Guide to the Alfred E. Emerson Papers 1917-1976

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Descriptive Summary

Identifier ICU.SPCL.EMERSON

Title Emerson, Alfred Edwards. Papers

Date 1917-1976 (inclusive)

Size 7 linear feet (14 boxes)

Repository 1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637

Abstract The Alfred E. Emerson Papers consist of seven linear feet and cover the period 1917 to 1976. The papers contain correspondence, calendars, lecture notes, photographs, committee and foundation records, as well as articles and reprints. Alfred Emerson was a professor of zoology and a central figure in what became known as the "Chicago school" of ecology. He developed a model of biological evolution in which the social group, rather than the individual organism, constitutes a superorganism that is the primary unit of natural selection. Much of his extensive research involved the study of termite physiological morphology and behavior.

Information on Use

Citation
When quoting material from this collection the preferred citation is:

Emerson, Alfred Edwards. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

Alfred Edwards Emerson was born in Ithaca, New York on December 31, 1896. He was also educated in Ithaca, receiving his B.S. (1918), M.A. (1920), and Ph.D (1925) from Cornell University. His first teaching appointment was as associate professor of zoology at the University of Pittsburgh (1925-1929). In 1929 he accepted a position as associate professor of zoology at the University of Chicago where he remained until his retirement in 1962; he achieved the rank of full professor in 1934. During his tenure at the University of Chicago, Prof. Emerson also held visiting appointments at the University of California at Berkeley (summer 1949) and Michigan State University (spring 1960), where he was awarded an honorary Sc.D. Emerson had two children by his first wife, Winifred Jelliffe, who died in 1949. His second wife, Eleanor Fish, died in 1971.

At the University of Chicago, Emerson was a central figure in what became known as the "Chicago school" of ecology. Along with Warder Clyde Allee and Thomas Park, with whom
he co-authored the groundbreaking Principles of Animal Ecology (1949), Emerson developed a model of biological evolution in which the social group, rather than the individual organism, constitutes a superorganism that is the primary unit of natural selection. This model represents competition, both within and between species, as operative at multiple levels within a total ecological system, generating either cooperation or conflict.

Emerson's contribution to the "Chicago school" of ecology was based on his extensive research on termite physiological morphology and behavior. Using behavior traits, such as geographically specific nest building techniques, as indices of sub-speciation among termites, Emerson not only helped to elaborate termite taxonomy to a high degree of precision, but discovered evidence of a link between social and biological evolution. As a result of his research on termites, Emerson came to view reproductive behavior and division of labor as the fundamental group adaptations responsible for processes of social evolution, analogous in function to physiological adaptations in processes of biological evolution. Emerson further theorized that the social evolution of superorganisms tends toward greater overall efficiency and total ecological homeostasis or equilibrium.

Emerson also sought to interpret the implications of his work on the relationship between social and biological evolution for human social ethics. During World War II, Emerson spoke out against the misuse of Darwin's doctrine of the survival of the fittest as justification for nationalist aggression and totalitarian domination of the weak by the strong. He argued that cooperation more often than struggle is the key to survival and well-being among humans as well as other social animals. He did not idealize cooperation, however, as an end in itself, but formulated a relativistic natural ethics according to which the good and the right are those things and actions that function to promote "efficient homeostasis for all concerned."

In addition to teaching and prolific publication, Emerson conducted extensive field research abroad and participated in many scientific organizations. He traveled widely in search of termite populations for study, visiting Central and South America, numerous Caribbean and Pacific islands, and parts of Asia, Africa, and Australia. He was a central figure in the Ecological Society of American, serving as Secretary-Treasurer in 1931, editor of Ecology from 1932 to 1939, and president in 1941. Emerson was also a member of the Society for Systematic Zoology of which he was president in 1958, and a co-organizer of the Society for the Study of Evolution, which he served as president in 1960. Alfred E. Emerson died on October 3, 1976.

**Scope Note**

The Alfred E. Emerson Papers consist of seven linear feet and cover the period 1917-1976. The collection has been arranged into six series: Personal; Correspondence; Committees, Foundations, and Grants; Original Manuscripts by AEE; Published Articles and Reprints by AEE; Published Articles and Reprints by Others.

