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# Guide to the Robert S. Platt Papers 1898-1980



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## **Descriptive Summary**

<b>Identifier</b>	ICU.SPCL.PLATT
<b>Title</b>	Platt, Robert S.. Papers
<b>Date</b>	1898-1980
<b>Size</b>	18.75 linear feet (38 boxes)
<b>Repository</b>	Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
<b>Abstract</b>	Contains correspondence, manuscripts, student notes, lectures, field notes, teaching materials, letters of recommendation, maps, biographical material, postcards, offprints, book reviews, photographs, slides, and a motion picture film. Includes notes taken while Platt was a graduate student in the Department of Geography at the University of Chicago, notes and research papers from the Department's field courses in the upper Great Lakes region, correspondence relating to professional organizations such as the Association of American Geographers and the Library of Congress where Platt was Chief of the Division of Maps. Also includes editorial correspondence of the <i>Annals of the Association of American Geographers</i> (1961-1963).

## **Acknowledgments**

### **Information on Use**

#### **Access**

Access to student letters of recommendation in Series XI is restricted until 2037. The remainder of the collection is open for research.

#### **Citation**

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

#### **Biographical Note**

Robert Swanton Platt (1891-1964) was born in Columbus, Ohio, studied at St. George's School and the Hotchkiss School, and graduated from Yale in 1914. After teaching for a year at Yale in China at Changsha, he returned to the United States to enter the Department of Geography of the University of Chicago in 1915. Despite the interruption of military service during World War I, he completed his Ph.D. and was appointed an instructor in the Department in 1920. For the next thirty-seven years, Platt remained at the University of Chicago as assistant

professor (1921-1927), associate professor (1927-1939), professor (1939-1957), and chairman (1949-1957) of the Department of Geography.

The central concern of Platt's work as a geographer was the intensive field study of small geographical areas that could provide data to support broader theoretical generalizations on the interrelation of landforms and human occupancy. Beginning in 1920 and continuing for more than thirty years, Platt led graduate students in his field courses on annual summer trips to Ellison Bay, Wisconsin, the upper Great Lakes region, and along the U.S.-Canadian border from Manitoba to Quebec. Conclusions drawn from these studies were distilled for presentation at the annual meetings of the Association of American Geographers and subsequently published as a regular series of articles in professional journals.

Platt followed a similar procedure in surveying Central and South American geography. On seven trips to the Caribbean and Latin America between 1922 and 1941 (each lasting from two to six months), Platt and his wife, Harriet, alternated lengthy traverses of continental regions with careful micro-studies of specific villages and farms. These studies, which eventually numbered nearly one hundred, formed the basis for Platt's monographic text, *Latin America: Countrysides and United Regions* (1942). In later years, Platt utilized the field methods developed in the 1920's and 1930's to examine a variety of other geographic settings: Tierra del Fuego (1948); the Dutch-German border (1952-1954); the Saarland (1958-1959); volcanic activity in Mexico, Hawaii, and Italy (1958-1960); and Pakistan (1961). In each of these projects, as in the edited collection of essays published as *Field Study in American Geography* (1958), Platt stressed the spatial complexity of human social and cultural patterns and warned against the conceptual dangers of environmental determinism.

While fieldwork formed the foundation of his reputation, Platt was equally well known for his interest in general geographical theory and the development of geography as a professional discipline. From 1923 to 1940, he was a regular participant in the spring field conference of American geographers first organized by Wellington Jones and Carl Sauer. He served the Association of American Geographers for many years as its treasurer (1929-1934), vice-president (1943), president (1945), and as editor of the *Annals of the A.A.G.* from 1961 to 1964. Outside the discipline, Platt advanced the interests of professional geography as vice-chairman of the Division of Geology and Geography of the National Research Council (1937-1939); as adviser to the Geographer of the U.S. State Department (1943); and most notably as chief of the Division of Maps at the Library of Congress (1944-1945) during Federal wartime mobilization. Even after his retirement in 1957, Platt's interest in professionalism and methodology was reflected in his organization of the Pakistan Field Geographers while a Fulbright Scholar in 1962 and his course on *Geographic Thought* given as a visiting professor at Indiana University in 1963.

