SPIES LIKE US?

Scholars, Spies, and Secrets in ICFA’s Archives

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Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives (ICFA)
Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

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March 22, 2015, 9:30 AM
ROBERT WOODS BLISS, 1945

As the depression increased and Nazism gained control of Germany, we knew war was a certainty and that inevitably this country would be sucked into the cataclysm. So we faced the future squarely and decided to transfer Dumbarton Oaks to the University in 1940.
Robert Woods Bliss, 1943

Dumbarton Oaks now presents a strange juxtaposition. One half of the building is devoted to evolving means to kill human beings more speedily and in greater numbers; the other half continues to develop greater knowledge on the artistic creation of man.

One works for the development of the most hideous activity of war, the other for the discovery and preservation of the beauty of human expression.
Princeton Index of Christian Art, acquired 1940
Census of Objects of Early Christian and Byzantine Art in North American Collections, initiated 1938
Census of Byzantine Textiles in North American Collections, initiated 1939
Dumbarton Oaks Research Archive, initiated 1940
O.S.S.

Anyone connected with the Office of Strategic Service 1942-1945, please call 942-8473
DO JUNIOR FELLOWS, 1940-1945

Paul Julius Alexander  
Milton Vasil Anastos  
Margaret Alexander  
Franklin Matthews Biebel  
Herbert Bloch  
Donald Frederic Brown  
Edward Capps  
Mary Emma Crane  
Florence Eli Day  
Elizabeth Ettinghausen  
Alison Frantz  
Rosalie Beth Green  
Josephine Marie Harris  
Lester Clarence Houck  
Andrew Saeger Keck  
Ernst Kitzinger  
Paul Atkins Underwood  
Sister Monica Wagner  
Virginia Grace Wylie  
Stephan George Xydis
On the day of Pearl Harbor, I made an attempt to enlist in the Navy, and was unceremoniously rejected by a yeoman because *my eyes failed to meet naval standards*. Then, after some vicissitudes, I joined the OSS, hoping that my physical defects would be waived by this department of the armed services. After many delays, I finally was examined for a post as an intelligence officer in a parachute division. Then, as a crowning infamy, the examining physician said, "Boy, if we dropped you in a parachute, you would split! You can serve your country here in Washington."

- Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture, 1986
Then, I was taken on by SI (Special Intelligence) and, after a few months, transferred to R and A (Research and Analysis), headed by William Langer a great master of many fields of learning, who exerted enormous influence over the entire operation. Here, I was put in charge of what was designated as the "Greek desk," and found that the organization was dominated by colleagues from the universities, a large number of whom were historians, economists, archaeologists, and philologists, whose specialized training in a great variety of fields fitted them uniquely to provide the kind of analysis and information which were desperately needed for the conduct and planning of the war.

- Charles Homer Haskins Prize Lecture, 1986
I was then given the title of Research Analyst in the part of OSS that was called Research and Analysis, in the geographic section. This of course was a totally new experience from my point of view, in the sense that I suddenly found myself faced with the task of gathering information on roads, factories, gas works, and so on. [...] Everything was always at very short notice. The whole thing had to be ready within a month. Of course we had a whole team of people doing it. So I found myself doing more or less the same thing as I had been doing with excavation sites, only with a terrifically short time limit and absolutely no chance of going into any depth. But the methods were more or less the same: you gathered your material in a file and systematized it and wrote it up. It was a strange continuity there, in a sense. Some preparation for this had already taken place at Dumbarton Oaks, because Harvard had tried to do its bit in the war effort by compiling lists of monuments for protection.

