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Yale Divinity Library

Guide to the William H. Poteat Papers

RG 243



Martha Lund Smalley

2016

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Yale Divinity Library
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<http://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/special-collections>

CALL NUMBER: RG 243

CREATOR: Poteat, William H.

TITLE: William H. Poteat Papers

DATES: 1954–2018

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 3 linear feet (6 boxes)

LANGUAGE: In English .

SUMMARY: This collection documents the thought and work of William H. Poteat, a Yale Divinity School graduate who taught at Duke University from 1960 to 1987. The material was gathered by Walter B. Mead, who contacted former students and colleagues of Poteat, asking them to provide writings and correspondence of Poteat that document his contributions to the field of philosophy of religion.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.243>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/divinity.243>.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Walter B. Mead and others, 2011, 2014, 2015

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Preferred Citation

William H. Poteat Papers (RG 243), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

Biographical / Historical

See Box 1, Folder 1 for a more detailed chronology of Poteat's life and work, particularly as it relates to thought of Michael Polanyi.

Chronology

- 1919 April 19 ○ William Hardman Poteat (WHP) was born in China, the son of Baptist missionaries and a member of a long line of North Carolina educators. He spent the first ten years of his life in China.
- 1937 ○ Completed his high school education in Raleigh, North Carolina
- 1941 ○ B.A. degree from Oberlin College with Phi Beta Kappa honors
- 1944 ○ B.D. Yale Divinity School
- 1944-1947 ○ Served as a program coordinator for the YMCA at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill
- 1947 ○ Joined the faculty of the Philosophy Department at the University of North Carolina as instructor. Philosophy of Religion was immediately, and would remain throughout his teaching career, a major area of concentration.
- 1951 ○ Ph.D. Duke University
- 1955 ○ Having risen to the rank of associate professor at UNC, Poteat received an Outstanding Teaching Award in 1955
- 1958-1959 ○ Taught at Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, TX
- 1960-1987 ○ Joined Duke University Divinity School faculty as an associate professor of Christianity and Culture
- 1968-1987 ○ Joined the Department of Religion at Duke University, increasing his role in advising and directing doctoral theses
- 1968 ○ Poteat and his colleague, Thomas A. Langford, completed their editorial work on *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, published that year by the Duke University Press for the Lilly Endowment Research Program in Christianity and Politics.
- 1969 ○ Named to the National Humanities Faculty
- 1972-1978 ○ Chaired the Department of Religion at Duke University
- 1985 ○ *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* published by the Duke University Press
- 1987-2000 ○ Professor Emeritus, Duke University
- 1990 ○ *A Philosophical Daybook: Post-Critical Investigations* published by the University of Missouri Press

Chronology

- 1994 ○ *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection* published by the State University of New York Press
- 1994-1999 ○ Taught in the adult education program at Athens College (a part of the State University of New York system) in Greece, where his wife, Patricia Poteat, served as president, 1994 – 1999
- 2000 May 17 ○ Died after an extended illness. He was survived by his wife, Patricia; three children, Susan Poteat Uhler; Anne Carlyle; and Edwin McNeill Poteat III; three grandchildren; and his two sisters, Haley McGill and Elizabeth Terry

Scope and Contents

The documentation contained in this collection was gathered from 2009-2014 at the impetus of Walter B. Mead. Mead was a doctoral student in Political Science at Duke University, 1960-1963, at the beginning of Poteat's career at Duke, and he later became greatly influenced by Poteat's writings and a close friend. Mead contacted former students of William Poteat, and others influenced by him, asking them to provide writings and correspondence of Poteat. The collection has been organized according to the contributors of the material, in order to retain information about the varied provenance of the material.

This collection consists of both classroom and public lectures (in both written and audio format) by William H. Poteat, an audio interview of him by one of his students, extensive correspondence between Professor Poteat and his students (and a few who had never taken his courses or seminars), essays and segments of his books in various stages of draft form, his doctoral dissertation, course notes taken by some of his students, and some journalistic clippings relating to Professor Poteat. It also includes reflective observations by those who had conversed with Poteat as readers of his writings, and by those privileged to have had, also, extensive personal contact with him as friends or colleagues, as well as those who participated, between 1968 and 1978 in annual, multi-day, informal, "retreat" symposiums, often traveling from distant parts of the United States in order to reflect upon and extend their earlier learning experiences with him. (These gatherings came to be known as the 'Dutch Creek Falls' symposiums after a location in North Carolina where the group often met. To get a sense of the characteristic conviviality of those who came under the charismatic influence of Professor Poteat, read "A Reflection on the Ethos of the 'Poteat Bunch'," in the file of James W. Stines, the principal symposium convener.) Copies of William H. Poteat's obituaries are also included in this collection; also a complete bibliography of his published writings, a general, chronological outline of his life and career, four brief intellectual biographies of Poteat, and an essay that addresses the question of how his thinking relates to that of his chief mentor, Michael Polanyi.