Platt's skill as a teacher and his generous encouragement of the work of others contributed to the high regard in which he was held by both students and colleagues. Together with Harriet, he opened his home at 10820 S. Drew to successive generations of foreign and American students in geography and other fields, many of who lived with the Platts for more than a year and came to style themselves "Plattaches." The Platt home was also the scene of frequent gatherings of Department of Geography faculty, staff, students, and alumni, and of meetings

with geographers from other universities. Following Platt's death in 1964, several of these friends and colleagues joined in erecting a monument in his memory in Ellison Bay, Wisconsin, on the site of his earliest contributions to field methodology and in tribute to the teacher and scholar who represented "in remarkable degree," as Richard Hartshorne has noted, "the development of American geography during his lifetime."

### **Scope Note**

The Robert S. Platt papers contain student notes, professional correspondence, manuscripts, off-prints, lectures, field notes, teaching materials, postcards, photographs, and movie film; notes and research papers from his Department of Geography field courses in the upper Great Lakes region; and editorial correspondence of the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* from 1961 to 1963.

#### Series I. BIOGRAPHICAL

This series contains a miscellaneous group of materials related to Platt's life, as well as a series of tributes offered by his students and colleagues. Of particular interest are folders devoted to Platt's retirement and the critical appraisals of his career by William Pattison, Richard Hartshorne, and Richard S. Thoman.

#### Series II. EARLY NOTES AND PAPERS

Except for items in the first folder, this series of student notes and papers represents Platt's work as a graduate student in the Department of Geography from 1915 to 1920. The lectures by Barrows, Tower, and Cowles preserved in Platt's notes are significant for the information they provide on the intellectual climate of the Department during its early years. That these teachers (and others including Rollin D. Salisbury and Albion Small) were having an important effect on Platt's thinking is apparent from a group of undated geographical notes, evidently written ca. 1916; in these notes, Platt compares definitions of geography offered in Departmental courses with those found in standard dictionaries, and counter-poses his own reflections on the nature of the discipline.

#### Series III. PROFESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

Platt's professional correspondence includes a number of important exchanges with such colleagues as Harlan H. Barrows, Richard Hartshorne, Wellington D. Jones, and Derwent Whittlesey. In the case of Hartshorne, Platt considered certain letters to be of such theoretical consequence that they were separated for use in teaching his course on *Geographic Thought* at Indiana University in 1963. The professional correspondence also contains letters related to Platt's work with the Association of American Geographers, the Library of Congress, the National Research Council, and the U.S. State Department and War Department.

#### Series IV. WRITINGS

The writings in this series have been divided into three sub-series: Books and Articles and Addresses and Lectures arranged alphabetically by title, followed by Book Reviews organized alphabetically by the last name of the author or editor. Individual folders in the Books and Articles section typically contain manuscripts and offprints, but they may also include outlines and correspondence or notes by Platt such as those found on the manuscript chapters of *American Geography: Inventory and Prospect*. Several autobiographical writings containing Platt's comments on his career and the development of American geography should also be noted: "Being a Geographer"; "My Unfinishing School" and "My Photogenic Finish;" "Around the World in 47 Years"; "Glimpses of the Decades"; and "A Half-Century of Geography and Geographers."

#### Series V. FIELD NOTES

Notes in this series record Platt's field observations throughout his career, from a trip to the Fox Valley as a graduate student to travels in Spain and Morocco in the year before his death. The notes have been organized into five general geographical categories (United States and Canada; Bermuda; Latin America and Caribbean; and Europe and North America), and within each category have been arranged chronologically by year. The notes on Bermuda collected in the spring and fall of 1919 served as the basis for his 1920 Ph.D. dissertation, "Resources and Economic Interests of the Bermudas."

#### Series VI. DEPARTMENTAL AND TEACHING MATERIALS

Apart from a small group of administrative materials, this series is devoted largely to notes and correspondence related to regular geography courses taught by Platt from 1920 to 1963. Included are records of his earliest teaching experiences at Changsha at Yale in China and in the U.S. Army during World War I, and a group of materials from his courses on Geographic Thought and Methodology given at the University of Chicago and Indiana University late in his life.

Letters of recommendation in this series are restricted until 2035.

#### Series VII. GREAT LAKES FIELD COURSES

Material in this series records the work of Platt and his students in the field from 1920 to 1951. Within the group of folders devoted to each year's trip, Platt's correspondence and notes on travel arrangements and field instructions are followed by printed maps indicating the general area being surveyed, manuscript reports and maps compiled by students in the field, and final research papers prepared by students for course credit.

#### Series VIII. ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF GEOGRAPHERS

This series contains the editorial files accumulated by Platt during his tenure as editor of the *Annals of the A.A.G.* (1961-1964). General editorial correspondence is followed by letters and referees' reports on individual published articles arranged by issue.

