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Special Collections

Finding Aid for the WILLIAM WISTAR COMFORT Papers, 1867-1941

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INFORMATION FOR USERS

Abbreviation of WWC=William Wistar Comfort

RESTRICTIONS

No restrictions

RELATED MATERIALS

Papers of William Wistar Comfort may also be found in the Haverford College archives (HCV R4 Oj B16) representing his administration as president of Haverford, 1917-1940 and in 910A representing work relating to the college after he left office.

ABSTRACT

Papers of William Wistar Comfort (1876-1955), president of Haverford College in a particularly sensitive time between the two world wars and scholar of French literature. Comfort was a prolific writer and speaker on Quaker topics, but also on such diverse subjects as William Cowper, children's stories, education and music.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William Wistar Comfort (1874-1955), son of Howard and Susan Foulke Wistar Comfort, was born in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pa. and raised a Quaker, attending Meeting as a youth at the Meeting at Coulter and Greene Streets in Germantown. He graduated from Haverford College in 1894 and received a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1902. His thesis was titled: "The Development of the Character Types in the French Chansons de Geste." In 1902, he married Mary Lawton Fales. He returned to his alma mater (Haverford) to teach from 1897-1898, also 1902-1909, took many trips abroad and taught Romance Languages at Cornell University, 1909-1917. In 1917 he returned to Haverford to serve as its president until 1940, thus spanning the two World Wars. He often lectured on Quaker topics at the college.

Comfort was an elder, later minister in the Society of Friends. He was Clerk of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting from 1934-1953, president of Friends Historical Association from 1941-53, member of the Board at Lingnan University, China. In 1937, he traveled to France at the request of the American Friends Service Committee to lecture on Quaker topics.

William Wistar Comfort was the author of a number of books primarily on Quaker topics, written both in French and English, including *William Penn and our Liberties*, *Quakers in the Modern World*, *Arthurian Romances*, *French Romantic Plays*, *Just Among Friends: the Quaker Way of Life*, *Stephen Grellet, 1773-1855*, and *The Quest of the Holy Grail*. But his interests ranged into other fields, and, for example, he wrote extensively on the poet William Cowper, as well as Quaker stories for children.

See also paper by George Conyne written for History 361 at HC in 1977 on the "Commencement Address of William Wistar Comfort, Delivered 8 June 1940" for more.

(Information from the Dictionary of Quaker Biography, *Comfort Families of America...* / by Cecelia C. and Roland B. Botting. Brookings, SD 1971. BX 7721 C73 B75 and internal evidence)

SUBJECT HEADINGS

- 600 1 Benezet, Anthony, 1713-1784.
- 600 1 Cowper, William, 1731-1800.
- 600 1 Grellet, Stephen, 1773-1855.
- 600 1 Penn, William, 1644-1718.
- 610 20 Haverford College – History.
- 650 0 Quakers – Education.
- 650 0 Christian literature for children.

- 700 1 Comfort, Howard, 1850-1912.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

Series List:

- Series I. Biographical Information
- Series II. Correspondence
- Series III. Manuscripts
- Series IV. Speeches

BOX CONTENTS LIST

- Box 1: Biographical Information and Correspondence, p. 3
- Box 2: Manuscripts: French topics, Friends Stories for Children, Miscellaneous, p. 4
- Box 3: Manuscripts: Titles A-Z, p. 5
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- Box 5: Manuscripts: William Penn and Stephen Grellet, p. 8
- Box 6: Speeches, 1916-1940s & n.d., p. 8

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

Papers include such biographical information as provided in William Wistar Comfort's autobiography, a small amount of correspondence, as with his father, Howard Comfort, Comfort's writings on French topics, Friends' stories for children, on William Cowper and primarily on Quaker topics, including on William Penn, Anthony Benezet and Stephen Grellet. Comfort spoke publicly on many occasions, specifically at schools and colleges as well as in France during his stay there in 1937.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Series I. : Biographical Information

Box 1: Biographical Information and Correspondence

Autobiography, [1949]. 1 folder (2 items).

