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Description and Finding Aid
SAMUEL ALFRED BROWNE MERCER FONDS
F2171

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SAMUEL ALFRED BROWNE MERCER FONDS

Dates of creation

1916-1942

Extent

13 cm of textual records

101 lantern slides : b&w ; 8 x 8 cm

Biographical sketch

Samuel Alfred Browne Mercer, BD, MA, PhD, DLitt, LID, DD, FRGS (Ang.), was an Episcopalian minister who became Canada's foremost Egyptologist during his lengthy career at the University of Toronto. He was a distinguished orientalist and authority on Egyptian hieroglyphics. Mercer was born in 1879 in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, son of Samuel and Elizabeth Browne Mercer. His early education was in St John's and later at Harvard University. From 1922 to 1923, Dr Mercer was dean of Bexley Hall at Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio. On 1 October 1923, he was appointed to University of Toronto's Trinity College as Dean and Professor of Divinity and remained there from 1924 to his retirement as Professor of Semitic Languages and Egyptology. In 1946 he retired to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he devoted himself to the first translation and commentary of the ancient Pyramid Texts. It was published in 1952.

An active scholar, he held 12 degrees from various universities, published 29 books in his field, and read more than 50 ancient and modern languages. During one of his many trips to the Middle East and Africa, he was present at the opening of the tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamun in 1922. On another field trip to Ethiopia, he discovered a manuscript of the Book of Ecclesiastes that was 200 years older than any previously known.

Mercer married Genevieve, daughter of John Lewis Magee, on 15 August 1910. He died in Toronto on 10 January 1969 at the age of 89, leaving his daughter, Mrs Donald (Harriet) Briggs of Burbank, California, and two sisters, Miss Ethel Mercer and Mrs Ross (Charlotte) Spaulding, both of Toronto.

Scope and content

Fonds comprises handwritten and carbon copies of the manuscripts for two books: "A Study in the Idea of God" and "Civilization in the Making." As well, there is a Sign-List for Pre-Hammurabi Contract Tablets. There are some 100 lantern slides that Mercer was famous for using in his lectures. Some of these slides by photographer A.J. Reading show titles for the images; however there is no listing of them.

Notes

Immediate source of acquisition: received from Harold Nahabedian in 1981.

Custodial history: Found in Trinity College by Harold Nahabedian in 1981, possibly received from Mercer's sister's husband, Ross Spaulding. The original box was received in Toronto on 9 November 1960 from Attelborough, Massachusetts. An undated letter from Spaulding with the list of textual material outlines why these manuscripts were not published.

Restrictions on access: Condition and fragility of slides may affect access.

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Related material: See *Trinity University Review*, volume LIX, Christmas 1946, report upon Mercer's retirement from Trinity.

Provenance access points

Mercer, Samuel Alfred Browne, 1880-1969

Box/file listing:

FOLDER/UNIT TITLE	START DATE	END DATE	CONTENTS	BOX/ FILE #
Pre-Hammurabi Contract Tables	1932	1932	"Sign-List for Pre-Hammurabi Contract Tablets (Including some general signs) / Personal papers of Samuel A.B. Mercer", handwritten in pencil "Not entered yet Feb 1932". [Trinity Library, PJ3223/M4].	1-1
"A Study in the Idea of God"	[193-]	[193-]	Handwritten manuscript, "A Study in the Idea of God," 156 pages.	1-2
"A Study in the Idea of God"	[193-]	[193-]	Typed copy, "A Study in the Idea of God," 94 pages.	1-3
"Our Civilization in the Making"	[194-]	[194-]	Handwritten manuscript, "Our Civilization in the Making," 126 pages.	1-4
"Our Civilization in the Making"	[194-]	[194-]	Carbon copy, "Our Civilization in the Making," 145 pages, including a note about its rejection.	1-5
"Our Civilization in the Making"	1942	1942	Carbon copy, "Our Civilization in the Making," 133 pages, including table of contents and a preface outlining the purpose of the book, 10 September 1942.	1-6
Letter from M.W. Bazely to Mercer	1916	1916	Letter dated 4 June 1916, sent from M.W. Bazely, 3141 Vernon Avenue, Chicago, advising that he is sending an Urdu translation of the Church of England Prayer Book containing various scripts.	1-7
Lantern slides	[193-]	[193-]	55 lantern slides, including images of art works, monuments, costumes, maps.	Box 2
Lantern slides	[193-]	[193-]	46 lantern slides, as above	Box 3