All records in this series are restricted until 2014 and may be consulted only upon application to the University Archivist.

#### Series IX. POSTCARDS

Platt was an avid collector of postcards with geographical views, particularly in the early years of his career. Besides serving as colorful souvenirs of his travels, postcards also met research needs: those depicting the landforms, flora, and industries of Bermuda, for example, proved useful in the writing of his dissertation.

#### Series X. PHOTOGRAPHS

Rooted in his early amateur interest in picture taking, Platt's commitment to photography as a research tool was a hallmark of his geographic field technique. Although many of the photographs in this series were intended to appear as illustrations in his published articles, others were taken to serve as permanent records of significant events in his life. Platt recorded student excursions with Rollin Salisbury; his earliest fieldwork at Ellison Bay; the first of the American geographers' spring field conferences; and numerous incidents during annual trips to the upper Great Lakes region. Platt's collection of photographs is also an important source of visual information on the Department of Geography and the varied events at his home in Morgan Park.

#### Series XI. RESTRICTED

This series contains student evaluative material restricted until 2037.

### **Related Resources**

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

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

Further information on Robert S. Platt and the Department of Geography can be found in the Presidents' Papers; the papers of Rollin D. Salisbury and Harlan H. Barrows; the Archival General and Biographical Files; the Goode Base Map collection; the Department of Geography records; and the records of the Department of Geography 75th Anniversary Exhibit.

### **Subject Headings**

- Platt, Robert S. (Robert Swanton), 1891-
- Barrows, Harlan H. (Harlan Harland), b. 1877
- University of Chicago. Dept. of Geography
- Association of American Geographers
- Library of Congress. Map Division
- Great Lakes
- Geographers

## INVENTORY

### Series I: Biographical

#### Box 1

##### Folder 1

Correspondence with parents, 1918-1924

#### Box 1

##### Folder 2

Amateur photographic contest and published photographs, 1924, 1929

#### Box 1

##### Folder 3

Curriculum vitae and miscellaneous biographical information, 1933-1963

#### Box 1

##### Folder 4

Harriet Shanks Platt, lecture prospectus, undated

#### Box 1

##### Folder 5

Foreign geographic society memberships, 1948-1960

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##### Folder 6

"Plattweg" reunion, 1957

#### Box 1

##### Folder 7

Book of tributes from colleagues and former students, 1957

#### Box 1

##### Folder 8

Helen Culver Gold Medal presentation, Geographic Society of Chicago, 1959

#### Box 1

##### Folder 9

Anonymous biographical introduction of RSP, ca. 1959

#### Box 1

##### Folder 10

"Robert S. Platt: An Appreciation," eulogy by Marvin W. Mikesell, Rockefeller Chapel, March 17, 1964

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##### Folder 11

Letters of condolence, 1964

#### Box 1

##### Folder 12

Descriptions of 10820 S. Drew St. Property (Platt residence), 1965; proposal for housing Amitree organization in residence, 1974; proposal for Platt monument on Niagara escarpment, Ellison Bay, Wisconsin, undated

#### Box 1

##### Folder 13

William Pattison, "An Exercise in the Sociology of Knowledge," 1950

#### Box 1



**Folder 14**

Richard Hartshorne, "Robert S. Platt, 1891-1964," 1964

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**Folder 15**

Richard S. Thoman, "Robert Swanton Platt, 1891-1964," 1980

**Series II: Student Notes and Papers**

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**Folder 16**

Miscellaneous notes, Yale University, 1911-1912

**Box 1**

**Folder 17**

University of Chicago transcript, 1915-1920

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**Folder 18**

Harlan H. Barrows, The Influence of Geography on American History (Geography 10),  
Autumn 1915

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Harlan H. Barrows, The Influence of Geography on American History (Geography 10),  
Autumn 1915

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Harlan H. Barrows, The Influence of Geography on American History (Geography 10),  
Autumn 1915

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**Folder 2**

Harlan H. Barrows, Conservation of Natural Resources (Geography 12), Winter 1916

**Box 2**

**Folder 3**

Harlan H. Barrows, Conservation of Natural Resources (Geography 12), Winter 1916

**Box 2**

**Folder 4**

Harlan H. Barrows, Geographical Influences on the History of the Western United States  
(Geography 36), Autumn 1916

