

Tradition & Discovery

The Polanyi Society Periodical

SPECIAL ISSUE:

Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi

The Michael Polanyi Papers in the Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library

The Michael Polanyi Papers are among the most heavily used collections in the Department of Special Collections at the University of Chicago's Joseph Regenstein Library. Researchers have traveled from all over the world to consult the papers for a wide variety of scholarly projects. The following "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" is the finding aid for the main collection of forty-seven archival boxes of Polanyi's papers, and it includes a detailed introduction as well as a box and folder list of the contents of the papers. In addition to the main collection, there are seventeen boxes of addenda to the Polanyi papers, which are not listed in this guide. The addenda include published works of Polanyi, articles and reprints by other authors, dissertations written about Polanyi, and audio-visual materials.

The Polanyi papers are open to visiting researchers as well as to faculty, students and staff of the University of Chicago. Upon arrival in the Dept. of Special Collections, researchers are asked to register and show two forms of identification (one of which must have a photo). Researchers who have not previously used archives and manuscripts at the University of Chicago Library will have a brief reference interview with a staff member. In addition, the researcher will fill out an application for the use of the Polanyi papers that also functions as a call slip to request specific boxes for reading room use. The Dept. of Special Collections is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 - 4:45, and Saturday, 9 - 12:45. We are closed Sundays, University holidays, and Saturdays during the month of September. While an appointment is not required, it is always wise to contact us in advance of a research trip.

Photocopies can be ordered at \$0.25 per page (plus \$3.50 shipping and handling), with a limit of 50 pages per archival box. All photocopy orders are subject to curatorial review, based on the condition of the material. The forty-six boxes of the main portion of the Polanyi papers have been microfilmed on forty-four reels, and duplicates of the films can be purchased for \$25.00 per reel (plus \$10.00 [domestic] or \$15.00 [foreign] per order for shipping and handling). These prices are subject to change; microfilm orders must be prepaid.

Written reference inquiries may be submitted to Suzy Taraba, Public Services Librarian, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Ill. 60637 (e-mail:

specialcollections@lib.uchicago.edu). Requests for permission to publish should be directed to Daniel Meyer, Associate Curator of Special Collections and University Archivist, at the above address. The Department of Special Collections can be reached at (312) 702-8705 (tel.) or (312) 702-3728 (fax). The Department's [homepage](#) will soon contain information on the Polanyi Papers.

Suzy Taraba
Public Services Librarian

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Department of Special Collections

GUIDE TO THE PAPERS OF MICHAEL POLANYI

by

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The Papers and Michael Polanyi's Career

While the cumulative correspondence, notes, manuscripts, and memorabilia in this collection provide a biographical resource for the varied career of Michael Polanyi, the specific series in the papers, when taken individually, are only partially illuminating. In order to understand the scope of the collection, the individual series must be examined and compared with Polanyi's work in science, economics, philosophy and social problems.

Michael Polanyi was born in Budapest in 1891, and though his career as a scientist and philosopher led him far from his native Hungary, the intellectual milieu of his childhood remained a life-long influence on his work. His father was an engineer and businessman and his Russian mother, Cecile, wrote a fashion column for the German-language newspaper in Budapest. Throughout the early years of Polanyi's childhood, the family was financially successful, but most of their resources were lost before the first World War, leaving the children largely dependent on Polanyi's brother Karl for support (Box 45, Folder 7. Hereafter, all box and folder references will read with the box and folder numbers only, thus

this reference would read [45:7]). Despite this poor financial situation, Cecile Polanyi maintained a salon for Hungarian literary figures (46:6-9).

Polanyi grew up in a literate, political world. At an early age, he helped to found, with his brother Karl and Oscar J szi, the Galilei Circle, a Hungarian nationalist group which promoted Hungarian cultural traditions and worked for an independent Hungarian state. Polanyi became a Doctor of Medicine at Budapest University in 1913 and served as a medical officer in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. His earliest scientific paper, "Chemistry of Hydrocephalic Liquid," was published at age 19. Throughout the war, he worked on the application of quantum theory to the third law of thermodynamics of adsorption. In 1916, he published his work on adsorption, one of the first of over two hundred scientific papers he was to publish before his move into philosophy in 1948. His theory of adsorption was accepted by the chemistry faculty of Budapest University which awarded him a Ph.D. in 1917.