In order to facilitate an introduction of Professor Poteat to the scholar who comes fairly new to these materials, the following have been pulled from the files of the individual contributors to this collection and placed, together with this present "Description of the William Hardman Poteat Collection," in an introductory section to provide a relatively brief overview of the person and of the significance of his scholarly contributions: a) A Chronology of William H. Poteat's Life and Career; b) The Question of Whether William Poteat is a 'Polanyian'; c) A Bibliography of Poteat's Published Writings; d) Two Brief Intellectual Biographies, by Ronald L. Hall and R. Taylor Scott, Assessing Poteat's Contributions as a Philosopher; e) A Brief Intellectual Biography by James W. Stines, Assessing Poteat's Contributions as a Theologian.

Arrangement

- I. Poteat Documentation, 1954-2010
- II. Audio Recordings, 1966-2008
- III. Writings of Poteat

Collection Contents

Series I: Poteat Documentation, 1954-2010

Introductory material		
b. 1, f. 1	Essay on "The Question of Whether William Poteat is a 'Polanyian'"	
b. 1, f. 2	Bibliography of Poteat's Published Writings; Two Brief Intellectual Biographies, by Ronald L. Hall and R. Taylor Scott, Assessing Poteat's Contributions as a Philosopher; A Brief Intellectual Biography by James W. Stines, Assessing Poteat's Contributions as a Theologian	
b. 5, f. 1	List of doctoral dissertations supervised by Poteat, 1962-1985	ca. 1985
b. 5, f. 2	Tributes to Poteat, including "Words of Farewell" by Patricia Lewis Poteat	2000
b. 6, f. 6	Issue of <i>Tradition & Discovery</i> The Polanyi Society Periodical, with papers related to Poteat by several authors, from symposium held at special meeting of Polanyi Society, June 2008 (Volume XXXV Number 2)	2008
Material contributed by Ellen W. Bernal		
b. 5, f. 3	Handouts from seminars taught by Poteat; footnote from dissertation of Bernal Including "Critical Thought and the Project of Merleau-Ponty"; "The Obviousness and Triviality of Polanyi"; "Some Notes Written in the Margins of Michael Polanyi's <i>Personal Knowledge</i> While Reading it for the Umpteenth Time..."	1974-1980
b. 6, f. 1	Handouts from seminars taught by Poteat	1971-1975
b. 6, f. 2	Notes from seminars taught by Poteat	1971-1975
b. 6, f. 3	Seminar papers	1970-1972
b. 6, f. 4	Bernal's dissertation: "The Meaning of Embodiment in the Thought of Michael Polanyi and Maurice Merleau-Ponty" (William Poteat, supervisor)	1980
Material contributed by Gus Breytspraak		
b. 1, f. 3	Writings of WHP: "Further Notes in the Margins of Michael Polanyi's <i>Personal Knowledge</i> , January-May, 1976"	1976
b. 1, f. 4	Course-related: "Theology and Art: Religion 81 - A Selected Bibliography" by WHP	ca. 1967-1968
Material contributed by Dale Cannon		
b. 1, f. 5	Correspondence: WHP to Dale Cannon	1968-1975
b. 1, f. 6	Writings of WHP: Autobiographical sketch for <i>Duke Divinity School Review</i> ; "The Body of Speech: An Essay in Linguistic Metanoia"; "A Few Words About Words"	1964, n.d.

Material contributed by Dale Cannon (continued)

