Robert Hall Merrill (1881-1955)
Papers
(1930-1952)
4.8 linear ft.

Acquisition Number: 2016-03

Acquisition: Donated to the Institute of Science in 1958 by Audie Sinclair Merrill; transferred from the Institute to the Archives in 2016.

Access: Access to the collection is unrestricted.

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Preferred Citation: Robert Hall Merrill Papers, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Photographs: Retained in the collection.

Drawings: Oversize maps and charts have been catalogued in Horizon and are housed with the architectural drawing collection.

Processing: Processed by Leslie S. Edwards, 2017
BIOGRAPHY

Robert Hall Merrill was born January 18, 1881 in Grand Rapids, Michigan to Sarah Hills Hall and Robert Wilkins Merrill. Merrill Sr., a successful businessman, served as plant manager for the Phoenix Furniture Company in Grand Rapids for over thirty years. Merrill Jr., educated in Grand Rapids, attended the University of Michigan where he received his Bachelor of Engineering in 1902. He worked for the United States Department of Rivers and Harbors as an assistant engineer, and in the engineering department of the New York State of Court Claims. During this period, he became interested in China’s Grand Canal project (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site), and ultimately relocated to Tianjin, China where he served as chief engineer (1918-1921) on plans for constructing a series of locks. When it became evident that the project would not be realized, Merrill returned to Grand Rapids and established the firm of Spooner & Merrill with Charles Spooner.

While Merrill was employed as an engineer, he developed a passion for archaeology and served as surveyor for a number of expeditions including Uxmal, Yucatan. There, he developed detailed plans for reproducing the Maya Temple for the 1933 Chicago World’s Fair Exposition. He also mapped numerous projects in Alaska, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Italy; and served as surveyor, engineer, and photographer for the University of Pennsylvania Museum’s expedition to Coclé, Panama. Merrill, who was particularly interested in the application of engineering methods to archaeological studies, developed a device for taking vertical photographs of large areas of artifacts, which assisted archaeologists in documentation of the excavation process.

In 1944, Merrill became affiliated with Cranbrook Institute of Science as a member of the Board of Trustees, a position he held until 1953. He was a consultant in the Anthropology Department (1948-1949) and on the Research Committee (1949-1952). He donated periodicals and books to the Institute’s library, and over 500 U.S.G.S. maps and folios. His publication, “The calendar stick of Tshi-zun-hau-kau” was published by the Institute of Science in 1945.

Merrill married Lena Billington in 1907; she died in 1933. He then married Audie Sinclair Weston in 1938. Merrill died June 5, 1955 in Grand Rapids.
SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Robert Hall Merrill Papers document Merrill’s fifty-year interest in archaeology, specifically the Maya Calendar. For over 20 years he corresponded with numerous scholars around the world, challenged their findings, and developed his own theories. He graphed the phases of the sun, moon, and the planets as they pertained to deciphering the calendar. The collection consists primarily of correspondence, graphs, and charts documenting Merrill’s personal research and conclusions.

The collection has been rehoused in folders following the original order maintained by Merrill in his notebooks, which is not chronological. The notebooks were indexed by his second wife, Audie, and called “codices” which refer to the ancient classical manuscripts of the same name. Each folder heading is taken from this index. In some cases, the documents were too numerous for one folder, so were split into two or three additional folders. While this arrangement may make research more time consuming, it reflects Merrill’s work and thought processes.

The collection has been lightly indexed to reflect additional correspondents that may be of particular interest to the researcher.
Box Number--Description

Box 1
1. Codice #1 -The Maya Correlation
2. Codice #2 - “A Graphical Approach to Some Problems in Maya Astronomy”
3. Codice #3 -“The Seaman’s Secrets” (Photostatic Copy)
4. Codice #4 - Astrolabe Rubbings and Tracings
5. Codice #5 - Lunar Tables and Maya Months
6. Codice #6 - Maya Calendar
7. Codice #7 – Part One, Publications (Biographical, writings)
8. Codice #7 – Part Two, Speaking Engagements
9. Codice #8 – Part One, Tables and Calendars
10. Codice #8 – Part Two, Maya Moon Tables
11. Codice #9 – Tables and Calendars

Box 2
2. Codice #11 – Publications, 1930-1950
3. Codice #12 – Arnost Dittrich – correspondence and publications, 1939-1949
4. Codice #13 – Part One, Spanish Papers, 1935-1952
5. Codice #14 – Part Two, Spanish Papers, 1935-1947

Box 3
1. Codice #17 – Counting by Fives, Maya Style
2. Codice #18 – Richard C.E. Long – correspondence and publications, 1934-1951
3. Codice #19 – Part One, Maya Arithmetic, J.Eric Thompson, 1947-1950
4. Codice #19 – Part Two, Maya Arithmetic, J.Eric Thompson, 1943-1946
5. Codice #20 – Part One, Moon Tables and Correlations, 1942-1952
6. Codice #20 – Part Two, Moon Tables and Correlations, 1942
7. Codice #20 – Part Three, Moon Tables and Correlations, 1935-1942
8. Codice #21 – Notes on the Maya Moon Age Count and Calendar Stick, 1931-1951
9. Codice #22 – Correspondence, Lawrence Roys, 1933-1952
10. Codice #23 – Correspondence, Charles A. Muses, 1951
11. Codice #24 – Chichen-Itza, 1929-1931
Box 4

1. Codice #25 – Maya Sun Calendar and Dictum Disproved, 1940-1948
2. Codice #26 – Part One - Uxmal Ruins, Chicago World’s Fair, 1930-1934
3. Codice #26 – Part Two - Uxmal Ruins, Chicago World’s Fair, 1930-1933
4. Codice #27 – Maps, notes and charts on Uxmal expedition, 1930
5. Codice #28 – Part One, Maya Eclipse Table, 1948-1952
6. Codice #28 – Part Two, Maya Eclipse Table, 1943-1948
7. Codice #28 – Part Three, “Concepts and Structure of Maya Calendrical Arithmetic”
8. Codice #29 – Part One, Maya Calendar Correlations
9. Codice #29 – Part Two, Maya Calendar Correlations
10. Codice #29 – Part Three, Maya Calendar Correlations

Box 5

1. Codice #29 – Part Four, Maya Calendar Correlations, ca 1952-1953
2. Codice #29 – Part Five, Maya Calendar Correlations, 1950-1951
3. Codice #29 – Part Six, Maya Calendar Correlations, 1952
4. Codice #29 – Part Seven, Maya Calendar Correlations, n.d.
5. Codice #30 – Part One, Some Problems in Maya Astronomy, 1942-1952
6. Codice #30 – Part Two, Some Problems in Maya Astronomy, 1942-1945
7. Codice #31 – Part One, Publications – Maud W. Makemson
8. Codice #31 – Part Two, Publications – Maud W. Makemson
9. Codice #31 – Part Three, Publications – Maud W. Makemson
10. Codice #32 – Notes on the Maya Venus Table
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