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Roscoe W. Thatcher Papers

1900-1934

4 boxes (1.5 linear ft.)

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The agronomist Roscoe Thatcher served as the last president of Massachusetts Agricultural College and the first when the institution changed its name to Massachusetts State College in 1931. Before coming to Amherst, Thatcher had extensive

experience in both agricultural research and administration, having served as director of the agricultural station for the state of Washington, as professor of plant chemistry at the University of Minnesota (1913-1917), and as dean of the School of Agriculture and director of the Minnesota Experiment Station (1917-1921), and as director of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva. Selected as President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1927, he helped expand the two year program in practical agriculture to become the Stockbridge School of Agriculture and oversaw curricular reform, orienting vocational training toward citizenship education. The student health service also started during his tenure. Thatcher resigned due to ill health in 1933. Although he returned to research in agricultural chemistry at the College in April 1933, he died in his laboratory on December 6, 1933.

Official and administrative correspondence, memos, and other papers, relating to Thatcher's service as president of Massachusetts State College together with writing and biographical material.

See similar SCUA collections:

Mass Agricultural College (1863-1931)

Mass State College (1931-1947)

UMass administration

Background on Roscoe Thatcher

Born in Chatham Center, Ohio, on Oct. 5, 1872, Roscoe W. Thatcher enjoyed a distinguished career as an agricultural chemist and administrator before becoming the eleventh and final President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College. Having moved with his family from Ohio to the Nebraska prairies at the age of 13, Thatcher worked his way through college, earning his BS (1898) and MA (1901) in chemistry from the University of Nebraska, Thatcher worked for several years at Washington State College and the University of Minnesota. Although known for his research on the chemistry of flour and insecticides, Thatcher also proved himself a capable administrator, serving as Director on the Agricultural Experiment Station in Washington State (1907-1913), as Dean of Agriculture at Minnesota (1917-1921), and as Director of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva and Ithaca. His scholarly reputation earned Thatcher election as a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Society of Agronomy, among other honors, and honorary degrees from his alma mater as well as Hobart College, Amherst College, and the Catholic University of Chile. His prominence earned his a position as the only eastern representative on the Agricultural Conference Commission convened by President Calvin Coolidge in 1924-1925.

Thatcher arrived in the presidency of MAC in 1927 following a protracted struggle between the state legislature and the college's Board of Trustees over the issue of "State House control." Apart from the printing of federally-funded Experiment Station and Extension Service publications, nearly all college operations were effectively managed by the state, and Thatcher was brought in on the proviso that he would manage the College under existing institutional arrangements, that is, as an autonomous part of the State Department of Education under the fiscal supervision of the State Commission on Administration and Finance.

Perhaps the most notable event of Thatcher's presidency was the change in name of the institution from Massachusetts Agricultural College to Massachusetts State College, reflecting a longer-term shift in emphasis in the college's course offerings and broadening of the curriculum. Thatcher helped spur a number of changes in student life, including revising the system of freshman dormitories, reorienting vocational training at the college toward citizenship education, and starting the student health service, and he instituted a more profound shift by expanding the college's two-year program in practical agriculture and



Roscoe W. Thatcher

renaming it the Stockbridge School of Agriculture in May 1928. His tenure in office, however, was brief. Declining health coupled with the limits of state control and the financial stress brought about by the onset of the Great Depression and prevented him from more vigorously reshaping the course of the college's development. Forced to resign in 1932 due to poor health, Thatcher was appointed Research Professor of Chemistry by the Trustees, the position he held until late in 1933 when he died at his desk in Goessmann Hall.

1872
Born at Chatham Center, Ohio, on Oct. 5, the son of Charles P. and Lide E. (Packard) Thatcher.

1885
Family moves to prairie farm near Gibbon, Nebraska.

1892
Enters University of Nebraska.

1896
Marries Nellie E. Fulmer of Gibbon, Nebraska, Aug. 25.

1898
B.S. in chemistry, University of Nebraska

1898-1899
Teaches at a high school in Nebraska.

1899-1901
Assistant Chemist, Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station.

1901
M.A., University of Nebraska.

1901-1913
Assistant Chemist and Chemist, Washington (State) Agricultural Experiment Station, Pullman.

1907-1913
Director, Washington (State) Agricultural Experiment Station.

1909-1913
Professor of Agricultural Chemistry and Head of Dept. of Agriculture, Washington State College, Pullman.

1912
President, American Society of Agronomy.

1913-1917
Professor of Plant Chemistry and Head of Dept. of Chemistry, College of Agriculture, University of Minnesota.

1917-1921
Dean of Dept. of Agriculture and Director of Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Minnesota.

1920
Doctor of Agriculture (honorary), University of Nebraska.

1921
Chemistry of Plant Life published.

1921-1927
Director, New York (State) Agricultural Experiment Station, Geneva.

1922-1927
Editor, Journal of the American Society of Agronomy.