Series I contains of an assortment of personal items such as address books, calendars, lecture notes, and family photographs. It also includes a lengthy bibliography of Emerson’s work and memorials and obituaries at his death in 1976. Series II contains correspondence from 1930-1976. There are incoming and outgoing letters, including a considerable number to his
sister, Gertrude Emerson and her husband, Boshi Sen, who lived in India. A small group of letters of his father, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., and letters written during Emerson’s numerous trips around the world are included.

The third series contains a few files of material related to committees and foundations of which Emerson was a member. Among these are the files on a National Science Foundation grant Emerson received from 1965-1971 for the study of termites. Series IV and Series V contain works written by Alfred E. Emerson. The former includes original manuscripts and the latter, published articles and reprints. Series VI includes articles and reprints by other scholars and scientists.

**Related Resources**

The following related resources are located in the Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago. Dept. of Zoology. Records

Warder Clyde Allee Papers

Thomas Park Oral History

**Subject Headings**

- Emerson, Alfred Edwards, 1896-
- University of Chicago. Dept. of Zoology
- Zoology
- Ecology
- Termites

**INVENTORY**

**Series I: Personal**

Series I, Personal, contains memorials and obituaries of Alfred E. Emerson from 1976 and a bibliography of his works from 1917 to 1976. The series contains miscellaneous newspaper and magazine articles, address books, calendars and notebooks as well as a container of index cards containing addresses. This series also includes a small group of lecture notes, some dated as early as 1930 but most undated, and several family photographs.

**Box 1**

**Folder 1-2**

Memorials and Obituaries, 1976

**Box 1**

**Folder 3**

Bibliography of Alfred E. Emerson, 1917 - 1976

**Box 1**

**Folder 4**

Newspaper clippings and magazine articles
Investiture ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan New Delhi, 1976

Address books (2)


Notebook, 1960

Public lecture notes, 1930, n.d.

Family photographs, clippings, and letters

Series II: Correspondence

Series II contains correspondence from 1930 to 1976. The arrangement imposed by Alfred Emerson has been preserved. The correspondence has been grouped, first, by Incoming and Outgoing letters of Alfred E. Emerson. These letters range from 1961 to 1976 with a considerable amount of material to and from his sister, Gertrude (Mrs. Boshi Sen), who was living in India. The next group of correspondence includes the letters of his father, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr. The letters range from 1930 until his death in 1942. The correspondence to follow includes family and financial letters as well as those written during trips Emerson took "around the world" in 1960 and 1962-1963 and during a trip to Japan in 1964.

Correspondence, incoming, 1961

Correspondence, incoming, 1961 - 1962

Correspondence, incoming, 1963 - 1965

Correspondence, incoming, 1964 - 1975
Correspondence, incoming, 1966
Box 3
Folder 7
Correspondence, incoming, 1972 - 1976
Box 3
Folder 8
Correspondence, incoming, 1973 - 1974
Box 3
Folder 9
Correspondence, incoming, 1974 - 1975
Box 4
Folder 1
Correspondence, incoming, 1974-1975
Box 4
Folder 2-3
Correspondence, incoming, 1975
Box 4
Folder 4-6
Correspondence, incoming, 1975 - 1976
Box 4
Folder 7-8
Correspondence, incoming, 1976
Box 4
Folder 9-10
Correspondence, outgoing, to sister Gertrude and her husband Bishi Sen, 1961 - 1970
Box 5
Folder 1-3
Correspondence, outgoing, to sister Gertrude and her husband Bishi Sen, 1961 - 1970
Box 5
Folder 4-5
Correspondence, outgoing, to sister Gertrude, 1972
Box 5
Folder 6
Correspondence, outgoing, to sister Gertrude, 1973
Box 5
Folder 7
Correspondence, outgoing, to sister Gertrude, 1974
Box 6
Folder 1
Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1930-1940
Box 6
Folder 2
Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1931-1936
Box 6
Folder 3
Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1935-1943
Box 6
Folder 4-5
  Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1936
Box 6
Folder 6
  Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1937-1941
Box 6
Folder 7
  Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1938 - 1939
Box 6
Folder 8-9
  Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1938-1943
Box 6
Folder 10
  Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1940
Box 6
Folder 11
  Correspondence, Alfred E. Emerson, Sr., 1942
Box 7
Folder 1
  Correspondence, Emerson family, 1938 - 1941
Box 7
Folder 2
  Correspondence, Emerson family, 1938 - 1942
Box 7
Folder 3
  Correspondence, Emerson family, 1943 - 1964
Box 7
Folder 4
  Correspondence, Emerson family, 1968 - 1976
Box 7
Folder 5-9
  Correspondence, Emerson family (Eleanor's death), 1968 - 1972
Box 8
Folder 1-2
  Correspondence, Emerson family (AEE’s death), 1976
Box 8
Folder 3-4
  Correspondence, Emerson family (Medicare), 1965, 1972-1975
Box 8
Folder 5-6
  Correspondence, financial, 1965 - 1970
Box 8
Folder 7-8
  Correspondence, financial, 1970 - 1976
Box 9
Series III: Committees, Foundations, and Grants

