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Descriptive Summary

Identifier
ICU.SPCL.OGBURN

Title
Ogburn, William Fielding. Papers

Date
1908-1960

Size
23.5 linear feet (47 boxes)

Repository
Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library
1100 East 57th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Abstract
William F. Ogburn, sociologist. Collection contains correspondence, minutes, memoranda, reports, typescripts and off-prints of articles, lectures, clippings, and personal journals. Papers document Ogburn’s participation in government projects such as the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends, the National Resources Committee, and the Census Advisory Committee; service on committees of the Social Science Research Council and at the University of Chicago; and research and writing for scholarly and popular publications. Includes material relating to publications such as Recent Social Trends in the United States (1933) and Technological Trends and National Policy, the administration of the 1940 decennial census, and the graduate program in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago.

Acknowledgments

Information on Use

Access
No restrictions.

Citation
When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Ogburn, William Fielding. Papers, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note
William Fielding Ogburn, sociologist, was born June 29, 1886 in Butler, Georgia. He received a Bachelor’s degree from Mercer College in 1905, and taught school for several years before entering Columbia University in 1908. At Columbia he received an A.M. degree in 1909 and a Ph.D. in 1912. Upon graduation he was appointed professor of sociology and economics at the newly organized Reed College in Portland, Oregon, where he remained for five years. He taught for a year at the University of Washington, and worked for the National War Labor Board and
the Bureau of Labor Statistics during World War I. In 1919 he returned to Columbia and served as Professor of Sociology until 1927, when he moved to the University of Chicago. He was named Sewell L. Avery Distinguished Service Professor of Sociology in 1933. After retiring in 1951, he traveled extensively in many parts of the world, and took visiting professorships at the universities of Delhi and Calcutta, at Nuffield College, Oxford, and at Florida State University. Ogburn married Rubyn Reynolds in 1910 and they had two children, Howard Reynolds and William Fielding, Jr. He died April 27, 1959.

Ogburn was brought to the University of Chicago because of his background in statistics and quantitative methods. At Columbia his teachers included Franklin H. Giddings in sociology, Edward L. Thorndike in education, Henry L. Moore in economics, and Franz Boas in anthropology. Although his orientation was very different from the "Chicago school" sociologists who relied heavily on personal observation and individual life histories, he was appointed by the Department of Sociology to fill a perceived gap in the Chicago curriculum and to assure that the department maintained its national standing. Some lively controversies ensued between Ogburn, Thomas C. McCormick, and Samuel Stouffer with proponents of the case history method including Robert Park, Herbert Blumer, and Louis Wirth. The case method was not abandoned, but Ogburn’s influence was indisputable. Ernest Burgess for one readily acknowledged the value of statistical data, although he continued to use life histories in his own research. The Social Science Research Building, completed in 1929, attested symbolically and functionally to the impetus Ogburn gave by bringing the various disciplines of the social sciences together in one building, and providing laboratory space suitable to the needs of statistical and demographic research.

As a teacher, Ogburn is remembered for his insistence on rigorous standards of measurement and the need for verifiable knowledge. In his own writings, however, he did not concern himself primarily with methodological techniques, nor did he focus his interest on a particular subject. Ogburn made important contributions to the literature on social reform legislation, voting behavior, consumer spending, marriage and the family, demography, and social effects of business fluctuations. Much of Ogburn’s work was concerned with social change, especially with the idea of "cultural lag," the theory that some parts of society adjust to changes slower than others which causes disequilibria. For the 20th century he saw inventions and technology as a major force that produced changes in economic organization, family and government structures, and eventually in people’s social philosophy.

Among Ogburn’s most notable books are Social Change with Respect to Culture and Original Nature (1922); Recent Social Trends in the United States (1933), which Ogburn edited as director of the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends commissioned by Herbert Hoover in 1929; Sociology (with M. F. Nimkoff, 1940), an introductory textbook used by a generation of students; The Social Effects of Aviation (1946); and Technology and International Relations (ed. 1949).