Following the war, in the autumn of 1920, Polanyi received an appointment to the new Institute of Fibre Chemistry in Berlin, part of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. His early years in Berlin are recounted in the 1962 essay, *My Time with X-Rays and Crystals* (34:17). Fritz Haber, the Director of the prestigious Institute of Physical Chemistry, sent Polanyi off to "cook a piece of meat," to expand his laboratory skills before being fully accepted into the German scientific community. He succeeded in this with a study of x-ray diffraction of cellulose fibres, and in 1923 he was appointed to the Institute of Physical Chemistry to work under Haber. During the following ten years in Berlin, Polanyi established himself as one of Germany's leading physical chemists. He carried on research with some of the most prominent scientists of the age including Eugene Wigner with whom he was to share a life-long friendship.

Polanyi's scientific work is well documented in the Papers only in the correspondence series. His early scientific studies of adsorption and reaction kinetics are given passing reference in several letters from the 1917-1919 period (1:5), but it is not until the autumn of 1920, when he joined the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, that the scientific correspondence becomes significant. From 1920 to 1933, when Polanyi left Berlin, he corresponded regularly with many of the leading scientists of Germany (1:6-2:15). Fritz Haber is represented in a series of letters beginning in 1923. Of particular interest are the large number of letters from early supporters of Polanyi's work such as the Polish chemists Georg Bredig and Kasimir Fajans, and Polanyi's colleague in Berlin, Herbert Freundlich. His circle of correspondents within the European community grew to include such important figures as James Franck, Otto Hahn, Werner Heisenberg, Wilfred Heller, Leo Szilard, and many others.

The coming to power of Hitler and the National Socialist Party marked the end of Polanyi's German career and the beginning of his move into social thought. In reaction to growing attacks on Jewish intellectual figures in 1933, Polanyi, who was a Jew, accepted a chair in physical chemistry created for him at the University of Manchester. He continued with the chemical studies begun in Berlin, but his contacts with non-refugee German scientists decreased. The early years in Manchester were difficult ones for the Polanyi family as refugees struggling with life in a foreign country (2:14-3:5).

Polanyi's departure for Manchester in 1933 signaled an intellectual and social break from the scientific work of Berlin. He was welcomed by the English scientific community and while correspondence with scientists in Germany decreases greatly at this point, it is replaced by a volume of letters from new British colleagues. From 1933 to 1948 (the year Polanyi accepted the chair of Social Studies at Manchester) the correspondence is filled with letters from British scientists such as William H. Bragg and his son William L. Bragg, Arthur Allmand, Patrick Blackett, Christopher Ingold, Cyril Hinshelwood, and Eric Rideal.

Refugee status created new friendships and strengthened old ones. The correspondence with Polanyi's colleague and close personal friend Eugene Wigner increases in 1933 and there are a number of exchanges from this period with Max Born and Erwin Schrödinger. Polanyi's laboratory at Manchester attracted students and established scientists from all over the world. Perhaps his most important associate during this period was the Japanese chemist Juro Horiuchi who is well represented in the correspondence.

As Polanyi increasingly turned his attention from science to economics and philosophy during and after the war, correspondence with scientists dropped off. The two other major series in the collection, notes and manuscripts, contain little material from Polanyi's scientific career. The earliest dated manuscripts are from 1936 and deal exclusively with economics and philosophy. There is one small group of scientific manuscripts (43:3-4,7) but they are fragmentary and indicate little about Polanyi's scientific work. The sections on science in the research notes (22:7-12) are philosophical in nature.

During these first years in England, Polanyi turned his interest to the philosophical attack presented on free societies by the totalitarian governments of Germany and Russia. In 1935, he published his first non-scientific work, "U.S.S.R. Economics --- Fundamental Data System and Spirit." This was accompanied by a film which criticized the system of Soviet economics as an attack on liberty. While devoting most of his time to scientific pursuits, Polanyi spent part of the next five years in work on *The Contempt of Freedom* (1940), his large-scale critique of totalitarian government. In the early 1930s, Polanyi had visited the Soviet Union and had become friends with two Soviet chemists, Alexander Frumkin and Nicolai Semenoff. Both were to write him asking that he stop his attacks on Soviet economic policies.