Series III contains newsletters, brochures, and correspondence for several foundations and committees of which Alfred E. Emerson was a member. The Atlantica Foundation maintained and supported scientific and educational institutions including the Atlantica Ecological Research Station in Southern Rhodesia. Emerson was a member of the Belgian American Educational Foundation, an organization that supported technical schools, libraries, individuals, and scientific research. Emerson was also involved with the Committee on Systematics, Evolution, and Environmental Biology at Cornell University. Series III also contains scattered correspondence and articles from 1965 regarding the history of the Society for the Study of Evolution. In addition to papers showing foundation and committee involvement, this series includes a National Science Foundation grant (1965-1971) entitled Taxonomy, Geographical Distribution, Ecology, Social Behavior, and Evolution of Termites.

Box 10
Folder 1
Atlantica Foundation, 1962-1965

Box 10
Folder 2
Belgian American Educational Foundation, 1964-1966

Box 10
Folder 3-6
Committee on Systematics, Evolution, and Environmental Biology, 1964

Box 10
Folder 7
Society for the Study of Evolution documents from Ernst Mayr concerning founding

Box 10
Folder 8-10
National Science Foundation grant, 1962 - 1971

Box 11
Folder 1-4
National Science Foundation grant, 1962 - 1971

Series IV: Original Manuscripts by AEE
Series IV contains articles written by Alfred E. Emerson. These items are the original manuscripts and have been arranged alphabetically by the title of the article. This series also contains a small amount of correspondence regarding Emerson's writings.

Box 11
Folder 5
Article manuscripts and correspondences, 1942 - 1963
Box 11
Folder 6
"The Biological Basis of Social Cooperation"
Box 11
Folder 7-8
"The Biological Foundations of Ethics and Social Progress, "1951
Box 11
Folder 9-10
"Dynamic Homeostasis - A Unifying Principle in Organic, Social, and Ethical Evolution, "1954
Box 12
Folder 1
"Ecology and Evolution, "1941
Box 12
Folder 2
"Ecology, Evolution, and Society, "1942
Box 12
Folder 3
"Extrapolation from the Biological to the Social, "1945
Box 12
Folder 4
"Five New Genera of Termites from South America and Madagascar"
Box 12
Folder 5
"The Supraorganismic Aspects of the Society"
Box 12
Folder 6
"Taxonomic Categories and Population Genetics, "1944
Box 12
Folder 7
"Termite Studies in the Belgian Congo"
Box 12
Folder 8
"Why Termites?"

Series V: Published Articles and Reprints by AEE

Series V contains published articles and reprints of material written by Alfred E. Emerson. This material has been arranged chronologically according to the date the article was published.
Box 12
Folder 9
"Laboratory Experiments in General Zoology, "1928 - 1929 (with Robert T. Hance) - The University of Pittsburgh

Box 12
Folder 10
"Termitophile Distribution and Quantitative Characters as Indicators of Physiological Speciation in British Guiana Termites (Isoptera), " from Annals of The Entomological Society of America, Vol. 28, No. 3, Sept.1935

Box 12
Folder 11
"The Termite Problem, " reprinted from Natural History, Vol. 39, No. 4, 1937

Box 12
Folder 12
"Termite Nests - A Study of the Phylogeny of Behavior, " April, 1938

Box 12
Folder 13

Box 12
Folder 14
"Basic Comparisons of Human and Insect Societies, " Reprinted from Biological Symposia, Vol. VIII, 1942

Box 12
Folder 15

Box 12
Folder 16
"Ecology, Evolution, and Society, "1943

Box 12
Folder 17

Box 12
Folder 18
"Frank Eugene Lutz, " In Memoriam essay, reprinted from Science, Vol. 99, No. 2569, March 24, 1944