In some ways Ogburn had a stronger reputation nationally than he did in his own department in Chicago. His connection with Recent Social Trends, which attempted to bring together a body of empirical data from different disciplines concerning national life, made him a knowledgeable spokesman on many issues affecting social policy and planning. He believed that important
social trends were persistent and long-term in nature, and therefore thought it possible to make projections with a fair degree of accuracy. Known for his scientific approach, he also detested obscure terminology, and was able to express ideas clearly and directly for non-technical audiences. He was widely quoted in newspapers, and wrote many articles for the New York Times Magazine and other popular periodicals, with titles like "What's Ahead in the Home," "Our Future Cities," and "Machines and Tomorrow's World."

Ogburn participated on a number of government committees that were established to review programs and make policy recommendations. In addition to the President's Research Committee on Social Trends, they included the Consumers Advisory Board, the National Resources Committee, the Resettlement Administration, and the Census Advisory Committee. He also served terms as president of the American Sociology Society and the American Statistical Association, as vice president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, as chairman of the Social Science Research Council, and was elected the first president of the Society for the History of Technology shortly before his death. He disliked meetings and criticized colleagues who built up their reputations by collecting committee assignments, perhaps because he spent so much of his own time occupied in such duties.

In spite of his distaste for "theory" and his constant demands for quantifiable social knowledge, Ogburn had a philosophical bent of mind that displayed itself in his pursuit of the "big ideas" and in attempts to synthesize his findings into broad concepts. He also developed an interest in psychoanalysis and enjoyed hobbies such as tennis, photography, and bird watching. One of his last projects was to track down the source of stories of children supposedly raised by wolves in India.

**Scope Note**

The papers of William Fielding Ogburn consist of 23.5 linear feet of correspondence, minutes, notes, typescripts and off-prints of articles, clippings, and journals. The papers document Ogburn’s participation in government projects such as the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends, the National Resources Committee, and the Census Advisory Committee, service on committees of the Social Science Research Council and at the University of Chicago, and research and writing for scholarly and popular publications.

The William F. Ogburn Papers do not give a complete picture of Ogburn’s life or scholarly work. Files on certain projects, such as the President’s Research Committee on Social Trends, appear to be virtually complete. Documentation on some aspects of his career is fragmentary, or in some cases missing from the papers given to the library. Still, the papers offer important insights into his activities and research, and preserve an important segment of the history of sociology at the University of Chicago and in the United States.

The collection is divided into eight series:

I. PRESIDENT’S RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL TRENDS

II. NATIONAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
III. SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

IV. CENSUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

V. ACADEMIC MATERIALS

VI. LECTURES, ADDRESSES, AND PUBLICATIONS

VII. PUBLICITY

VIII. PERSONAL JOURNALS

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

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

Additional correspondence and papers relating to William F. Ogburn can be found in the following collections: Department of Sociology Interviews with Graduate Students; Department of Sociology Faculty Meeting Minutes 1926-1939; Division of Social Sciences Minutes 1939-1955; Division of Social Sciences Record Books 1933-1953; Social Science Research Committee Records; Society for Social Research Records; Office of the Vice-President Records; the Presidents’ Papers; and papers of William Benton, Ernest W. Burgess, Philip M. Hauser, Robert M. Hutchins, William T. Hutchinson, Charles H. Judd, Frank H. Knight, Jr., Charles E. Merriam, John U. Nef, Jr., Robert Redfield, Beardsley Ruml, Louis Wirth, Quincy Wright, and Florian Znaniecki. An interview with Ogburn is in the Audio Collection.

Subject Headings

• Ogburn, William Fielding, 1886-1959.
• Social Science Research Council (U.S.)
• United States. National Resources Planning Board. Science Committee.
• United States. President’s Research Committee on Social Trends.
• University of Chicago. Dept. of Sociology.
• Census.
• Statisticians.
• Sociologists.