b. 1, f. 7	Writings of WHP: "Discussion: What is a Poem About?"; "In Search of a Post-Critical Logic: A Prospectus"; Letter to the editor of the <i>Daily News</i> captioned "What Did Goldwater Mean?" (excerpts); "Sixteen Books That Made a Difference: Philosophy and Religion Since WWII"; "Some Notes on the Status of Language in Modernity and the Quarrel of Kierkegaard with Hegel and Danish Hegelianism"; "U.N.C.-Duke Colloquy on Graduate Education - A Position Paper"; "Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology and Action: Some Polanyian Meditations"	1957,1977, n.d.
b. 1, f. 8	Bibliographies and book reviews by WHP	ca. 1960-1967
b. 1, f. 9	Course-related: "Contemporary Western Culture"; "Theology and Art"	n.d.
b. 1, f. 10	About WHP: "A Reflection on the Ethos of the 'Poteat Bunch'" by James Stines	n.d.
Material contributed by Ronald L. Hall		
b. 5, f. 4	"Introduction of Bill Poteat to the Polanyi Society"; book review, reader's report, letter written by Poteat to Hall	1993, no date
Material contributed by Richard P. Heitzenrater		
b. 5, f. 5	Bibliography and notes for course on "Theology and Art" - Religion 81, Duke University	no date
Material contributed by Murray Jardine		
b. 1, f. 11	Correspondence: WHP to/from Houston Craighead; WHP to James Stines	1987, 1989
b. 1, f. 12	Writings of WHP: "Christianity and the European Enlightenment"; "A Commentary"; "Drawing Hands"; "A Few Ontological Left-overs"; "For Whom is the Real Existence of Values a Problem"	n.d.
b. 1, f. 13	Writings of WHP: "Foundationalism/Anti-Foundationalism"; "The Meaning of Religious Language - Handout"; "Memory and Imagination"	1987, 1989, n.d.
b. 1, f. 14	Writings of WHP: "Paul Cézanne and the Numinous Power of the Real"; "Persons and Places: Paradigms in Communication"; "Some Reflections on Method"; "Further Reflections on Method"; "A Skeleton Key to Arendt's <i>The Human Condition</i> "; Untitled, re. spirit	n.d.
b. 5, f. 6	Seminar handout "A Skeleton Key to Arendt's <i>The Human Condition</i> "	no date
Material contributed by Benjamin Ladner		
b. 5, f. 7	Correspondence, including Poteat to/from Ladner	1968-1993
b. 5, f. 8	Writings of Poteat, including "The Voice of Orpheus"; "Reflections on Walker Percy's Theory of Language"	1968, 1975, no date
b. 5, f. 9	Seminar handout, summer seminar proposal, writings re. Evangelos Moustakas	1970-1981, no date
b. 5, f. 10	Writings of re. Poteat, including eulogy delivered by Ladner	1994-2001, no date

Material contributed by Walter B. Mead

Material contributed by Walter B. Mead (continued)

b. 1, f. 15	Correspondence: WHP to/from Walter B. Mead (WBM)	1988-1995
b. 1, f. 16	Correspondence: WHP to/from WBM	1996-1999
b. 2, f. 17	Correspondence: WBM to/from Patricia Poteat (wife of WHP)	1996-2006
b. 2, f. 18	Correspondence: WBM and WHP with publishers	1989-1992
b. 2, f. 19	Correspondence: WBM to/from various individuals re. WHP, Polanyi Society	1994-2008
b. 2, f. 20	Writings of WHP: "Foreknowledge and Foreordination: A Critique of Models of Knowledge"; "Memory and Imagination"; "Prolegomenon"; "Some Remarks on Walter Mead's Essay, 'Poteat's Philosophical Anthropology'"	1960, 1997, n.d.
b. 2, f. 21	About WHP: News release re. death; memorial service program; "Remembering Bill Poteat" by Ronald L. Hall	2000
b. 2, f. 22	About WHP: <i>Tradition Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical</i> , Volume XXI, No. 1, 1994-1995: Essays on WHP by J. W. Stines, Benjamin Ladner, Bruce Haddox, Dale Cannon, Walter B. Mead, E. M. Adams	1995
b. 2, f. 23	About WHP: <i>Tradition Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical</i> , Volume XXXV, No. 2, 2008-2009: Essays on WHP by Walter B. Mead, Gus Breytspraak, Ronald L. Hall, Dale Cannon, D.M. Yeager, J. W. Stines, Robert T. Osborn, Kieran Cashell	2009
b. 2, f. 24	About WHP: <i>Tradition Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical</i> , Volume XXXVI, No. 2, 2009-2010: Essays on WHP by Phil Mullins, R. Melvin Keiser, Elizabeth Newman, Murray Jardine, Araminta Stone Johnston, John Berkman	2010
b. 2, f. 25	About WHP: "William H. Poteat: <i>A Laudatio</i> " by R. Taylor Scott; "William Poteat: the Primacy of the Person" by David Rutledge in <i>A ppraisal: The Journal of the Society for Post-Critical and Personalist Studies</i>	2008, n.d.
b. 2, f. 26	About WHP: Notes, transcriptions by WBM	1993-2008
Material contributed by Elizabeth Newman		
b. 2, f. 27	Correspondence: WHP to Elizabeth Newman	1991-1998
b. 2, f. 28	Writings of WHP: "Reflections Engendered by the Sentence: '...Central to the Biblical concept of covenant...is the notion that who we are and how we come to know restes in our bondedness with others through our words and deeds', from Elizabeth Newman's essay 'Theology and Science'"	n.d.
Material contributed by David H. Nikkel		
b. 5, f. 11	Seminar handouts, including "Some Reflections"	no date
b. 5, f. 12	Papers written by Nikkel for Poteat seminars	1977
b. 5, f. 13	Published writings of Nikkel related to Poteat, including <i>Radical Embodiment</i> , <i>Pantheism in Hartshorne and Tillich</i>	1995, 2008
Material contributed by Diane Yeager		
b. 5, f. 14	Poteat recommendation for Yeager NEH seminar proposal	1994