**Box 2**

**Folder 5**

Harlan H. Barrows, Geography of Illinois (Geography 38), Winter 1917

**Box 2**

**Folder 6**

Walter S. Tower, Geography of South America (Geography 21), Winter 1917

**Box 2**

**Folder 7**

Walter S. Tower, Geography of South America (Geography 21), Winter 1917

**Box 2**

**Folder 8**

Walter S. Tower, Geography of South America (Geography 21), Winter 1917

**Box 3**

**Folder 1**

Henry C. Cowles, Physiographic Ecology (Botany 34), Spring 1919

**Box 3**

**Folder 2**

Notes on the nature of geography, undated

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**Folder 3**

Miscellaneous student notes, undated

**Series III: Professional Correspondence**

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A, general

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American Geographical Society (includes John K. Wright)

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Association of American Geographers, general

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Association of American Geographers, general, annual meetings

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Association of American Geographers, general, Constitutional Committee

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Hartshorne, Richard, correspondence used in teaching Geography 520, Indiana University, February 1963

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I, general

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L, general

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Library of Congress, general

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Library of Congress, Division of Maps

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Longmans, Green and Co.

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M, general

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National Research Council, Division of Geology and Geography

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U.S. State Department, general (includes Cordell Hull)

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U.S. State Department, general (includes Cordell Hull), Office of the Geographer

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Y-Z, general

**Series IV: Writings**

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**Folder 1**

Bibliographies of published works by RSP

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**Folder 2**

"An Air Traverse of Central America," 1934

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**Folder 3**

"America, War, and Waves of the Future: An Analysis of National Agreement and Disagreement," 1941

**Box 7**

**Folder 4**

American Geography: and Prospect, James, Jones, and Wright, eds. (1954)

**Box 7**

**Folder 5**

"Anomalous Panama," 1929

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**Folder 6**

"Being a Geographer," 1947

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**Folder 7**

"Brazilian Capitals and Frontiers," Parts I and II, 1954-1955

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**Folder 8**

"Can the Americas Be United for Defense?" 1940

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**Folder 9**

"Central American Railways and the Pan-American Route," 1926

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**Folder 10**

"A Classification of Manufactures, Exemplified by Porto Rican Industries," 1927

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**Folder 11**

"Coffee Plantations of Brazil: A Comparison of Occupance Patterns in Established and Frontier Areas," 1935

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"Critical Spots in Latin America," undated

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"A Cross Section of Central America in Costa Rica," 1923

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"Cuba, Haiti and Santo Domingo," 1923

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**Folder 15**

"A Detail of Regional Geography: Ellison Bay Community as an Industrial Organism," 1928

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"Determinism in Geography," 1948

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**Folder 17**

"Development and Problems of Land Transport in Latin America," 1940

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"Do We Lack Proper Field Methods and Mapping Techniques?" 1955

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"Environmentalism versus Geography," 1948

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"Exploration and Geography," 1925

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"Field Approach to Regions," 1935

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Field Study in American Geography: The Development of Theory and Method Exemplified by Selections (1959)

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**Folder 1**

"Field Study of Republic, Michigan: A Community in the Marquette Iron Range," 1928

**Box 8**

**Folder 2**

A Geographical Study of the Dutch-German Border (1958), manuscript

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**Folder 3**

A Geographical Study of the Dutch-German Border (1958), manuscript, maps

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**Folder 4**

A Geographical Study of the Dutch-German Border (1958), manuscript, published copy

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**Folder 5**

"Geography of a Sugar District: Mariel, Cuba," 1929

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Handbook of Latin American Studies (1938, 1939)

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**Folder 7**

"Harlan H. Barrows," 1961

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"The Influence of Volcanoes on People: A Study of Human Response to Natural Environment," 1959

**Box 8**

**Folder 9**

Writings

- "Items in the Chilean Pattern of Occupance," 1934
- "Items in the Haitian Pattern of Occupance," undated abstract
- "Items in the Regional Geography of Panama: With Some Comments on Contemporary Geographic Method," 1938

**Box 8**

**Folder 10**

Latin America: Country sides and United Regions (1942), outline and correspondence

**Box 8**

**Folder 11**

Latin America: Country sides and United Regions (1942), outline and correspondence, publicity and reviews

**Box 8**

**Folder 12**

"Latin America in World Affairs," 1941

**Box 8**

**Folder 13**

"MRA: Help or Hindrance in Our World?" 1955

**Box 8**

**Folder 14**

"Magdalena Atlipac: A Study in Terrene Occupancy in Mexico," 1933

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**Folder 15**

"Memorandum on 'Large Scale Regional Development' Address by E.S. Draper," undated