- Art History Oral Documentation Project, Getty Research Institute, 1995
From the 1945 manual
“Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Organization and Functions”
From the 1945 manual “Office of Strategic Services (OSS) Organization and Functions”
From the 1944 manual "Secret Intelligence Field Manual"

e. In conformity with the basic rule of security that no one in the organization be told more than he needs to know to do his own job, a secret intelligence network may be set up along the lines of the cell system, modified to fit prevailing circumstances. The following diagram represents a type of the cell principle:

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HEADQUARTERS
  Operative
    Agent    Agent
    /       \
   /         \
  Agent
    /   \
   /     \
 Sub-agent Sub-agent Sub-agent Sub-agent

Cell No. 1

Sub-agent (chief)
    /   \
   /     \
Sub-agent Sub-agent Sub-agent Sub-agent

Cell No. 2

Sub-agent (chief)
    /   \
   /     \
Sub-agent Sub-agent Sub-agent Sub-agent

Cell No. 3
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The only American I took into my confidence and my personal security in Istanbul was young and spry old Tom Whittemore, the nearly eighty years old archaeologist, who had secured permission from Ataturk in the twenties to restore Santa Sofia to its Byzantine glory. Tom was a born eccentric and a great scholar. He was disliked by the provincial and narrow-minded Americans in our Istanbul colony - if for no other reason than that he went around the city in the ragged overcoat of a private in the Turkish Army and was endowed with wit, taste and a brain.

Tom Whittemore was a great help to me. He knew the Turks well and had friends high in their secret police. On at least one occasion, he was able to save me from an expulsion order issued because of my strange behaviour and too frequent trips into the German controlled Balkans.

- From *The Scarlet Thread: Adventures in Wartime Espionage*, 1953
The last three times I saw Tom are characteristic of his eccentricities: on Ascension Island in the South Pacific in 1942 dressed as a Kurd peasant in quilted clothes and a goatskin coat, casually changing planes; alone one summer midnight in 1944 throwing stones at a desert fox on the hillside behind the Sphinx in Egypt; and the last time at a reception given by Umberto in the great hall of the Quirinal Palace in Rome to the new cardinals created by the Consistory of 1946; the huge doors opened and Umberto entered, not with his royal wife on his royal arm - but with Tom! When I asked him how he came to be substituting for Her Royal Highness he screwed up his nose and winked, 'I'm just an old friend of the family.'

Tom died in 1950. You couldn't ignore him. You could hate him or love him. I loved him.

- From *The Scarlet Thread: Adventures in Wartime Espionage*, 1953
The green metal file box was about the size and shape of an ammunition case. It was scuffed and serious-looking and packed tight with personal letters and papers that had belonged to my grandfather, who died in 1989. The line in the family had always been that he “did intelligence work in Washington after the war.” This file box gave up a better story... What I found was The Case of the Sudden Death of Thomas Whittemore.

Thomas Whittemore was a dashing and colorful archaeologist and preservationist, a mash-up of Indiana Jones, Oscar Wilde and Tom Wolfe. A prized dinner guest and an excellent fund-raiser, he was the founder of the deliciously named “Byzantine Institute, Inc.” (offices in Boston, Paris and Istanbul). He is remembered primarily as the man who convinced Mustafa Kemal Ataturk to let him preserve the mosaics of the Hagia Sophia.

Robert Van Nice Personnel File at National Archives and Records Administration
SECRET
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

TO: Lt. E. G. Seer
(Chief, Finance Branch, or Chief, Special Funds Branch)

FROM: X-2 Branch
(Office or Branch)

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR FINANCE OFFICER'S APPROVAL

It is requested that this travel be approved on the basis of availability of funds to be expended for travel under the conditions and to the destination described below:

Traveler or group leader: Van Hise, Robert Lawrence

Address (Residence or quarters): 1401 Fairmont Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. Tel. No. KI-3150

Starting point: Washington, D.C.

Official station: Washington, D.C.

Destination: X-2 Branch, London

Most direct route to London, England

Change of status:

Permanently:

From: Washington, D.C.
To: X-2 Branch, London

Official courier:

Secret

Special funds:

Estimated expense: $500

Traveling expense:

Officer charged:

X-2 Branch, London

Authority No. 47587

By: NARA Date 9-23-44
The Nation

Scientists as Spies

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

Sir: In his war address to Congress, President Wilson dwelt at great length on the theory that only autocrats maintain spies; that these are not nested in democracies. At the time that the President made this statement, the Government of the United States had in its employ spies of unknown number. I am not concerned here with the familiar discrepancies between the President's words and the actual facts, although we may perhaps have to accept his statement as meaning correctly that we live under an autocracy; that our democracy is a fiction. The point against which I wish to enter a vigorous protest is that a number of men who follow science as their profession, men whom I refuse to designate any longer as scientists, have prostituted science by using it as a cover for their activities as spies.

