

# Guide to the Theophil Mitchell Prudden Papers

MS 1051



compiled by Barbara L. Narendra

June 1981

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Manuscripts and Archives  
Yale University Library  
P.O. Box 208240  
New Haven, CT 06520-8240  
(203) 432-1735  
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

**CALL NUMBER:** MS 1051

**CREATOR:** Prudden, T. Mitchell (Theophil Mitchell), 1849-1924

**TITLE:** Theophil Mitchell Prudden papers

**DATES:** 1872-1925

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2 linear feet (6 boxes, 1 folio)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Chiefly correspondence relating to medicine, public health and details on laboratory techniques at the turn of the century. Important medical correspondents include Richard H. Derby, Alva H. Doty, Henry Hun, Abraham Jacobi, Charles McBurney, W.P. Northrup, Edward L. Trudeau, Ira Van Gieson, William Henry Welch, and in Germany, Julius Arnold, Robert Koch and Rudolf Virchow. Prudden's interest in the Indians of Southwestern United States is documented in his correspondence with anthropologists and writers on the West such as George Grant MacCurdy, George H. Pepper, C. Hart Merriam, F. W. Hodge, F.S. Dellenbaugh, and Charles F. Lummis. Also in the papers are photographs of Prudden, biographical notes, memorabilia and writings (1875-1910). Among these are his dissertation, typescripts of published and unpublished essays, pamphlets and clippings, all largely on public health. Diaries of two scientific expeditions, one with G.H. Isham to Eastport, Maine in 1872 and the other with O.C. Marsh to the West in 1873 are the earliest items in the papers.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1051>

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To order reproductions from this collection, please go to [http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr\\_copy\\_order.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html). The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.        box

f. folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Probably given to Yale University by Lillian Prudden, sister of T.M. Prudden.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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### Conditions Governing Use

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### Preferred Citation

Theophil Mitchell Prudden Papers (MS 1051). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

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### Existence and Location of Copies

Notebook from scientific expedition to the West in 1873 is available on microfilm (1 reel, 35mm.) from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, at cost. Order no. HM117.

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## Biographical / Historical

Theophil Mitchell Prudden, pioneering American pathologist and bacteriologist, was born on July 7, 1849, in Middlebury, Connecticut. He was the fourth son of George Peter and Eliza (Johnson) Prudden. His father, a Congregational minister, was a descendant of the Reverend Peter Prudden, one of the original settlers of the New Haven Colony and the founder, in 1639, of Milford, Connecticut.

After preparation at the Wilbraham (Massachusetts) Academy, Prudden attended Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, receiving the Ph.B. degree in 1872. The school's premedical program, which included instruction in chemistry, zoology, and botany, was initiated for him and another student. Prudden's thesis for graduation was on the fiddler crab. He did more work on marine crustaceans in the summer of 1872 as a member of a dredging party in Eastport, Maine led by A.E. Verrill, professor of zoology at Yale, and Spencer F. Baird of the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries. In June, 1873, he joined Professor O.C. Marsh's fourth student expedition to the West in search of vertebrate fossils. He wrote about their adventure for the *New York Tribune*.

From 1872 to 1874 Prudden taught chemistry at the Sheffield Scientific School while attending Yale's medical school (M.D., 1875). After further medical study in New York and a year's internship in the New Haven Hospital, Prudden studied for nearly two years more in Heidelberg, Vienna, and Berlin. In 1878 he was appointed assistant to Dr. Francis Delafield, director of the new Laboratory of the Alumni Association of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York. Prudden himself became director in 1882. From 1880 to 1886 he was also a lecturer at Yale's medical school. In 1885, at the request of the Connecticut State Board

of Health, he returned to Germany to study the new science of bacteriology with Robert Koch. After the College of Physicians and Surgeons was turned over to Columbia, Prudden was appointed first professor of pathology in the Columbia University Medical College in 1892. In 1897 he received the honorary degree of LL.D. from Yale University for his services to the cause of medical science. He had an important role in planning the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, and after his retirement from Columbia in 1909 he continued to work until his death as a member of the Institute's Board of Scientific Directors.

Prudden never married. He died of heart disease in New York City on April 10, 1924. A younger sister, Lillian E. Prudden of New Haven, survived him.