WWC's autobiography focuses on his Quaker family and Quakerism, his undergraduate days at Haverford College, a great deal on his travels, world war, including Haverford College during the war, areas of his interest and expertise, teaching, presidential years at Haverford and encounters with various people.

Included here is also a typescript "The Appeal to Ancestry in Literature."

Miscellaneous biographical materials. 1 folder (7 items)

WWC's appreciation for teaching by Board of Managers of Haverford College, 1909.

Text and related items from Lake Forest University on WWC's award of LL.D., 1925

Photograph of WWC with HC alumni, class of 1894 in ca. 1944, some are identified as Alfred Busselle, E.M. Wilson and Francis J. Stokes

Series II. : Correspondence

William Wistar Comfort correspondence, 1867-1951. 1 folder (11 items).

Note: Includes letters of an earlier William Comfort.

Letter writers include: Howard Comfort, William Comfort, William Wistar Comfort, Percival Fay, and C.J. Rhoads

Highlights include:
[Comfort], William to Howard Comfort. Westtown, [Pa.], 1867 1/10. [on brother Howard's attendance at Haverford College; received photograph of family members]

Comfort, Howard to William Wistar Comfort. Philadelphia, 1895 2/22. [reports on a Haverford reunion]

Comfort, Howard to William Wistar Comfort. Philadelphia 1901 1/18. [tells WWC Board of Managers has appointed him Instructor in Romance Languages at Haverford for an annual salary of \$1,000; other Haverford events and decisions]

Comfort, William W. to "friend." Philadelphia, 1945 5/31. [raising funds for Lingnan University, Comfort refers to Free China and invasion of China by Japan]

Letters to WWC regarding the publishing of a book of French Romantic plays and a volume of stories.

French trip, 1937. [Correspondence involving a lecture tour of France]

Series III.: Manuscripts

BOX 2: Manuscripts: French topics, Friends Stories for Children, Miscellaneous

Note: Here are WWC's writings on French topics, on a variety of miscellaneous topics and his Quaker stories for children.

William Wistar Comfort: French topics . 1 folder (5 items).

French instruction in schools [1937?] [Addresses the pedagogy, particularly grammar and composition, and grading of courses in French.]

On the Friends' Centre in Paris [1937?] [Information on the lecture series of 1937 and the state of Quakerism in France.]

On Moliere [n.d.] [Two copies, one annotated.] [Places Moliere in the social context of 17th century France, provides biographical information, and discusses the effect of his plays on his career.]

On the siege of Paris by the Saracens [n.d.]

Preliminary writings for the introduction and play notes for French Romantic Plays. WWC ed., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933. [n.d.]

Miscellaneous topics. 1 folder (4 items).

"General History of English Literature during the 18th & 19th Centuries." These are notes taken by WWC, class of 1894, while at a lecture by Dr. Francis B. Gummere in 1893-94.

[On William Penn's legacy.] [n.d.]

"A Quaker Voyage in 1784" (Printed in *Bulletin F.H.A.*, v. 42, 1953, p 91-97.)

[On Dante] [n.d.]

"A Chance for the Small College", [1917?] [Expounds on the advantages of the small college over the large university]

Friends' stories for children. 1 folder (8 items).

Note: All of the stories concern legendary characters from French history

"Hervi of Metz." [n.d.]

"Baiart." [Published in The Target: A Paper for Boys-Continuing the Sunday School Advocate, November 30, 1929. Copy included]

"Aiol." [n.d.]

"Rainouart." [n.d.]

"Vivien." [n.d.]

"The Hawk." [n.d.]

“Guillaume and His Dappled Palfrey.”[Published in The Portal: A Paper for Girls-Continuing the Sunday School Advocate, February 22, 1930. Copy included.]

“Hugh Capet.”[Published in The Classmate: A Paper for Young People, November 2, 1929. Copy included.]

Box 3: Manuscripts: Titles A-Z

Note: Titles inside quotation marks are those given by WWC; without quotation marks are derived titles.