INVENTORY

Series I: President’s Research Committee on Social Trends

This series contains files Ogburn kept as director of the Committee from 1929 to 1934. They document the creation of the committee, selection of staff, organizing of the various research projects, and editing and compiling of the final report, Recent Social Trends in the United States (1933).
The series is divided into three parts. The first includes minutes and transcripts of committee meetings, budget correspondence, and financial records. The second contains general correspondence concerning committee members and staff, including Shelby M. Harrison, E. E. Hunt, Charles E. Merriam, Wesley C. Mitchell, and Howard W. Odum; foundations and government agencies engaged in related projects; publication arrangements for the report; and answers to inquiries regarding the work of the committee. Filed after this alphabetical sequence are outlines, drafts, and quarterly progress reports of the chapters of the report. The third section contains correspondence with authors of individual chapters.

Because research was carried on by professors scattered across the country, very little of the original data is contained within this collection. Some of the data files, as well as methodological summaries of how data was obtained and analyzed, were deposited in the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress also received eight large scrapbooks of clippings concerning the report and research of the Committee.

**Subseries 1: Meeting Minutes and Budget**

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"The Measure of a Changing Nation," work memorandum, 1932

Series II: National Resources Committee

The materials in this series document Ogburn’s work on the Science Committee of the National Resources Committee (renamed the National Resources Planning Board in 1939), from 1935 to about 1940. The Science Committee was organized in 1935 as one of a number of committees made up of experts from technical fields that helped plan and coordinate public works projects. Ogburn was one of many who attended as a representative of the Social Science Research Council, while the National Academy of Sciences and the American Council on Education selected many other members. The Science Committee published a series of reports which surveyed the scientific research carried on within federal bureaus and made recommendations on how data could be gathered more efficiently and accurately, how it could be put to better use in forming long-range plans and national policy, and how to coordinate federal research projects with similar work being done by universities and private institutions. The reports Ogburn helped produce included National Population Problems, Relations of Government to Scientific Research, Transportation and National Policy, and Technological Trends and National Policy.

The series begins with minutes and general memoranda of the Science Committee, followed by materials for specific subcommittees, including minutes, memoranda, correspondence, and drafts of reports. The major part of the series concerns the editing and publishing of Technological Trends and National Policy, and includes a file of general correspondence, as well as folders for each chapter which contain drafts, correspondence with the individual authors, and critiques from readers.

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<td>&quot;Resistance to the Adoption of Technological Innovations&quot; (Part I, correspondence with American Telephone and Telegraph</td>
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<td>Folder 4</td>
<td>&quot;Unemployment and Increasing Productivity&quot; (Part I, Section 5), by David Weintraub</td>
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<td>&quot;The Relation of Science to Technological Trends&quot; (Part II, Section 1), by John C. Merriam</td>
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<td>&quot;Agriculture&quot; (Part III, Section 1), by S. H. McCrory and R. F. Hendrickson</td>
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<td>&quot;The Mineral Industries&quot; (Part III, Section 2), by F. G. Tryon, T. T. Read, K. C. Heald, G. S. Rice, and Oliver Bowles</td>
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Series III: Social Science Research Council

This series contains materials concerning Ogburn's association with the Social Science Research Council, mainly during the 1930s and early 1940s. Ogburn maintained close relations with the SSRC over most of his career, serving as chairman from 1933 to 1936, as a member of a number of committees, and consulting on particular matters where his expertise was needed. The papers include reports and recommendations concerning some of the research projects carried on under the auspices of the SSRC as well as organizational and policy matters of the Council itself.

The series is divided into three sections - minutes of the Council, 1937-1940, and other general records; correspondence, mainly with SSRC staff and members, arranged alphabetically; and committee reports, agendas, minutes, and related correspondence, arranged by committee title. Some of the material is procedural or fragmentary, but there are substantial files for the Committee on Problems and Policy, the Southern Regional Committee, the Committee on Employment, and the Committee on Social Aspects of Atomic Energy.