A devoted Keynesian, Polanyi's writings on economic subjects are divided between attacks on the Soviet system and lucid commentaries on the work of Lord Keynes. Between 1935 and c1950 (3:3-5:7), Polanyi corresponded with a number of important economists including Friedrich A. Hayek, David Caradog Jones, Wolfe Mays, and John Maynard Keynes. His position as a scientist and a social thinker led him to become involved with a group of intellectuals in England concerned with social problems. This group, the Moot, was convened by Joseph H. Oldham, editor of the *Christian Newsletter*. Correspondence with Dr. Oldham and papers presented at meetings of the Moot have been grouped together in this collection (15:3-10). Polanyi corresponded independently with two significant members of the Moot, T. S. Eliot and Karl Mannheim. Their letters will be found in the correspondence.

Many of the manuscripts written between 1935 and 1940 (Boxes 25-35) deal with economic subjects. As

a whole, they represent Polanyi's two-part approach to contemporary economic problems. Such manuscripts as the 1935 lectures on economics (25:9), the 1943 essays on economic planning (28:1-3), and the 1944 *Principles of Economic Expansion* (29:11-12) are interesting interpretations of Keynesian thought. Other manuscripts from this period like the 1938 *Reflections on Marxism* (25:16), the 1940 *Collectivist Planning* (26:3), and the 1947 *Soviets and Capitalism* (31:4) are criticisms of Soviet economics.

The notes series contains little of relevance to Polanyi's economic thought. There are a few general notes on economic subjects (21:6) as well as material on individual economists like Keynes and von Hayek, but the majority of economic material is found in the correspondence and manuscripts.

During the course of World War II, Polanyi lost contact with many friends and family on the continent. Correspondence during the early war years, 1939 and 1940, is filled with pleas for assistance from loved ones trapped in occupied lands (3:14-4:5). Polanyi was instrumental in bringing his brothers Karl and Adolf and his sisters Laura and Irene to England (17:9).

The war was passed in divided intellectual pursuits. Polanyi continued his scientific studies and tried to obtain military projects through Sir William Lawrence Bragg. At the same time he wrote on economic subjects. It was during these years that he helped to found, with John R. Baker, the Society for Freedom in Science which he used as a forum for developing his ideas on scientific liberty.

The philosophic ideas of Michael Polanyi first took characteristic shape during the war years. His activities in opposition to planning in science led to an epistemology of science grounded in a belief in an individual nature of discovery, unhindered by official or dogmatic interference. In 1945, Polanyi published *Science, Faith and Society*, his first large-scale philosophic work and the foundation for his theory of knowledge. The evolution of Polanyi's thought which resulted in this publication is traceable in the papers through a number of manuscripts beginning with his 1936 essays *On Truth, On Reason* and *Science and Liberty* (25:11) and continuing with his studies of scientific planning throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. By 1950, the date of the first of his University of Chicago lecture series, *The Logic of Liberty* (32:8-14), strictly economic concerns had become clearly subordinate to philosophical inquiry.

In 1951, Polanyi was offered a position at the University of Chicago on the Committee on Social Thought and was awarded a large grant by the Rockefeller Foundation. The State Department, however, held up his immigrant visa under the McCarran Act until Polanyi withdrew it. He was suspected of past involvement in a subversive organization, the Galilei Circle of his Hungarian youth. This episode, which resulted in Polanyi's remaining in Manchester, was made doubly absurd by the philosopher's involvement with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the most significant intellectual anti-Communist force in post-war Europe, and by his 1950 publication, *The Logic of Liberty*, in which he continued his attack on Soviet infringement of personal liberty begun nearly twenty years before. Articles and letters detailing this event have been grouped together in the collection (46:5).

When Princeton made Polanyi an honorary Doctor of Science during its 1949 bicentennial celebration, he was cited as "a veteran campaigner against those who would take from science the freedom she requires for the pursuit of truth." Polanyi became a regular visitor to the United States and the University of Chicago. Two of his lecture series here, *The Logic of Liberty* (1950) and *Meaning* (1969), were ultimately published.

