain documents of conferences, meeting notes and correspondence about the journal, and the rest are Associate reply letters. These materials, and the rest of Tax's papers when they become available, will provide unique opportunities for historians to study the professionalization processes that transformed anthropology after the Second World War, in which Tax played a central role.