



Smithsonian

National Museum of Natural History

Guide to the William H. Sheldon papers, circa 1920-circa 1980

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Biographical Note.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	National Anthropological Archives
Title:	William H. Sheldon papers
Date:	circa 1920 - circa 1980
Identifier:	NAA.1987-39
Creator:	Sheldon, William Herbert, 1899-1977
Extent:	129.25 Linear feet
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the archives by Guy Paschal and received June 1987.

Provenance

For a period following Sheldon's death, his collection was in the custody of Dorothy Paschal, Roland Elderkin, Emil Hartl, and Edward P. Monnelly. Elderkin was a social worker and one of Sheldon's assistants, and he recorded notes concerning some research subjects. He was also the person who assembled and arranged much of the nonphotographic material. Paschal was also one of Sheldon's assistants, who handled many of these administrative matters. She also carried out photography of women. Emil Hartl, a minister and social worker affiliated with the Morgan Memorial Charles Hayden Goodwill Inn School in Boston, Massachusetts, helped Sheldon in his early studies of delinquent boys. Sheldon regarded these and certain others as collaborators, and he shared authorship of some of his publications with them. Monnelly, a psychiatrist, was a later colleague and follower of Sheldon. Limited material of all four individuals have been incorporated in the papers.

Other Finding Aids

Inventories for this collection are available. Contact the repository for more information.

Preferred Citation

William H. Sheldon papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution

Restrictions

The Sheldon Papers include both photographic and textual material that is restricted.

Restricted collection material is restricted in accordance with policies and regulations relating to privacy because it contains Personally Identifiable Information (PII), photographs, and human subjects data about living individuals.

Access to the William H. Sheldon papers requires an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

Biographical Note

William Herbert Sheldon received a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Chicago in 1925 and an M.D. from the same institution in 1933. He taught at the University of Texas in 1923-1924; University of Chicago, 1924-1927; University of Wisconsin, 1927-1930; University of Chicago Theological Seminary, 1931-1938; Harvard University, 1938-1942 (as lecturer in psychology and research associate in anthropology); and University of Oregon Medical School, 1951-1970. He served in the United States Army Medical School, 1942-1944. In 1946, he became the director of the Constitution Clinic of Presbyterian Hospital in New York, and he continued in that capacity from 1946 to 1959, by which time the clinic was transferred to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. Sheldon became a research associate with the Institute of Human Development at the University of California at Berkeley in 1956, and attending chief at the research facility of Rockland State Hospital in Orangeburg, New York in 1961. His last post was a director of the Biological Humanics Foundation in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which he assumed in 1972.

Around 1927, Sheldon became interested in both biological and sociological aspects of personality, and he followed this interest the rest of his life. The interest was reflected in his decision to pursue medical studies and in research pursuits during military service, teaching appointments, and service with medical institutions. Some of his work concerned the relationship between constitutional factors and medical disorders, including psychiatric ones, and much of it involved constitutional factors and personality and behavior, including sociopathic behavior.

Much of his work remained in the stage of devising tools and techniques for dealing with subjects and collecting data, some of it apparently never developing much beyond the photographs of subjects, his work with female subjects being an example. Still, Sheldon became widely known for having devised a relatively elaborate classification of male body types based on variations and combinations of three characteristics--mesomorphy, endomorphy, and ectomorphy (roughly muscularity, fattiness, and lack of both muscularity and fattiness)--and ascribing personality and behavioral characteristics to the many types.

Scope and Contents

The papers reflect much of Sheldon's professional life and aspects of his personal life. Materials include correspondence, research and subject files, and other documents regarding Sheldon's work on his "constitutional psychology."

Photographs and other files containing PII (Personally Identifiable Information) and private information are restricted.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Biological anthropology
Somatotypes

Names:

Gesell Institute of Child Development
University of California, Berkeley. Institute of Human Development