Manuscripts, titles A to G. 1 folder (10 items).

Antoine Benezet and the Society of Friends [in French], [n.d.]

Appeal of Ancestry [n.d.]

Application to the Million Dollar Community Contest to provide foreign study for those with good projects. 1936 9/15.

Book review; “The Awakening College” by C.C. Little. [n.d.]

Changes in education strategy. [n.d.] [two copies]

To the citizens and patrons of the Steele High School, Dayton, Ohio. 1918 4/5.

“Difficulties of Knowing the Facts”, [n.d.]

“A Forward Look in the Higher Education of Friends.”[Annotated] [n.d.]

Friends reconstruction work, [ca. 1917]

Manuscripts, titles M to R. 1 folder (10 items).

Hawthorne’s literary qualities. [n.d.]

The liberal arts college. [n.d.]

(China) [Lingnan University]. [n.d.]

[Literature and the search for good in history.] [n.d.]

[Address or article] “Men Not Methods Wanted.” [n.d.]

Miscellaneous manuscripts regarding War Victims Committee of the Society of Friends (including WWC), Arch Street Meeting/ William Atkinson, High School Senior Test, analyzed (WWC?)

“The Present Situation of Education in the United States.” [n.d.]

On the nature of Quakerism and Quaker worship [n.d.]

“Quakers at Sea.” [Reflections on the writings of George Fox, John Woolman, Stephen Grellet, William Forster, Joseph John Gurney and Thomas Scattergood.] [n.d.]

Qualities of the average student. [n.d.]

Manuscripts, titles S to Z. 1 folder (8 items).

Samuel Richardson’s Pamela [n.d.]

Position of the Society of Friends in time of war. [n.d.]

Sojourn to Italy. [n.d.]

“Some Stage Quakers.” [n.d.]

Study documents (Typed copies of letters and documents by various historical figures): Deborah Logan, Benjamin Rush (from personal observations on the streets of Philadelphia), John Wesley (letter to Benezet, 1774), Baron Cromot du Bourg, 1777, Bordeaux, 1808, Birmingham, 1812, St. Petersburg, 1819, Rome, 1819, Paris, 1813. Brief notes on Quakerism in England, William Penn, Antoine Benezet and Etienne de Grellet.:

“The Task” [American education]. [n.d.]

U.S. as friend of China. 1927 4/18.

“The Value of Literary Memory in the Experience of Worship.” [n.d.]

Box 4: Manuscripts: William Cowper

“The Patriotic Poetry of William Cowper.” [n.d.]. TS., 9 p.

[William Cowper]. [n.d.]. TS., 25 p.

“William Cowper: His Poetry and Influence.” [n.d., but after 1940]. TS., 173 p.

“William Cowper: His Poetry and Influence.” [n.d.]. TS., annotated, 199 p.

Pencil drawing of the birthplace of Cowper at Berkhamstead. On the back is stamped "Allen C. Thomas, Haverford, Pa." and a poem attributed to Cowper is written out.

Box 5: Manuscripts: William Penn and Stephen Grellet

Stephen Grellet and other Grellet family members, 1793-1864; portraits of S. Grellet & Rebecca Collins. 1 folder.

Letters of Stephen Grellet and other Grellet family members, 1793-1864, transcribed and typed and occasionally translated from the French. Also, typed reference to Rebecca Grellet from the diary of Benjamin Lowry as provided by John W. Cadbury Jr.

- Photograph of the silhouette of Stephen Grellet from original lithograph by A. Newsam;
- Albumen photograph of Rebecca Collins, 1888. Rockwood [photographer].

William Penn. 4 folders

- Various iterations of WWC's writings about William Penn: 9 p.; 14 p. (1931); 24 p., 2 copies, 1 incomplete, both annotated; 28 p., 2 copies, one with a 2-page addition, both annotated. All in TS., [n.d.]
- "Penn to Pepys." TS., [n.d.]
- "What American Liberty Owes to the Quakers." TS, [n.d.].
- "William Penn's Religious Background, [n.d.]
- Various sets of notes on William Penn. MS.
- About William Penn (not by WWC)

Series IV. Speeches

Box 6: Speeches, 1916-1940s & n.d.