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Series IV: Census Advisory Committee

Series IV contains correspondence, reports, memoranda, and meeting minutes of the Census Advisory Committee from 1937 to 1947. Committee members were chosen by the American Statistical Association and made recommendations to the Bureau of the Census, in order to assure high scientific standards for the statistics that were collected, and that types of data of interest to a wide range of users would be collected. Ogburn served as chairman of the committee beginning in 1941. The records concern the administration of the 1940 decennial census as well as other ongoing projects conducted by the Bureau. Subjects discussed by the Committee include plans and preparations for the census, what questions to include, how to design the schedules, and potential research uses for census data. Much of the correspondence is with William L. Austin and James C. Capt, directors of the Bureau of the Census during the period. Additional correspondence concerning the census from earlier years can be found in Series III.

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Series V: Academic Materials

Series V comprises various files relating to Ogburn’s career at the University of Chicago. Although mostly administrative in nature, the records in this series provide information on research projects that Ogburn carried out or directed, as well as other duties he performed on campus. The series is divided into several categories, including minutes of University ruling bodies (the University Senate, the Division of Social Sciences, and the Department of Sociology); materials concerning the graduate program in sociology, including program requirements, course outlines, and student recommendations; correspondence, mainly with University colleagues and administrators; and committees, which include University bodies such as the Senate Committee on Research, the Social Science Research Committee, and the Committee on Symbolism for the New Social Science Research Building, and other groups such as the Harris Foundation Committee, Project RAND, the Committee for Research in Problems of Sex of the National Research Council, and the Committee for the Study of Personality.

Two folders in the series date from Ogburn’s last year at Columbia University; they contain correspondence concerning the publication of The Social Sciences and Their Interrelations, which Ogburn co-edited with Alexander Goldenweiser.
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Series VI: Lectures, Addresses and Publications
Ogburn’s published and unpublished writings have been collected in this series. The first part of the series consists of lectures and public addresses, notes, correspondence, drafts of published writings, unpublished pieces, and a number of titled but otherwise unidentified typescripts. Materials are arranged under subject headings that represent some of Ogburn’s ongoing research interests as well as particular projects in various stages of completion. Following this group are typescripts and offprints of published articles by Ogburn, listed chronologically by title. They include research monographs and reports, articles for popular magazines and trade journals, and book reviews, dating from 1915 to 1960.

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"On the Trail of the Wolf-Children," 1959

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Series VII: Publicity

This series contains news clippings and other materials organized topically under headings used by Ogburn. Included are newspaper and magazine reports of Ogburn’s research, interviews and public statements concerning social trends and national problems, notices of lectures and addresses, reviews of some of Ogburn’s books and articles, and miscellaneous biographical items. Some clippings date as far back as 1908, announcing Ogburn’s acceptance at graduate school at Columbia University, his marriage, and hiring at Reed College. Among the topics in the series are the controversies engendered by a pamphlet written by Ogburn, "You and Machines," which was banned by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and Ogburn’s clash with Mary Rumsey while on the Consumers Advisory Board of the National Recovery Administration in 1933.

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Series VIII: Personal Journals

The last series contains a transcript of journals that Ogburn kept from 1942 until a few days before his death in 1959. Among the subjects of his reflections and ruminations are friends and colleagues, social gatherings, current events, travels, and bird watching. In a foreword, Ogburn wrote that the journals expressed traits of contemplation, love of ideas, curiosity, love of nature, and an aesthetic appreciation. Many of the entries indicate this philosophical side of his character, while others give frank critiques of the academic profession and political affairs. Ogburn hoped that his journals would show that "a life unadventurous in action need not be a dull one, if we make a hobby of reflecting on what we do and on what we observe." Included at the beginning of the series is an account of a sociological field trip Ogburn made to several Indian villages in Arizona in 1917.

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Tour of Indian villages in Arizona, 1917

Box 46
Folder 2
Journal 1, June 22, 1942 to November 29, 1946

Box 46
Folder 3
Journal 2, May 26, 1947 to January 17, 1949

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Folder 4
Journal 2 1/2, January 17, 1949 to May 19, 1951

Box 47
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Box 47
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Box 47
Folder 3
Journal 5, July 28, 1955 to February 12, 1957

Box 47
Folder 4
February 12, 1957 to August 18, 1957

Box 47
Folder 5
October 17, 1957 to April 23, 1959