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Guide to the University of Chicago John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought Records 1940-1984



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.SOCIALTHOUGHT
Title	University of Chicago. John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought. Records
Date	1940-1984
Size	13.5 linear feet (25 boxes)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	The John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought is a Ph.D.-granting interdisciplinary program of the University of Chicago. Founded in 1941 by historian John U. Nef, the committee became a leading center for interdisciplinary scholarship. The records of the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought document administrative, educational, and editorial activities within the committee from its founding in 1941 through the early 1980s. The collection includes correspondence, manuscripts, reports, minutes, teaching materials, faculty appointments, budgets, curricula vitae, publicity material and publications. Nearly half of the collection consists of the editorial records of <i>Measure: A Critical Journal</i> , published by the committee from 1949-1951.

Information on Use

Access

Series V: Restricted, includes administrative records restricted for 30 years; budgets and faculty appointments restricted for 50 years; and student material restricted for 80 years.

The remainder of the collection is open for research, with no restrictions.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: University of Chicago. Committee on Social Thought. Records, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Historical Note

The University of Chicago's John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought is a Ph.D.-granting interdisciplinary program, founded in 1941 by economic historian John U. Nef. Intellectual inquiry emphasizes fundamental issues in history, philosophy, theology and literature. While the

committee falls under the administration of the Division of the Social Sciences, subject areas for research and teaching have no formal limits. Students in the committee select foundational texts in their areas of interest, studying these works intensely and collaboratively before moving on to qualifying examinations and dissertation research.

Founded as the Committee on the Study of Civilization, its name was soon changed to the Committee on Social Thought at the behest of university administration. In its early development, the committee was led by Nef as Executive Secretary. Significantly, Nef also financially underwrote the enterprise. From 1945-1964, he served as the committee's first chairman. Anthropologist Robert Redfield, economist Frank Knight, and university president Robert M. Hutchins were instrumental founders.

The Committee on Social Thought became a distinguished center for interdisciplinary scholarship, attracting some of the world's leading intellectuals. Notable members of the committee have included Hannah Arendt, Saul Bellow, Allan Bloom, John Coetzee, Mircea Eliade, T.S. Eliot, Robert Fogel, François Furet, Leon Kass, Friedrich A. von Hayek, Hans Jonas, Edward Levi, Robert Pippin, A.K. Ramanujan, James M. Redfield, Paul Ricoeur, Harold Rosenberg, Edward Shils, Otto G. von Simson, Mark Strand, Victor Turner, and many more. The committee also hosts visiting faculty and lecturers.

In December 1949, the committee published the first issue of *Measure: A Critical Journal*. The journal briefly flourished under the editorial leadership of Otto G. von Simson, publishing articles and poetry by some of the most important authors, intellectuals and international leaders of the twentieth century. However, the journal did not find a base audience to support the costs of publication, and folded in 1951.

Nef served as Chairman until 1964, and continued his involvement and support of the committee throughout his life. The committee continues to advance Nef's vision of an elite center of independent, interdisciplinary inquiry into the fundamental issues of society.

In 2008, the committee became the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought. The naming recognized Nef's leadership in interdisciplinary studies, as well as John and Evelyn Nef's generosity as donors to the University of Chicago.

Scope Note

The records of the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought document administrative, educational, and editorial activities within the committee from its founding in 1941 through the early 1980s. The collection includes correspondence, manuscripts, reports, minutes, teaching materials, faculty appointments, budgets, curricula vitae, publicity material and publications. The collection is organized into six series:

Series I: John U. Nef, consists of administrative records kept by the committee's founder. This series spans the years 1941-1964, documenting the time during which the committee was first organized, through the end of Nef's service as Chairman. Material is arranged by topic, with files organized chronologically. This series includes correspondence, announcements, minutes and reports. It also includes curricular material such as program outlines, syllabi, course descriptions, reading lists, and sample examinations: Much of this material is found in files dedicated to individual fields of study that were developed from 1942-1950. Other important early material is found in a file on the Committee on the Study of Civilization, and in a file of founding statements, programs and correspondence. Nef's later efforts to sustain the committee are detailed in his annual reports, and in correspondence with donor Associates of the Committee on Social Thought. Correspondence in this series includes letters and memoranda among John U. Nef, founding members of the committee such as Robert Redfield and Frank Knight, administrative staff and committees within the university, the Division of the Social Sciences, and the Committee on Social Thought, donors, and colleagues in other departments of the university. A file containing student recommendations has been transferred to Series V.

