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The Alfred Vincent Kidder Papers

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SOURCES FOR THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

I. The Alfred Vincent Kidder Papers

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The papers of Alfred Vincent Kidder provide a unique and personal look into the development of Americanist archeology from 1907 through 1963. Through the kind generosity of Kidder's daughter, Faith Kidder Fuller, the papers were loaned to me with the purpose of providing resource material for my doctoral dissertation ("Alfred Vincent Kidder and the Development of Americanist Archaeology," Washington University, St. Louis, 1986). The papers were stored in a large wooden crate after Kidder's death in June, 1963, and when they arrived at my home in March, 1982, it was evident that they had not been opened since originally placed in the crate. Although the papers were not then indexed, that task was completed shortly after they were received.

Kidder was one of the premier figures in Americanist archeology from 1915 through his retirement in 1950. His writings include a great variety of topics very important to the archeology of his time. His Introduction to Southwestern Archaeology with a Preliminary Account of the Excavations at Pecos was one of the first attempts to synthesize the cultural development of prehistoric Southwestern peoples. After his retirement from the Division of Historical Research, Carnegie Institution of Washington, he was frequently consulted by colleagues and by graduate students in archeology at Harvard University, with which he had long been associated.

Kidder's collected papers can be divided into seven sections: correspondence between Kidder and his colleagues, as well as with noted institutions; archeological notes and analyses for future publication; rough drafts of his memoirs (in two volumes); copies of his published journal articles; photographs of his Southwestern and Mayan expeditions; field notes written at Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala and at Mesa Verde, Colorado (as well as at other Southwestern archeological sites); and personal diaries beginning in February 1896 and ending in June 1963. Some of the diary years are unfortunately missing from the collection, including the critical Pecos Pueblo years of 1915-1925. Kidder mentioned in some of his diaries after 1927 that he had relied upon his insurance agent in Cambridge, Massachusetts to provide him with blank diary books. Since his agent did not send him any and none were available in the general stores near the Pecos Pueblo, this may explain the gap. As a collection, the Kidder papers contain correspondence and references relating to many of the major anthropological figures of his day—the most influential of whom, as far as Kidder himself is concerned, was A. L. Kroeber, whom he regarded as the finest cultural anthropologist America had produced.
The correspondence from Kidder's colleagues reflects his important role in the development of Americanist archeology. Of particular note is the correspondence with Robert Wauchope, in which Wauchope outlined many of the contributions that Kidder made to Americanist archeology, and Kidder played down his own contributory role. The papers also contain correspondence between Kidder and Sylvanus Morley, William S. Webb, Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, Eric Thompson, Gordon Willey, H.C. Bumpus, Alfonso Caso, Eduardo Noguera, Alfred Tozzer, Emil Haury, Richard B. Woodbury, Watson Smith, and other notables. There is also a minor amount of correspondence between Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and Kidder concerning conservation archeology.

Scholars interested in the origins and development of aerial archeology in the Americas will appreciate the letters (1929-1935) between Kidder and Charles Lindbergh, which include a plan to ask Transworld Airways to locate a base for airmail operations in Yucatan (to serve parts of South America), with air routes over suspected Mayan sites. The two men also thought of using the flexible Goodyear airship for aerial surveys of the Mayan jungles. The papers also contain photographs of Lindbergh's flights over the American Southwest as well as his aerial photographs of selected Mayan archeological sites. On some Mayan aerial surveys Kidder flew with Lindbergh as the photographer.

Kidder's memoirs speak of two important developments in Americanist archeology: the usage of stratigraphy as a dating method, and his insistence that archeology develop a "pan-scientific" or multidisciplinary approach to the resolution of archeological problems. In several instances he credits Gustav Nordenskiold and Nels C. Nelson with the first use of stratigraphy in the United States, and Manuel Gamio with its initial use in Mexico, when Gamio was working for Boas.

Kidder was very much impressed with the methods of data organization and analyses found in the "hard sciences," and he believed that multidisciplinary collaboration would aid archeological interpretation. These emphases are early seen in his interest in ceramic taxonomy in the American Southwest, and later in his "pan-scientific" attack upon the archeological problems of the Maya.

The Kidder papers will not disappoint those who find great interest in historical vignettes of the early "who's who" of American anthropology. His diary entry of 29 April 1963 recalls that

    J.P. Harrington [was an] eccentric soul[,]. . . completely wrapped up in his linguistics research. At one period he had an office in the part of the Santa Fe museum across the patio from the exhibition rooms. He slept and worked there, his bed being some old quilts piled on the floor under a large table, upon which he used to lay out scores of slips, on each one of which was a word of whatever Indian tongue he was studying at the time. These being
likely to be blown about if door or windows were opened, he kept the place locked up. His food was beans—at first nothing else—of which he'd buy a large supply. One day he told Kenneth Chapman that his stomach ached. Chap asked him what he ate. 'Beans,' said J.P. 'They're cheap and nourishing.' Chap told him that of course his stomach hurt and that he should try malted milk. So J.P. said he would, and the next time Chap met him he asked him how he was getting on. 'Not so well,' replied Harrington. 'It's terrible hard to swallow and it's awfully expensive; a three-dollar bottle [of the powder] doesn't hold many tablespoons full; and it's so dry, too. I've used up three bottles this week, but my stomach hurts worse than ever.' (Kidder diary 1963:37-38--from which Mrs. Faith Kidder Fuller has graciously allowed me to quote)

The papers of A.V. Kidder now reside at the Tozzer Library in Cambridge at the request of his daughter. It is my understanding that Kidder's diaries will be held by his family and will not be opened for scholarly research. Interested scholars should contact the Tozzer Library (Harvard University) for information concerning access to the papers. The index to the papers that I have constructed might be of value to those interested in Kidder's anthropological time period. I would be glad to aid scholars interested in these materials.

II. Anthropological Manuscripts in the American Philosophical Society

The Society has just published "The Proper Study of Mankind": An Annotated Bibliography of Manuscript Sources on Anthropology & Archeology in the Library of the American Philosophical Society, edited by David van Keuren. In addition to the sixty-page bibliography, the volume includes an essay on "Anthropology and Archeology in the American Philosophical Society," by the editor, a description of the manuscript collections, and a user's guide to the bibliography.

III. Proposed National Anthropological Archives Guide

The National Anthropological Archives is seeking information about the location of original documents in the United States and Canada relating to anthropology (cultural, physical, and applied anthropology; linguistics; archeology). Prepared finding aids to such collections will also be welcome. This information is to be compiled into a guide to archival material of anthropologists and anthropological associations. Please contact James Glenn or Kathleen Baxter, NAA, Natural History Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560 (202-357-1976).