Between 1951 and 1958, when he retired from Manchester to accept a position of senior research fellow at Merton College, Oxford, Michael Polanyi wrote his central philosophical work, *Personal Knowledge*. It was this book that systematically developed the epistemology first presented in *Science, Faith and Society*.

The collection contains few manuscripts from the years preceding this publication. *Personal Knowledge* grew out of Polanyi's 1951 Gifford lectures for which there are manuscripts incorporated into the lectures but no manuscripts of the actual lectures themselves (33:1-4). The manuscripts series jumps from a solid collection of pre-1952 manuscripts to an equally large group of post-1960 manuscripts. This leaves the researcher with sources for the foundation and later developments of Polanyi's thought, but without sources for the work which culminates in *Personal Knowledge*.

There is a similar gap in the correspondence. Correspondence dated 1950-1959 fills only six folders in the collection (5:7-12) while letters from 1960-1975 fill eight boxes. One of the most significant influences on the development of Michael Polanyi's thought was the correspondence he shared with his friend and colleague, philosopher Marjorie Grene. This material has been grouped together (19:1-9), but it contains only two letters which predate *Personal Knowledge*.

In spite of this lack of early material relating to Polanyi's philosophical thought, later relevant correspondence with Marjorie Grene and others is abundant. Polanyi's thought ranged over a multitude of ideas and disciplines. His views on the mind led to correspondence with Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Erik Erikson; his views on language, with Noam Chomsky and Yehoshua Bar-Hillel; on visual perception, with Maurice Pirenne. Perhaps the most consistently stimulating exchanges in the collection occur with old friends like Marjorie Grene, Arthur Koestler, and Eugene Wigner whose criticisms and reflections were respected and shared by Michael Polanyi throughout the last twenty years of his life. The range of his thought in these later years was enormous. *The Logic of Personal Knowledge*, a *Festschrift* presented to Polanyi on his seventieth birthday in 1961, contains essays by such prominent thinkers and friends as Arthur Koestler, Raymond Aron, Bertrand de Jouvenel, and C. V. Wedgwood.

After 1960, there are a large number of manuscripts in the collection which help to demonstrate the growth of Polanyi's thought. Of particular interest are the sets of lectures delivered between 1960 and 1971. Included in this group are the 1960 Gunning Lectures, *Perceptions of Personal Knowledge* (34:1-6); the 1962 Terry Lectures (35:6-12); *Man in Thought*, a 1964 Duke University lecture series (36:4-37:3); Wesleyan lectures of 1965, *Man's Place in the Universe* (37:15-38:5); and *Meaning*, lectures and seminars at the University of Chicago in 1969 (39:6-40:1). The majority of philosophical manuscripts

are corrected typescripts of lectures and papers delivered between 1960 and 1972. There are no galley proofs in the collection for any of Polanyi's publications.

Nearly all of the series of research notes are devoted to philosophy. When received, the notes had been divided between "author notes" and "miscellaneous." The miscellaneous notes have been sorted by subject and inventoried. The author notes have been arranged alphabetically by last name of author. Most of this material contains summaries, commentaries, and quotations relating to the work of a specific author. Together these sets of notes formed a reference file which Polanyi could turn to in writing.

Another aspect of Michael Polanyi's life, political involvement, can be traced throughout the collection. Prominence as a scientist and anti-Communist social thinker led Polanyi to recognition as an important commentator on current affairs. Throughout World War II, his letters, articles, and reviews appeared in various British journals, particularly the Manchester *Guardian*. Many of his writings are preserved in the collection of clippings (46:1) and as manuscripts from 1940-1945 years.

Polanyi was a major figure in the debate over intellectual liberty and most particularly the issue of planning in science. He was co-founder with John R. Baker of the Society for Freedom in Science in 1941 (15:1-2). In the post-war period, Polanyi was an active participant in the organization of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and its English affiliate, the Committee on Science and Freedom. His close involvement with these organizations is best illustrated in the correspondence through exchanges with such figures as Raymond Aron, Konstantin A. Jelenski, Shepard Stone, and Michael Josselson. There is also a folder of notes which deals with various activities of the Congress (23:3).