Material contributed by David Rutledge

Material contributed by David Rutledge (continued)

b. 2, f. 29	Correspondence: WHP to David Rutledge	1988-1995
b. 2, f. 30	Writings by WHP: Sketch written for "Focus on Faculty", <i>Duke Divinity School Review</i>	1964
Material contributed by Milton Scarborough		
b. 2, f. 31	Correspondence: WHP to Milton Scarborough, with explanatory note by Scarborough	1968-1994
b. 2, f. 32	Writings by WHP: "For Whom is the Real Existence of Values a Problem..."	1988
b. 2, f. 33	Course-related: Notes taken by Scarborough in three graduate courses taught by WHP, with explanatory note.	1966-1969
b. 6, f. 5	Scarborough's dissertation: "Erik Erikson's Anthropology and its Implications for Epistemology" (William Poteat, supervisor)	1972
b. 6, f. 5	Article by Scarborough: "Mapping Poteat on the Buddha and Zen" published in <i>Tradition and Discovery - The Polanyi Society Journal</i> , Volume XLIV, Number 2	2018
Material contributed by James W. Stines		
b. 3, f. 34	Correspondence: WHP to James W. Stines	1975-1994
b. 4, f. 46	Correspondence: WHP to James W. Stiner and Samuel Watson	1973-1993
b. 3, f. 35	Correspondence: Re. book of Poteat essays	1987, 1989
b. 3, f. 36	Correspondence and papers related to yearly gatherings of former students and admirers of WHP	1971-1975
b. 3, f. 37	Course-related: "Lecture Notes: Poteat on Tragedy" by James Stines	ca. 1963
b. 4, f. 47	Writings of Poteat: Dissertation, Duke University - "Pascal's Conception of Man and Modern Sensibility", pp. 1-240	1950
b. 4, f. 48	Writings of Poteat: Dissertation, Duke University - "Pascal's Conception of Man and Modern Sensibility", pp. 241-470	1950
b. 4, f. 49	Writings of Poteat: Essay - "The Body of Speech: An Essay in Linguistic Metanoia"	no date
b. 4, f. 50	Writings of Poteat: Review - of "Freedom and Immortality" by Ian T. Ramsey	ca. 1960
b. 4, f. 51	Collected: Duke University Lectures by Michael Polanyi (hosted by WHP)	1964
b. 4, f. 52	Collected: Dissertation supervised by WHP - "Elizabeth Sewell: Poetic Method as an Instrument of Thinking and Knowing" by Benjamin Ladner	1970
Material from Douglas Adams Collection at Graduate Theological Union Library, Berkeley, CA		
b. 3, f. 38	Correspondence: Copies made from Doug Adams papers including to/from WHP	1966-1968
b. 3, f. 39	Miscellaneous copies from Adams papers, including "The Need and Plan for an Experimental College - Taken from notes by Dr. William H. Poteat"	1966-1968

Material from Douglas Adams Collection at Graduate Theological U [...] (continued)

b. 3, f. 40

Writings of WHP: "Faith and Existence" The Hibbert Journal

1953-1954

Series II: Audio Recordings, 1966-2008

b. 3, f. 41	Interview of WHP by James Clement van Pelt for Duke University student radio station: "A New View of Man" (1 CD)	1966 April
b. 5, f. 15	Interview of WHP by James Clement van Pelt for Duke University student radio station: "A New View of Man" (2 audio tapes)	1966 April
b. 3, f. 42	WHP at Frances Marion College (1 CD)	1987
b. 3, f. 43	Responses of WHP to Elizabeth Newman (and occasionally Araminta Johnston) in a graduate directed-reading course, Duke University (9 CDs)	1988 Feb-Apr
b. 3, f. 44	Prof. William H. Poteat at 74 - "Some concluding thoughts and conversations with his former students" - from Polanyi Society meeting, Washington, DC (4 CDs)	1993
b. 3, f. 45	Wm. Poteat / Michael Polanyi Panel Discussion; Robert Osborn re. WHP (2 CDs)	2008
b. 5, f. 16	Recordings of discussions between Poteat and his graduate student Melvin Keiser (3 CDs)	1971

Series III: Writings of Poteat

	Bound typescript: "Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post Critical Logic" Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post Critical Logic Available in digital format only.	1979
b. 5, f. 18	Bound typescript: " Post Critical Investigations: A Philosophical Daybook"	no date

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

Philosophy, American -- 20th Century

Names

Polanyi, Michael, 1891-1976

Poteat, William H.