Note: Speeches (and addresses) are arranged chronologically. With the exception of two notices of speeches by WWC, these are actual texts. Created titles are in square brackets.

Speeches, 1916-1929. 1 folder.

Notices of speeches on "Friends in England the War: and "William Cowper: His Life, Work and Influence," 1916

Westtown Commencement address, 1921

Address at inauguration of W.M. Lewis, 11/7/1923

“Education and Quakerism,” speech given as part of Fox celebration at Y[early] M[eeting] of Hicksite Friends, 5/15/1924

Address at Baldwin School at dedication of Elizabeth Forrest Johnson Hall, n.d.; laying of cornerstone, 6/1924

Lake Forest [College] Commencement address, 1925

Address at West Chester State Teachers’ College, 2/6/1928

Address at Chemists’ dinner, 3/15/1928

Address at Baldwin School, 6/2/1928

Address at Founders Day, Lafayette College, 11/8/1929

Speeches, 1930-1933. 1 folder.

[Education as Enabler], 1930

Albright College commencement address, 1930

Earlham commencement address, 1930

William Penn, 1644-1718. Address given at Friends’ Meeting House to the Welcome Society of Pennsylvania, 3/4/1931.

Broadcast for Liberal Arts College Movement, 11/14/1931

Address on Higher Education for Friends, [1932?] “short version”

Address at Conference at Cape May, NJ, “The Society of Friends and Higher Education,” 07/1932 and “Higher Education for Friends,” July 11, 1932. (two variants of same address)

Address at the American Institute of Banking?, Phila. Chapter, 5/24/1933

Address at Park School Commencement, 6/8/1933

Speeches, 1934-1935. 1 folder.

[Progressive education], Private School Association, Baltimore, MD, 10/22/1934.
2 copies, one annotated

Address to the Gastroenterological Association, Atlantic City, 4/30/1934

Address to Honor Societies at Cornell University, 4/1934

Speech at Tulpehocken Church Rose Festival, 06/1935

Speech at Unitarian Church, 10/27/1935

Speeches, 1936-1937. 1 folder.

Address to the Association of Principals of Private Schools in Central States,
Chicago, 3/19/1936

[Peace in our Time], Drexel Institute, Peace Day, 4/22/1936

[Music], Philadelphia Conservatory of Music, 5/18/1936

[William Penn and the Hall of Fame], 5/28/1936

Address at City Hall, 1936

A Forward Look in Higher Education, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1936

Gilman School Commencement Address, 6/8/1936

A Quaker Embassy in France, [1937]

French lectures in France, 1937. 1 folder.

Note: There are all in French

[Comparison of colleges in U.S., England and France]

[William Penn and other Early Quakers]

Fox and Quakerism

[Quakers, AFSC, Haverford College, war and peace in 1917]

Anthony Benezet

Stephen Grellet

Speeches, 1940-1941. 1 folder.

College of Osteopathy Commencement Address, 1940

Address: "Are We a Religious Society?" at Friends Social Union. 1940 2/20.

Wilmington College Commencement Address, 1941

Address to Colonial Society of Pennsylvania on William Penn, 11/8/1944

Some Fruits of Silence, Crozer Seminary Address, 6/3/1941

Speeches, n.d. 1 folder.

Address at Earlham College.

Competition in Education: abstract

[To the graduation class, at a high school?]

Lecture [at the end of a French Literature course]

Are we prepared to do our part?

[William Penn]

England in the early 19th century [fragment]

MATERIALS REMOVED

To PG: newspaper articles and other printed information by and about WWC, including book review of his translation *The Clermont Assizes of 1665*; *L'Equipe*, no. 4, Sept. 4, 1917, serial pub. by members of American Friends' Reconstruction Unit No. 1

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