"Prudden was a splendid teacher, a lucid speaker, for a long time the central figure in the scientific medical life of New York City." (Francis Carter Wood, "Prudden, Theophil Mitchell," in *Dictionary of American Biography*). He was a member of numerous medical and public health organizations and committees, and was responsible for much of the development of municipal and state public health service in New York. He wrote newspaper editorials and drafted bills for state and national legislation on public health matters. His pathology and histology textbooks, which went through many editions, were standard texts in medical schools. His popularly written and widely-read books like *Dust and its Dangers* (1890) urged improved sanitation as a means of combatting the bacterially-caused diseases such as tuberculosis which were then major public health problems.

Prudden's summers for many years were spent in Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona, where he explored and mapped ancient Indian dwellings. His guides were the Wetherill brothers—Richard, Alfred, John, Clayton, and Winslow—who were ranchers, traders, and serious amateur archaeologists. (Richard Wetherill was the discoverer of the Mesa Verde ruins in Colorado, and he named the "basket-maker" culture.) Prudden published several papers and a book on the ruins of the Southwest. He gave to Yale's Peabody Museum his own collection of Indian antiquities (1906) and a collection of photographs (1912).

Biographical accounts of Prudden agree that he was reserved and hard to get to know well and that he had few close friends. His best friend for a decade was George W. Hawes (1848-1882)—classmate, roommate, and fellow instructor at the Sheffield Scientific School. Hawes was one of the earliest petrographers in this country. Not long after becoming Director of the Geological Department of the U.S. National Museum, he died of tuberculosis. Prudden, as his only beneficiary, was bequeathed Hawes' books and personal effects.

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## Scope and Contents

Theophil Mitchell Prudden's papers span the years 1872-1925, but are most nearly complete only from the time he hired a secretary in 1896 until his health began to fail in approximately 1906. Consequently, although Prudden was in the forefront of the development of bacteriological and pathological science in this country, there is comparatively little documentation of the first 18 years of his professional life, during which much of his pioneering laboratory, teaching, and public health work was accomplished. These papers - of which the bulk is correspondence - picture an already prominent and respected scientist, administrator, teacher, author, and mentor.

The papers were probably given to Yale by his sister, Lillian Prudden, who edited and published some of the correspondence and other material in *Biographical Sketches and Letters of T. Mitchell Prudden, M.D.* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1927). Interfiled here with the original letters are typed duplicate copies used in preparation of the book, as well as English translations of some letters in German. Marginalia appearing on some letters are also related to the book's preparation. Other materials quoted by Miss Prudden, such as family correspondence and Prudden's "autobiographical notes," are not to be found in the papers.

Series I, CORRESPONDENCE, has been separated into two sections: *General Correspondence* and *Anthropological Correspondence*. The original chronological order has been retained in each. Most of Prudden's letters are typed and are in the form of unsigned retained carbon copies.

The *General Correspondence* is mainly concerned with Prudden's professional life. The earliest material relates to his medical studies at Yale and in Germany from 1875 to 1878. By far the largest part falls in the years he had regular secretarial help. There are annual gaps during the summer months while Prudden was vacationing. The almost complete absence of professional correspondence from July 1906 to October

1908—only one incoming letter is included—may indicate the loss of one of the ringed binders in which the correspondence was originally contained. In addition, when the correspondence was removed from the binders, paper remnants indicated that from 250 to 300 letters had been ripped out. There is almost no family and personal correspondence.

The *General Correspondence* deals largely with medical and public health topics or Prudden's routine laboratory and administrative work. It provides information on laboratory techniques at the turn of the century, theories of the cause of disease, politics and the progress of public health. A letter from Prudden to New York City mayor Seth Low (1901 Nov 11; 7 pages) recommending Hermann M. Biggs for Commissioner of Health gives a history of the New York Health Department and Dr. Biggs's role in its development.

Prudden's opinion and advice were asked on matters ranging from candidates for medical positions, purification of water supplies, and cremation (1906 May 4 and 8), to the proper design of a morgue table (1896 Nov 5). Resistance to antivivisection legislation is a recurrent topic (e.g., 1896 Jun 6; 1899 Feb 3 and 10; 1909 Mar 2, 11 letters to state senators). In a letter describing the Department of Pathology (1902 Sep 17, in reply to one of Jul 18), Prudden wrote: "We have material from between five and six hundred autopsies yearly, and aside from this a large number, frequently more than a thousand each year, of various kinds of pathological specimens for examination." Some of these specimens and others are the subjects of correspondence. *General Correspondence* and WRITINGS both contain material on the quarantine in the Port of New York, 1892.