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**Folder 16**

"Mining Patterns of Occupance in Five South American Districts," 1933

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**Folder 1**

"My Unfinishing School: An Unsuccess Story," 1959, and "My Photogenic Finish: A Success Story," 1960

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**Folder 2**

Writings

- "A New Capital for Brazil?" 1952
- "Nicaragua: Revolution and Intervention," 1927
- "A Note by the President," 1946
- "A Note on Rollin D. Salisbury," 1957
- "Notes (Written After Talking with Mr. Harrison, Listening to Mr. Hutchins at the Trustees Dinner, and Reading Mr. Colwell's Approach to the Teachings of Jesus)," 1950

**Box 9**

**Folder 3**

Palestine, undated

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**Folder 4**

"Pattern of Land Occupancy in the Mexican Laguna District," 1930

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"Pattern of Occupance in the Maracaibo Basin," 1934

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"Peripheral Items in the Argentine Pattern of Terrene Occupancy," 1931

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"Pirovano: Items in the Argentine Pattern of Terrene Occupance," 1931

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Writings

- "Political Geography," 1950
- "Porto Rico, Jamaica, and Martinique," 1923

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"Problems of Our Time," 1945

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**Folder 10**

"Quotations on Function, Process, Organization, Dynamic Spatial Relations, Spatial-Temporal Pattern, System of Operations, as Distinct from Static Uniform Homogeneous Areal Differentiation, in Publications of 1928-1957, R.S. Platt," undated

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**Folder 11**

"Reconnaissance in British Guiana, with Comments on Microgeography," 1939

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**Folder 12**

"Reconnaissance in Dynamic Regional Geography: Tierra del Fuego," 1949

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**Folder 13**

Regional planning, undated

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**Folder 14**

"Regionalism in World Order," 1943

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**Folder 15**

"Resources and Economic Interests of the Bermudas" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1920), correspondence

**Box 9**

**Folder 16**

"Resources and Economic Interests of the Bermudas" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1920), manuscript and abstract

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**Folder 17**

"A Review of Regional Geography," 1957

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**Folder 18**

"The Rise of Cultural Geography in America," 1952

**Box 9**

**Folder 19**

"The Saarland, an International Borderland: Social Geography from Field Study of Nine Border Villages," 1961, correspondence, grant proposal, maps

**Box 9**

**Folder 20**

"The Saarland, an International Borderland: Social Geography from Field Study of Nine Border Villages," 1961, manuscript and offprint

**Box 9**

**Folder 21**

"Significance of the Location of Bermuda," 1921

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**Folder 1**

"Six Farms in the Central Andes," 1932

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**Folder 2**

"South Range, Keweenaw Copper Country: A Mining Pattern of Land Occupancy," 1932

**Box 10**

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"Statement by Two Geographers," 1959

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**Folder 4**

Suggestions Concerning Desirable Lines of Research in the Fields of Geology and Geography, Bastin, Dunbar, and Platt, eds. (1936)

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**Folder 5**

"Summary Memorandum on the Bad River Indian Reservation, Based on Reports of Field Study," 1940

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**Folder 6**

"Tentative Interpretation of Middle Tennessee," 1927 "Transportation in Inter-Regional Relations," 1949

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"An Urban Field Study: Marquette, Michigan," 1931

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"Wellington D. Jones," 1957

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"What A Geographer Thinks About," 1961 "Where Do the Cultures Meet?" 1940

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"Working on the Professor's Terms," 1952 Addresses and Lectures

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"Around the World in 47 Years," 1962

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- "The Bermuda Islands," 1920
- "Blueprint for Hemisphere Defense," 1941
- "Bordering on Geology," 1948

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- "Boundary between Canada and U.S.," 1953
- "Boundary Reconnaissance in Europe," 1954

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"Can We Avoid Determinism?" 1947

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"Chasing a European Boundary," 1954

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Writings

- "Comparative Religions," 1937
- "Conflicting Territorial Claims in the Upper Amazon," 1937

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"Contributions of Geographers in Latin American Studies," 1961

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"Critical Spots in Latin America," 1939

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"Destruction and Resettlement around Volcanoes," 1961

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**Folder 21**

Writings

- "Development of Field Study, Theory, and Method," 1961
- "Dutch-German Border," 1955

**Box 10**

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