By 1972, the last year for which there are manuscripts in the collection (41:11), age and infirmity had slowed Professor Polanyi's work. His final years were spent at home in Oxford and in a Northampton nursing home. During this period, Polanyi's wife of fifty-six years, Magda Kemeny Polanyi, managed his affairs. She supervised the translation of *Personal Knowledge* into German (43:9-15) and was responsible for decisions concerning the disposition of Professor Polanyi's papers and library. Michael Polanyi died in the hospital at Northampton on February 22, 1976. He was eighty-four.

Organization of the Papers

The papers of Michael Polanyi are a continuing testament to the richness of the philosopher's life. They are a legacy which helps to explain the evolution of scientific genius to philosophy, of economics to intellectual liberty. In order to facilitate an understanding of the evolving nature of Michael Polanyi's career, the papers have been divided into four basic series and organized in a largely chronological framework. They fill forty-six archival boxes and are organized in four series: correspondence (Boxes 1-20); notes (Boxes 21-25, folder 7); manuscripts (25:8-44:11); and memorabilia (44:12-46).

When received, correspondence, manuscripts, notes, and memorabilia had already been sorted by Professor Polanyi's secretary. The correspondence had been arranged alphabetically in yearly files from

1950 to 1975. Earlier correspondence has been grouped together in no particular order. Professor Polanyi's manuscripts were likewise ordered chronologically and labeled by the title given a particular document at the time of its composition and not necessarily by its final title at the time of publication or delivery as a lecture. The notes were segregated into files arranged alphabetically by author and there were several folders of notes labeled "miscellaneous." Memorabilia was scattered throughout the collection in folders of clippings, photographs, and unorganized announcements, invitations and the like. In addition to these relatively clear groupings, a good deal of overlap occurred with notes and letters scattered among the manuscripts. Letters and clippings from Polanyi's mother Cecile had been separately filed. These items (Boxes 18-20 and 46:6-9) have been separated but not further organized.

The original organization has been largely retained. Correspondence is interfiled chronologically with separate categories for certain specific people and organizations. The letters and manuscripts relating to Polanyi's involvement with John R. Baker and the Society for Freedom in Science and Joseph H. Oldham and the Moot are separate as are letters to and from his close friends and colleagues Marjorie Grene and Harry Prosch. Most of the family correspondence has been interfiled, but there is a box of letters from his brother Karl Polanyi and Karl's wife Ilona which covers over fifty years of family history. All the sections of correspondence are filed chronologically with undated and fragmentary letters arranged alphabetically at the end of the series. The correspondence contains letters to Polanyi as well as copies of letters he sent out. An index of selected correspondents has been prepared which calendars letters to and from figures significant in twentieth-century history and scholarship.

Manuscripts in the collection are also arranged chronologically by date of composition. Their order has been determined by the dates ascribed to them by Professor Polanyi when they were originally filed. Thus, a revised version of a paper will generally fall under the year of its revision and not the year of its composition. Exceptions to this ordering occur with manuscripts composed at an earlier period and drawn together for a lecture series. Such manuscripts have been filed by the dates of their lectures. Titles and descriptions of manuscripts are taken from the text and have not been matched with any bibliography of Polanyi's published writings. It is hoped that this approach, respecting the integrity of Polanyi's original organization and titles, will help to illuminate the evolving nature of his thought.

Research notes have been divided into two groups: subject and author. The subject notes are drawn together from inter-related material in the folders originally marked "miscellaneous." "Author notes" are an alphabetical arrangement of Polanyi's files of quotations by and comments on a variety of scientific, political, philosophical, and literary figures. The memorabilia in the collection have been separated into the following categories: photographs and postcards, general memorabilia including announcements, addresses, receipts, etc., and clippings.

The Papers, with Polanyi's library of books, periodicals, and offprints, were purchased by the University of Chicago Library from Professor and Mrs. Polanyi in December 1975. Edward Shils, Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and the Department of Sociology, was instrumental in their acquisition. In accordance with the wishes of the Polanyi family, Polanyi's library of more than 1,500 books was held together as a collection for ten years. In 1994, the collection was dispersed. Photocopies of title pages of the books in the collection have been bound and retained as a

permanent record of the range of works in Michael Polanyi's library.

Further manuscripts by and about Polanyi may be found in other collections in this department: the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* Papers (30:2); The James Franck Papers (6:6); the International Association for Cultural Freedom Papers; and the *Minerva* Papers (12:12-13).

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