A soldier whose business is murder as a fine art, a diplomat whose calling is based on deception and machination, a politician whose very life consists in compromises with his conscience, a businessman whose aim is personal profit within the limits allowed by a licentious law—such men must be excused. If they set patriotic devotion above common everyday decency and perform services as spies. They merely accept the code of morality to which modern society still conforms. Not so the scientist. The very essence of his life is the science of truthfulness. We all know scientists who in private life do not come up to the standard of truthfulness, but who, nevertheless, would not consciously falsify the results of their researches. It is bad enough if we have to put up with these, because they reveal a lack of strength of character that is liable to distort the results of their work. A person, however, who uses science as a cover for political spying, who demeanes himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researches in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist.

By accident, incontrovertible proof has come to my hands that at least four men who carry on anthropological work, while employed as government agents, introduced themselves to foreign governments as representatives of scientific institutions in the United States, and as sent out for the purpose of carrying on scientific researches. They have not only subverted the belief in the truthfulness of science, but they have also done the greatest possible disservice to scientific inquiry. In consequence of their acts every nation will look with distrust upon the visiting foreign investigator who wants to do honest work, expecting sinister designs. Such action has raised a new barrier against the development of international friendly cooperation.

New York, October 16

FRANZ BOAS
American Library Association
Code of Ethics

III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.

IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.

Society of American Archivists
Code of Ethics

Archivists recognize that privacy is sanctioned by law. They establish procedures and policies to protect the interests of the donors, individuals, groups, and institutions whose public and private lives and activities are recorded in their holdings. As appropriate, archivists place access restrictions on collections to ensure that privacy and confidentiality are maintained, particularly for individuals and groups who have no voice or role in collections’ creation, retention, or public use. [...] Archivists respect all users’ rights to privacy by maintaining the confidentiality of their research and protecting any personal information collected about the users in accordance with their institutions’ policies.
ROBERT L. VAN NICE FIELDWORK RECORDS AND PAPERS, ca. 1936-1989

Repository: Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives,
Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C.

Location: ICFA Stacks

Identifier: MS.BZ.012

Collection Title: Robert L. Van Nice Records and Fieldwork Papers, ca. 1936-1989

Primary Creator: Van Nice, Robert Lawrence, 1910-1994

Secondary Creators: Emerson, William, 1873-1957
Mainstone, Rowland J., 1923-1997
Fieldwork and drafting assistants

Inclusive Dates: ca. 1936-1989

Languages: English, Turkish, French, German, and Italian

Quantity: 64 boxes of correspondence, administrative records, research materials, photographs, and drawings; 22 boxes with approximately 6,600 negatives (film and glass), transparencies, slides (35 mm and lantern), and microfilm; approximately 2,300 oversize architectural drawings and plans

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection documents the architectural survey of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, Turkey, conducted by Robert L. Van Nice from the late 1930s to the 1980s. The project was sponsored by William Emerson, Dean of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), from 1937 until Emerson’s death in 1957. The project was then sponsored by Dumbarton Oaks until Van Nice’s retirement in 1989.

Materials in the collection include administrative records, correspondence, research notes, drafts, publications, architectural drawings, rubbings, photographs, slides, and negatives. The bulk of the material in the collection dates from the early 1940s through the late 1960s, when most of the intensive fieldwork took place at Hagia Sophia. The records represent all aspects of the project:
Scholars Margaret Mullett and Annemarie Weyl Carr researching Byzantine Institute photographs
Rearranging and rehousing the Robert Van Nice Archive
Wrapping negatives for long-term cold storage
Interviewing Sarah Underwood about her parents, Paul and Irene Underwood
If ever the humanities were necessary... it is in this epoch of disintegration and dislocation

- Mildred Barnes Bliss to Paul Sachs, May 9, 1042