1923-1927
Director, New York (State) Agricultural Experiment Station, Cornell University, Ithaca.

1924-1925
Member, Calvin Coolidge's Conference on Agricultural Legislation.

1925
LL.D., Hobart College.

1925-1928
Chairman, Editorial Board, Journal of the American Society of Agronomy.

1927-1932
President, Massachusetts Agricultural College; inaugurated Oct. 28, 1927.

1930
ScD., Catholic University of Chile.

1930-1931
On leave for reasons of health, Dec. 1-May 31.

1931
MAC renamed Massachusetts State College (MSC), March 26.

1932
Resigns Presidency of MSC, effective in Sept.; appointed Research Professor of Chemistry; LL.D., Amherst College.

1933

Died in Amherst, Dec. 5.

Scope of collection

The Thatcher Papers center on Thatcher's five years as President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College (MAC), 1927-1932, but include material from throughout his thirty-year career as a researcher in scientific agriculture. Materials include memoranda and correspondence with officials of MAC and other colleges, as well as with officers of the state and federal governments; typescripts and copies of many of Thatcher's writings; and biographical materials and newspaper clippings reporting on his activities as President of the College.

The Thatcher papers came from two sources: the files which in 1972 were standing in the Archives; and papers accumulated by Secretaries of the University between 1908 and the early 1950's and received in the Archives in 1975 and 1977.

Aside from some writings in Series 3 and some biographical sketches, nothing dealing with Thatcher's administrative and research positions at Washington State College, the University of Minnesota or the New York State Experiment Stations at Geneva and Ithaca is in this collection. Nor are there family papers or materials dealing with his activities as Research Professor of Chemistry at the College after his presidency.

Further information on Thatcher's presidency can be found in the narrative portions of the published annual reports of the President and officers of the College in Archives RG 1/00/2, and in the papers of other College officials of his day, such as those of William L. Machmer, longtime Dean of the College and the University.

Series descriptions

Series 1. Biographical materials

1927-1934

1 box (0.25 lin. feet)

The biographical materials of the Roscoe W. Thatcher Papers include recommendations written on his behalf, a resume, biographical sketches, certificates, memorial tributes, and newspaper clippings recounting his appointment in 1927 to the presidency of the College, his activities as President, 1927-1932, his death the next year, and the 1934 presentation of his portrait to the College.

Further biographical data is found in Series 2 under "Resignation" and in President Lewis' papers (in the Presidential Administrative Series under "Thatcher Appointment"). Photographs of Thatcher are in Archives RG 110/1, and a phonodisc recording of a talk he gave is no. 11 in Archives RG 185/1.

Series 2. Administrative Records

1927-1932

2 boxes (0.75 lin. feet)

The surviving administrative papers of Thatcher's presidency make up Series 2 of the Thatcher Papers. They cover the last three and a half years of the Massachusetts Agricultural College and the first eighteen months of the Massachusetts State College.

During Thatcher's presidency, Robert D. Hawley was Secretary of the College. The arrangement of the surviving papers is similar to those of the corresponding papers of Presidents Butterfield and Lewis. Headings include: Administrative Planning; Admissions; Alumni; Associations; Buildings and Grounds; Course of Study; Experiment Station; Farm; Inauguration; Massachusetts (State) Government Agencies, and Legislation; Personnel; Public Relations; Resignation; Scholarships, Prizes and Trust Funds; Student Life and Employment; Tuition; U.S. Bureau of Education; and Women's Program.

Among the highlights are the 1931 student petition to change the Reserve Officers Training Program (R.O.T.C.) from mandatory to elective, with the associated surveys of faculty opinion and of the requirements of other colleges (folders 9 to 11); correspondence on the problems of providing office space to meet the expanding needs of the U.S. Northeastern Forestry Experiment Station in a vain attempt to prevent its removal in 1932 to Yale University, and ultimately to Upper Darby, PA (folder 12); the correspondence with Howard Edwards, President of Rhode Island State College, about the activities of the New England Section of the American Society of Agronomy, led by Dr. A.B. Beaumont of MAC, following the dismissal of the head of the Rhode Island Agricultural Experiment Station (folder 4); the reports of unsatisfactory conferences of College officials with the State Attorney General on the statutory status of the College (folder 18), and the efforts of the College administration to prevent raises in tuition charges in response to the tightening of the State's fiscal situation at the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930's (folder 27).

Papers related to the formulation of annual budgets forwarded to state authorities for enactment by the General Court, and to the apportionment of the resulting funds among the various programs of the College have been removed to the chronological budget file in Archives RG 4/2. Materials generated by the Course of Study Committee have been removed to Archives RG 40/A2; those relating to the Cabinet (an advisory body to the President), to Archives RG 3/12; and those of the Associate Alumni to

Archives RG 50/2.

