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Guide to the Manuel Conrad Elmer Papers 1907-1980



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.ELMER
Title	Elmer, Manuel Conrad. Papers
Date	1907-1980
Size	1.5 linear ft. (3 boxes)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract Manuel Conrad Elmer received one of the first doctorate degrees in sociology given by the University of Chicago. His dissertation and early research utilized social survey techniques. In 1926, he helped to found the department of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. The Manuel Conrad Elmer papers comprise 1.5 linear feet of material and date from 1907 to 1980. The papers include Elmer's sociological publications; additional, non-sociological writings from later in his life; a series of interviews of Elmer conducted in 1978 and 1979; personal records from his college years; a scrapbook of newspaper articles, further newspaper clippings and announcements; and correspondence.

Information on Use

Access

Access to Series III is restricted. Contact the Special Collections Research Center for further information. (specialcollections@lib.uchicago.edu)

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Elmer, Manuel Conrad. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

Manuel Conrad Elmer was born in 1886 and spent his youth in southern Wisconsin. He received a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and mathematics from Northwestern College, in Naperville, IL in 1911. In 1912, he received a master's degree in economics from the University of Illinois. Receiving encouragement from David Kinley at the University of Illinois, Elmer matriculated at the recently established Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. He received his Ph.D. in 1914, writing a dissertation entitled *Social Surveys of Urban Communities*.

During Elmer's time at the University, the Sociology department, under the directorship of Albion Small, was moving in the direction of reconciling general theoretical and philosophical concerns with a growing awareness of the need for empirical data and field research. W.I. Thomas' monograph: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* was a groundbreaking move toward placing a variety of data sources at the center of a sociological study and developing analytical tools sufficient to draw conclusions from the information gathered. This impetus would come to fruition at the University of Chicago in the collaboration between Ernest W. Burgess and Robert Park between 1916 and 1934.

Given this developing intellectual current within the department, M.C. Elmer's own work was underappreciated by the faculty at Chicago. According to Martin Bulmer, the sort of social research initiated by Thomas and developed at Chicago following his departure was "distinguished [from social survey work] by its greater scope, its formulation of hypotheses or propositions about social action, and the attempt to formulate theories or laws to explain social phenomena." Elmer's difficulties at Chicago may be also explained, in part, by the close relationship between social survey work at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries and progressive social reform movements. Though Elmer himself recognized the value of standardized methods of data collection and of integrating statistical analyses into his conclusions, the close historical relationship between his chosen method and political activism may have given the impression that it was insufficiently objective for the intellectual climate of the day. Whatever the cause, Elmer found himself spending a great deal of time at Chicago attempting to justify his chosen research orientation. Burgess and Park themselves had considered using social survey methods during the early phase of their collaboration, but soon abandoned them in favor of direct observation of social phenomena and the utilization of other forms of data such as censuses and maps. Elmer, for his part, continued making social surveys throughout his career, and did, in fact, link them at times with various political and social welfare causes.

M.C. Elmer's first academic appointment was at Fargo College in Fargo, North Dakota in 1914. While in Fargo, he began a correspondence with Franklin H. Giddings of Columbia University. Giddings provided early advice and support for Elmer's work, though the two did not meet until 1931, the year of Giddings' death. While in Fargo, Elmer engaged in survey work of the area, some of which was linked with a political campaign to decrease the incidence of infanticide by redefining the legal status of children born out of wedlock.

After two years at Fargo College, Elmer took a position at the University of Kansas. Here, he continued his work on social surveys and developed some early interest in the area of criminology which did not come to fruition. In 1919, after three years at the University of Kansas, Elmer took a professorship at the University of Minnesota, where he would spend the next seven years. While in Minnesota, Elmer began research work on women in industry and juvenile delinquency.

Following this, Elmer accepted an offer to reorganize the Department of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh. He was appointed head of the department and remained at Pittsburgh for the remainder of his career. Here, his interests in the sociology of the family developed, culminating in two books, *Family Adjustment and Social Change* (1932) and *Sociology of the Family* (1945). While at Penn, he also co-authored a textbook with Verne Wright: *General Sociology: An Introductory Book*. In 1931, he helped found the Graduate Division of Social Work at Pittsburgh and served as its head from 1932 until 1938. He died in 1988.