Series II: Office of the Chairman, 1963-1980, contains records of the committee's administration beginning shortly before the end of John U. Nef's time as chairman. Material in this series includes announcements, policy statements, proposals for seminars and lectures, reports, minutes, publications, calendars and correspondence. Material in this series is organized by topic, with files arranged chronologically. It includes correspondence with administrators in the Social Sciences Division; files on the chairmanship, death and estate of Marshall G.S. Hodgson; material related to the university's policy on Selective Service during the Vietnam War; and several files of reports, pamphlets, and periodicals relating to government policy on education, arts and the humanities. Files containing faculty appointments, budgets, and restricted administrative records have been transferred to Series V.

Series III: Faculty and Lecturers, contains material from 1940-1982. This series consists of files on individual faculty members in the committee, as well as files for prospective faculty, visiting lecturers, and invited lecturers. Files are arranged alphabetically. Material in this series consists primarily of correspondence; also included are faculty appointments, curricula vitae, reading lists, lecture notes, publications, minutes, reports, and publicity material. Represented in this series are notable members of the committee such as Hannah Arendt, Friedrich A. von Hayek, Hans Jonas, Frank Knight, Harold Rosenberg, Robert Redfield, Otto G. von Simson, and Victor Turner; also included are files on Michael Polanyi and other visitors. Files containing faculty appointments, budgets, recent administrative records and student material have been transferred to Series V. A set of oversize clippings and photocopies of articles by Harold Rosenberg have been transferred to Series VI.

Series IV: Measure, 1946-1952, contains editorial and administrative records of the journal. This is the largest series, and comprises nearly half the total size of the collection. While Measure: A Critical Journal was published only from 1949-1951, this series includes material related to

early planning for the journal, and administrative activities after the title folded. The largest part of this series is a set of alphabetical files of correspondence and typescripts, representing a diverse group of some of the most important authors, intellectuals and international leaders of the twentieth century: Martin Buber, T.S. Eliot, Friedrich A. von Hayek, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Maritain, George Orwell, José Ortega y Gasset, Katherine Anne Porter, Leo Strauss, and Rebecca West are among those whose correspondence and writings are found in this series. However, some files of other notables consist mainly of secondary correspondence among editors, referees and publishers, and some files contain no documents produced by the subject indicated: for example, the file for Jawaharlal Nehru contains only editorial correspondence about Nehru. Also included is a set of editorial proofs organized by issue; for many articles, multiple drafts annotated by authors and editorial staff are included. The proofs do not consistently represent the final selection or organization of articles as they were eventually published. Administrative files include a set of correspondence, organized chronologically from 1946-1951, and documenting the planning and founding of the journal. This series also contains financial records such as budgets and a ledger, correspondence with readers and subscribers, and a small number of images submitted for illustrations. Otto G. von Simson's editorial leadership is well-documented in correspondence, reviews, and annotations. One unusual file is found with material related to the physicist and philosopher Carl F. von Weizsaecker: it contains copies of the final plea for the defendant in United States of America vs. Ernst von Weizsaecker et al., also known as the Nuremberg "Ministries Trial." An oversize proposal from Willi Schlam to Henry R. Luce for a new magazine (possibly the National Review), has been transferred to Series VI.

Series V: Restricted, consists of files containing material subject to legal and administrative restriction, such as student grades and evaluations, faculty appointments, budgets, and meeting minutes. These files were transferred from Series I, II, and III. Folder headings can be used to trace these files to their original location.

Series VI: Oversize, consists of material transferred from Series III and IV. This includes a proposal from Willi Schlam to Henry R. Luce for a new magazine (possibly the National Review), and a set of clippings and photocopies of articles by Harold Rosenberg.

Related Resources

Browse finding aids by topic.

Greene, David. Papers

Hodgson, Marshall G.S. Papers

McKeon, Richard P. Papers

Nef, John U. Papers

Polanyi, Michael. Papers

Redfield, Robert. Papers

von Simson, Otto G. Papers

Subject Headings

- Nef, John Ulric, 1899-
- Simson, Otto Georg von, 1912-
- University of Chicago. Committee on Social Thought
- Interdisciplinary approach in education

INVENTORY

Series I: John U. Nef

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Founding statements, programs and correspondence, 1942

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Appointments and budgets, 1953-1965

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Newsletter, 1959

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- Manning, John B.
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- Mattick, Paul
- May, James Boyer
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- Mommsen, Theodor
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- Moore, Herbert G.
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- Mosher, George
- Muller-Thyne, Bernard
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