The sparse correspondence of Prudden's later years tends to point up his health problems; most of these letters were written from places of convalescence or vacation. He was described as working actively for the Rockefeller Institute during his last 15 years (and even going there as usual on his last day), but there is not much to document it. This suggests that some letters of this period are missing or elsewhere.

Correspondents include notable doctors of the time such as Richard H. Derby, Alva H. Doty, Henry Hun ("Henry"), Abraham Jacobi, Charles McBurney, W.P. Northrup ("Kernel"), Edward L. Trudeau, Ira Van Gieson, William Henry Welch, and in Germany, Julius Arnold, Robert Koch, and Rudolf Virchow.

*Anthropological Correspondence* centers on Prudden's deep interest in the ancient Indian inhabitants of the American Southwest. Much of it is with the Wetherills about the summer trips or their own excavations and discoveries. Many letters concern photographs—of sites, artifacts, or people—especially those needed for Prudden's publications. Correspondents include professional anthropologists and popular writers on western exploration and Indian lore such as George Grant MacCurdy at Yale, George H. Pepper, C. Hart Merriam, F.W. Hodge, F.S. Dellenbaugh, and Charles F. Lummis. The correspondence of 1910 is concerned solely with the murder of Richard Wetherill by a Navajo Indian.

Series II, WRITINGS, includes pamphlets, clippings, and published and unpublished typescripts; some are anonymous or written by others, but most are the work of Prudden. The bulk of the writings deals with public health matters such as quarantine in the Port of New York and the United States (1892-1893, 1897-1898) and a proposed U.S. Bureau of Public Health (1893-1897). The earliest item is a draft of Prudden's dissertation for the M.D. degree, "The present use of the sphygmograph in clinical medicine" (1875). One folder contains miscellaneous material (such as lists of personnel, course descriptions, and annual reports) concerning the Department of Pathology, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University (1886-1904). Also included are an unpublished (?) account of the murder of Richard Wetherill (ca. 1910), obituaries of Prudden's colleagues, particularly of Hermann M. Biggs (1923), and two folders of undated and incomplete typescripts (medical and anthropological). Other writings are filed as enclosures to correspondence, particularly drafts for newspaper editorials and materials on legislative bills.

Series III, PHOTOGRAPHS, BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL, AND MEMORABILIA, includes material by Prudden, about Prudden, and by and about others.

Earliest are two leather-bound diaries kept by Prudden during the summers with Professor Verrill's dredging party in Eastport, Maine (1872) and Professor Marsh's expedition to the West (1873), which were the gift of Lillian Prudden in 1931. Each contains a list of plants observed by him. Found inside the diary of the Marsh expedition were papers concerning its finances, clippings, and a map of an area in northern

Nebraska which could have been used during the trip. This diary has been microfilmed: Hist. Mss. Film No. 117 (one reel).

The series includes autobiographical material in the form of short sketches and lists of publications. There are photographs of Prudden at various ages. One folder contains the correspondence of his colleagues and former students who contributed funds for a portrait to be painted of him at the time of his retirement (1909). A folder of writings about Prudden contains some information not found elsewhere, including extensive memorials and reminiscences by several of his colleagues. The only anthropological material is a pamphlet advertising the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company and the Wetherill ranch at Mancos, Colorado, filed with miscellaneous clippings. A folder of the writings of George W. Hawes contains the manuscripts of two talks for classroom presentation: "Our trap rocks" and "Our red sandstones - both on the geology of the New Haven area - and "Ram Cat Resplendent," an account of a rowdy political meeting in rural North Carolina, which Hawes and Prudden toured on a botanizing trip in the summer of 1874.

The series concludes with "Ancestral tablets," a book of printed genealogical diagrams filled in in MS. This volume records the ancestry of Philip Schuyler Beebe, II (1882-1908), the only child of William Beebe (1851-1917; Yale B.A. 1873; Professor of Mathematics and Instructor in Astronomy at Yale from 1898 to 1917) and Elizabeth Francis (Febiger) Beebe. It is not clear why this is included in the Prudden papers, although among loose papers inside the book is a letter to "My dear Lillie" which may have been addressed to Lillian Prudden.