Scope Note

The Manuel Conrad Elmer papers date from 1907 to 1980. The majority of the collection is taken up by Elmer's own publications, both professional and non-academic. Some personal items are included as well as a collection of correspondence pertaining to Elmer's career. This latter is likely to be of marginal research interest since the correspondence primarily concerns Elmer's own publications and positive responses to his work by colleagues and readers; it contains meager reference to his actual sociological research. Of more interest is a series of interviews conducted by Carlos Brossard, David Fast, and Glenna Mars with M.C. Elmer in 1978 and 1979. The interviews recount Elmer's personal biography and recollections of his childhood. Some attention is given, however, to the politics and personalities of the early days of the Sociology department at the University of Chicago. Likewise, Elmer devotes some attention in these interviews to describing his intellectual genealogy and the academic influences on his social survey work.

The papers are organized into four series: Series I: Sociological Writings; Series II: Non-Sociological Writings; Series III: Interviews with M.C. Elmer; and Series IV: Personal. Series I contains Elmer's social survey publications from his dissertation of 1914 until 1926 as well as a sample of his non-survey sociological writings. An unpublished translation of *Social Statistics* by Franz Zizek is included in this series in manuscript form. Series II contains non-sociological writings by Elmer as well as a Report of the Minnesota Commission for the Blind a committee on which Elmer served during his tenure at the University of Minnesota. Series III contains the aforementioned interviews by Brossard, Fast, and Mars of Elmer. Series IV is composed of personal records from Elmer's college years, a scrapbook of newspaper clippings from early in his career, further newspaper clippings and works that refer to him, and a selection of his correspondence. Of particular interest in this series is a folder containing information on Ernest W. Burgess and handwritten notes by Elmer referring to his personal recollections of Burgess and his assessment of his contribution to the field of sociology.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Subject Headings

- Bogardus, Emory Stephen, 1882-
- Burgess, Ernest Watson , 1886-1966

- Elmer, M. C. (Manuel Conrad), b.1886
- Giddings, Franklin Henry, 1855-1931
- Ross, Edward Alsworth, 1866-1951
- Small, Albion Woodbury, 1854-1926
- University of Chicago. Dept. of Sociology
- University of Chicago. Division of the Social Sciences
- University of Pittsburgh -- History
- Sociology
- Social sciences -- History
- Social surveys
- Sociologists

INVENTORY

Series I: Sociological Writings

Subseries I: Social Surveys

Box 1

Folder 1

Social Surveys of Urban Communities by Manuel Conrad Elmer, Ph.D Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1914

Box 1

Folder 2

Social Survey of Fargo, North Dakota, M.C. Elmer, director of survey, (Fargo, ND: Associated Charities of Fargo, North Dakota, 1915)

Box 1

Folder 3

Social Survey of Council Grove, Kansas, M.C. Elmer, director of survey, (Council Grove, KA: University of Kansas Extension Center, 1917)

Box 1

Folder 4

The Minneapolis Social Survey, Manuel C. Elmer, director of survey, (Topeka, KA: Kansas State Printing Plant, W.R. Smith, State Printer, 1918)

Box 1

Folder 5

Report of Social Survey of Clay Center Kansas, Manuel C. Elmer, director of survey, (University of Kansas, 1918)

Box 1

Folder 6

Armourdale: A City Within a City, Manuel C. Elmer, director of survey, (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Plant, 1919)

Box 1

Folder 7

Stillwater, The Queen of the St. Croix: Report of a Social Survey, Manuel C. Elmer, director of survey, (Stillwater, MN: Community Service of Stillwater, Minnesota, 1920)

Box 1

Folder 8

The Cost of Feeble-Mindedness in Minnesota, Manuel C. Elmer, director of survey,
(University of Minnesota, Dept. of Sociology, 1922)

Box 1

Folder 9

A Neighborhood in South Minneapolis, Manuel C. Elmer, director of study,
(Minneapolis, MN: Council of Social Agencies, 1922)

Box 1

Folder 10

The Tuttle-Columbus Neighborhood, by Manuel C. Elmer, (Minneapolis: University
Print Co., 1922)

Box 1

Folder 11

Women in Industry in Saint Paul, Minnesota, M.C. Elmer, director of study, (St. Paul,
MN: Saint Paul Association of Public and Business Affairs, 1924?)