Series 3. Writings

1900-1932

1 box (0.5 lin. feet)

During his professional career, Thatcher published more than eighty articles on scientific subjects and fifty agricultural bulletins, reports, etc. He also wrote one book, *The Chemistry of Plant Life* (McGraw-Hill, 1921), and assisted in the production of at least one edition of Charles E. Bessey's *New Elementary Agriculture*. Most of his published works are listed in the 1927 resume he submitted to College authorities when he was being considered for the office of President. A copy of this list and a copy of the listings under Thatcher's name in the *National Union Catalog of Pre-1957 Imprints* are in the first folder in this series.

The Writings series includes a set of typescripts of 58 unpublished addresses and papers dating from about 1917 to 1932, arranged under general topics ranging from agricultural chemistry to religion. These works were intended for several different audiences, including scientists, farmers, students, and the general public. Also included are a published copy of Thatcher's book and seven published articles and pamphlets Thatcher wrote between 1915 and 1933 on a variety of topics including college administration and plant chemistry.

A copy of Thatcher's address upon his inauguration on July 28, 1927 as President of MAC is filed in folder 14 of Series 2. A copy of the Report of the 17th annual conference, 1930, of the American Alumni Council, hosted by Amherst, Mt. Holyoke, MAC, and Smith colleges, containing Thatcher's address to that body, has been removed to the Archives conference files, RG 7/3.

Inventory

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1927-1934

1 box (0.25 lin. feet)

Inventory

1982

Box 1: 1

Biographical Materials

1927-1942

Box 1: 2

Newspaper Clippings

1927

Box 1: 3

Newspaper Clippings

1927

Box 1: 4

Newspaper Clippings

1927

Box 1: 5

Newspaper Clippings

1928-1934

Box 1: 6

Series 2. Administrative Records

1927-1932

2 boxes (0.75 lin. feet)

Administrative Planning

1928-1930

Box 2: 1

Admissions: from other Agricultural Programs

1928-1929

Box 2: 2

Alumni

1927

Box 2: 3

American Society of Agromony: New England Section

1928

Box 2: 4
Association of Governing Boards of State Universities and Allied Institutions
1928-1932

Box 2: 5
Buildings and Grounds
1931

Box 2: 6
College Seal
ca.1931

Box 2: 7
Course of Study: General
1927-1932

Box 2: 8
Course of Study: R.O.T.C.-Student Petition and General
1931

Box 2: 9
Course of Study: R.O.T.C.-Survey of colleges
1931

Box 2: 10
Course of Study: R.O.T.C.-Survey of Faculty
1931

Box 2: 11
Experiment Station
1928-1931

Box 2: 12
Farm
undated

Box 2: 13
Inauguration: Academic Representatives
1927

Box 2: 14
Inauguration: Addresses
1927

Box 2: 15
Inauguration: Memorabilia
1927

Box 2: 16
Inauguration: Papers
1927

Box 2: 17
Massachusetts Government Agencies
1927-1932

Box 2: 18
Massachusetts Legislation: Dormitory Bill
1932

Box 2: 19
Personnel: Retirement System
undated

Box 2: 20
Personnel: Salaries
1927-1932

Box 2: 21
Public Relations
1928

Box 2: 22
Resignation
1932

Box 2: 23
Scholarships, Prizes and Trust Funds: General

1928-1932
Box 3: 24
Scholarships, Prizes and Trust Funds: Dairy Foundation
1932
Box 3: 25
Student Life and Employment
1927-1932
Box 3: 26
Tuition
1931-1932
Box 3: 27
U.S. Bureau of Education: Land Grant College Survey
1928-1929
Box 3: 28
U.S. Bureau of Education: MAC and MSC Reports
1928-1932
Box 3: 29
Women's Program
1927-1932
Box 3: 30
Series 3. Writings
1900-1932
1 box (0.5 lin. feet)
Published Articles: Lists
1900-1933
Box 4: 1
Addresses and Papers: Agricultural Chemistry and Agricultural Research
ca.1917-1932
Box 4: 2
Addresses and Papers: Agricultural Research; Alumni Letters
ca.1917-1932
Box 4: 3
Addresses and Papers: Book Reviews; Feature Articles; General
undated
Box 4: 4
Agricultural Problems
ca.1917-1932
Box 4:
Addresses and Papers: General and Educational
ca.1917-1932
Box 4: 5
Addresses and Papers: Miscellaneous Addresses; Religious Papers
ca.1917-1932
Box 4: 6
Book: *Chemistry of Plant Life*
1927
Box 4: 7
Published Articles
1915-1933
Box 4: 8

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Roscoe W. Thatcher.

Processing Information

Processed by W.B. Cook, 1982.

Language:

English

Copyright and Use (More information)

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Search terms**Subjects**

Agricultural chemistry
Agriculture--Study and teaching
Massachusetts State College--History
Massachusetts State College. President
United States. Army. Reserve Officers' Training Corps

Contributors

Thatcher, Roscoe Wilfrid, 1872-1933 [main entry]

Link to similar SCUA collections

Mass Agricultural College (1863-1931)

Mass State College (1931-1947)

UMass administration



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