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## Arrangement

The papers are arranged in three series: I. Correspondence, 1875-1924. II. Writings, 1875-1923. III. Photographs, Biographical Material, and Memorabilia, 1872-1925.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1875-1924

CORRESPONDENCE is divided into two sections: *General Correspondence* and *Anthropological Correspondence*. Each is arranged chronologically.

#### General Correspondence

b. 1, f. 1-16	1875-1896 Oct, 1896 November-1898 December	1875-1896 Oct, 1896 November- 1898 December
b. 2, f. 17-33	1899-1900, 1901 March-October 2-1901 December	1899-1900, 1901 March- October 2-1901 December
b. 3, f. 34-55	1902 January-November 15, November 17-1905	1902 January- November 15, November 17- 1905
b. 4, f. 56-62	1906 January-Jun, 1907-1924, n.d	1906 January- Jun, 1907-1924, n.d
b. 4, f. 63	Fragments and unidentified	

#### Anthropological Correspondence

b. 4, f. 64-75	1896-1897 May-Dec, 1907, 1910-1924	1896-1897 May- Dec, 1907, 1910- 1924
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**Series II: Writings, 1875-1923, undated***0.25 linear feet (1 box)*

WRITINGS is arranged in rough chronological order.

b. 5, f. 76	Draft of dissertation for Yale M.D.: "The present use of the sphygmograph in clinical medicine,"	1875
b. 5, f. 77	Material re: Department of Pathology, College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University	1886-1904
b. 5, f. 78-81	1892-1898	1892-1898
b. 5, f. 82	1901-1910	1901-1910
	Memorial of John Slade Ely See: <a href="#">box 4, folder 56</a>	1906 March 30
b. 5, f. 83	"Richard Wetherill," English	Circa 1910
b. 5, f. 84	1913-1923	1913-1923
b. 5, f. 85-86	undated	undated

## Series III: Photographs, Biographical Material, and Memorabilia, 1872-ca. 1925

0.25 linear feet (1 box)

b. 6, f. 87	Diary: "Eastport notes"	1872
b. 6, f. 88reel 1U	Diary: "Notes on trip with Professor O.C. Marsh in 1873 to collect fossils in West," related clippings, and memorabilia This material has been microfilmed. Patrons must use HM 117 instead of the originals. See also: Folio I	1872
b. 6, f. 89	Autobiographical material	undated
b. 6, f. 90	Photographs	undated
b. 6, f. 91	Correspondence of Dr. Eugene Hodenpyl re: portrait of Theophil Mitchell Prudden (TMP)	1909
b. 6, f. 92	Writings about TMP: clippings, obituaries, and memorials	1891-ca. 1925
b. 6, f. 93	Miscellaneous clippings	undated
b. 6, f. 94	Writings of George W. Hawes	undated
b. 6, f. 95	"Ancestral tablets"	1894, 1897, undated
b. 7	Map: "Trail of scout of Co' I Third Cavalry...1872...Drawn by Lt. E.Z. Steever, Jr. Co' I 3rd Cay."	1872

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## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### Subjects

Indians of North America -- Southwest, New  
Medicine -- United States  
Public health

### Geographic Names

West (U.S.)

### Genres / Formats

Diaries

### Occupations

Bacteriologists  
Pathologists

### Names

Arnold, Julius, 1835-1915  
Biggs, Hermann M. (Hermann Michael),  
1859-1923  
Dellenbaugh, Frederick Samuel, 1853-1935  
Derby, Richard Henry, 1844-  
Doty, Alvah H. (Alvah Hunt), 1854-  
Hodge, Frederick Webb, 1864-1956  
Hun, Henry, 1854-1924  
Jacobi, A. (Abraham), 1830-1919  
Koch, Robert, 1843-1910  
Low, Seth, 1850-1916  
Lummis, Charles Fletcher, 1859-1928  
MacCurdy, George Grant, 1863-1947  
Marsh, Othniel Charles, 1831-1899  
McBurney, Charles, 1845-1913  
Merriam, C. Hart (Clinton Hart), 1855-1942  
Northrup, William Perry  
Pepper, George H. (George Hubbard), 1873-1924  
Prudden, T. Mitchell (Theophil Mitchell),  
1849-1924  
Trudeau, Edward Livingston, 1848-1915  
Van Gieson, Ira, 1866?-1913  
Virchow, Rudolf, 1821-1902  
Welch, William Henry, 1850-1934  
Wetherill, Richard, 1858-1910