Box 1

Folder 12

Women in Clerical and Secretarial Work, M.C. Elmer, director of study, (Minneapolis,
MN: Woman's Occupational Bureau, 1925)

Box 1

Folder 13

The Juvenile Delinquent in Saint Paul, Minnesota, by M.C. Elmer, (St. Paul, MN: The
Community Chest, 1926)

Subseries II: Non-survey Sociological Work

Box 1

Folder 14

Agenda: A Community Center in Process of Development, report by M.C. Elmer, et al.,
draft copy, 1917

Box 1

Folder 15

Agenda: A Community Center in Process of Development, report by M.C. Elmer, et al.,
fair copy, n.d.

Box 1

Folder 16

Social Statistics by Franz Zizek, manuscript of translation by M.C. Elmer, 1923, pt. 1

Box 1

Folder 17

Social Statistics by Franz Zizek, manuscript of translation by M.C. Elmer, 1923, pt. 2

Box 1

Folder 18

The Family: A Series of Eight Radio Talks, by Manuel C. Elmer, (Pittsburgh, PA:
University of Pittsburgh, 1930)

Box 1

Folder 19

The Journal of Educational Sociology, v. 9, no. 5 (1936), M.C. Elmer, ed.

Box 2

Folder 1

"Report requested by Dean Rosenberg on establishment, development, and program of [University of Pittsburgh] School of Social Work", M.C. Elmer, draft copy, 1980

Box 2

Folder 2

Elmer, miscellaneous publications

Series II: Non-Sociological Writings

Box 2

Folder 3

Report of the Minnesota Commission for the Blind, 1923

Box 2

Folder 4

The Passing of the Red Tablecloth, by M.C. Elmer, 1965

Box 2

Folder 5

The Elmer Family, by M.C. Elmer, 1967

Box 2

Folder 6

Just Folks: Yarns and Legends from 1840 to 1940, by Manuel Conrad Elmer, 1970

Series III: Interviews with M.C. Elmer

Box 2

Folder 7

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 1

Box 2

Folder 8

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 2

Box 2

Folder 9

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 3

Box 2

Folder 10

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 4

Box 2

Folder 11

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 5

Box 2

Folder 12

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 6

Box 2

Folder 13

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1978, transcription, pt. 7

Box 2

Folder 14

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1979, transcription, pt. 1

Box 2

Folder 15

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1979, transcription, pt. 2

Box 2

Folder 16

Interview of M.C. Elmer by Carlos Brossard, David Fast and Glenna Mars, 1979, alternate transcription (poor copy, more complete than previous)

Series IV: Personal

Box 3

Folder 1

Records, personal finance, 1907-1912

Box 3

Folder 2

Contents of scrapbook, 1912-c.1918

Box 3

Folder 3

The Teaching of Sociology in High Schools, by Theron Freese, (Los Angeles: Southern California Sociological Society, 1917).

- Handwritten notes by M.C. Elmer

Box 3

Folder 4

E.W. Burgess memorabilia, handwritten notes by M.C. Elmer

Box 3

Folder 5

Newspaper clippings

Box 3

Folder 6

Correspondence

- G.H. Ashley
- J.P. Atreya
- Remy Bastien
- Emory S. Bogardus
- Martin Bulmer
- John R. Camp
- Thomas A. Christopher
- Harriott Dixon

- Ellsworth Faris
- Franklin H. Giddings
- J.L. Gillin
- James F. Gould
- Rudolph K. Haerle, Jr.
- Edith G. Hardwick
- Shelby M. Harrison
- Hornell Hart
- Edward C. Hayes
- Helen Hughes
- Henry Israel
- Edgar G. Johnsten
- David Kinley
- George R. Laird
- Robert P. Lamont
- Alfred McClung Lee
- Arthur G. Lindsay
- Angelo Patri
- George E. Perley
- Edward A. Ross
- Delores Saemisch
- A.L. Schilling
- Paul W. Shankweiler
- Elbridge Sibley
- Albion W. Small
- Elsa T. Stauffacher
- Frank Strong
- Jacob L. Susskind
- Jim Swanden
- Lisbet O. Temple
- George A. Theodorson
- A.J. Todd
- Ursila von Herauer
- Harold E. Wetzel
- Malcolm M. Willey
- Herrick B. Young
- Carle Clark Zimmerman

Box 3

Folder 7

Miscellaneous articles, publication announcements, reception invitation, note card

- University of Chicago Library, Department of Special Collections 9
- Manuel Conrad Elmer Papers