Box 13
Folder 1
Termitidae), " from Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Volume 83, Article 7, New York, 1945
"Address of the President - 'The Biological Basis of Social Cooperation, ' " 1946, from the journal "Illinois State Academy of Science, vol.39 - when AEE served as president, 1945 - 1946

Box 13
Folder 3
"Five New Genera of Termites from South America and Madagascar (Isoptera, Rhinotermitidae, Termiitidae), " from American Museum Novitates, no. 1444, January 4, 1950

Box 13
Folder 4
"The Supraorgasmic Aspects of the Society, "1952

Box 13
Folder 5
Termitidae), " Tervuren, 1952

Box 13
Folder 6
"The Biological Foundations of Ethics and Social Progress, "1953

Box 13
Folder 7
"The Impact of Darwin on Biology, "1958

Box 13
Folder 8
"Social Insects, " from Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1959

Box 13
Folder 9
"Feedback in Evolution, " article, reprinted from Science, Vol. 129, No.3363, June 12, 1959

Box 13
Folder 10
"Human Cultural Evolution and its Relation to Organic Evolution of Termites, "1960

Box 13
Folder 11
"New Genera of Termites Related to Subulitermes from the Oriental, Malagasy, and Australian Regions (Isoptera, Termitidae, Nasutitermitinae), " from American Museum Novitates, 1960

Box 13
Folder 12

Box 13
Folder 13
"Intellectual Cooperation among Natural Scientists, "1960

Box 13
Folder 14
"The Impact of the Theory of Evolution on Religion, "1960
Folder 15
"New Genera on the Subulitermes branch of the Nasutitermitinae from the Ethiopian Region (Isoptera, Termitidae), " from American Museum Novitates, No. 1987, March 1960

Box 13
Folder 16
"Six New Genera of Termitinae from the Belgian Congo (Isoptera, Termitidae), " from American Museum Novitates, No. 1988, March 1960

Box 13
Folder 17
"Taxonomy, " with Karl Patterson Schmidt, from Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1960

Box 13
Folder 18

Box 13
Folder 19

Box 13
Folder 20
"Vestigial Characters, Regressive Evolution, and Recapitulation Among Termites, "1962

Box 13
Folder 21

Box 13
Folder 22
"New Species of the Genus Glyptotermes Froggatt from the Papuan, Oriental, Ethiopian, and Neotropical Regions (Isoptera, Kalotermitidae), " from American museum Novitates, no. 2089, June 1962

Box 13
Folder 23
"Research Opportunities for American Biologists in Japan, " - A report on a visit to Japan, 1964 (with Lynn Throckmorton)

Box 13
Folder 24
"Interim Report on Accomplishments under NSF Grant G-5146, "1965

Box 13
Folder 25

Box 13
Folder 26
"Commentary on Theological Resources from the Biological Sciences, " reprinted from Zygon, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1966
Box 13
Folder 27

Box 13
Folder 28

Box 14
Folder 1
" Tertiary Fossil Species of the Rhinotermitidae (Isoptera), Phylogeny of Genera, and Reciprocal Phylogeny of Associated Flagellata (Protozoa) and the Staphylinidae (Coleoptera), " from the Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Volume 146, Article 3, New York, 1971

Box 14
Folder 2
"Some Biological Antecedents of Human Purpose, " from Zygon, vol. 8, nos. 3-4, Sept. - Dec.1973

Box 14
Folder 3
"Evolutionary Aspects of Freedom, Death, and Dignity, " (with Ralph Burhoe), from Zygon, vol. 9, no. 2, June 1974

Series VI: Published Articles and Reprints by Others

Series VI contains articles that were written by others. These articles have been arranged chronologically according to the date they were published.

Box 14
Folder 4
"Five Years of Farm and Home Development in Wisconsin, "June 1961

Box 14
Folder 5
Hermann J. Müller reprints, 1963-1964

Box 14
Folder 6
"Three New Species of Termites from Israel (Termitidae Amitermitinae), " from Israel Journal of Zoology, Vol. 13, 1964

Box 14
Folder 7
"Sociologia Ruralis, " Vol. 5, No. 4, 1965

Box 14
Folder 8
"Aspirations, Work Roles, and Decision Making Patterns, "April 1966

Box 14
Folder 9
"International Wives, "April 1966

Box 14
Folder 10
  Behavioral Science, Volume 21, Number 5, Sept.1976
Box 14
Folder 11