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10. William E. Gates and the Collection of Mesoamericana

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The study of the Maya and affiliated indigenous groups in Mexico and Central America is a fascinating and ever-evolving field. Few disciplines have gone through as many changes as the study of the Maya during the past one hundred years. The recent deciphering of the ancient linguistic code has greatly expanded knowledge of this population and radically changed our understanding of who they were and of their role in the evolution of pre-Columbian civilizations in the New World.

Equally important to the history of the discipline is the presence of colorful and complex personalities. When thinking of just a few of the most prominent—Sylvanus Morley, J. Eric Thompson, and Frans Blom—one recognizes that their personalities, their experiences, and their frequent conflicts tell us a great deal about the intriguing history of the discipline. One of the earliest and most eccentric was William E. Gates. While Gates may have lacked the academic expertise of his colleagues, he possessed the passion and the capital that gave him an entrance into the discipline, helping him become a major participant in the early investigations of the Maya. He was not just a scholar but also an avid book and document collector who built the largest and most important private collection on Mesoamerica of the early twentieth century. For various reasons, the collection became separated and is now housed in the libraries of Tulane, Princeton, and Brigham Young University.¹

Early History

Little in William E. Gates's background would suggest that he would spend much of his adult life studying Mesoamerican languages and culture. He came from a traditional American family. His ancestors lived in the Jamestown colony of early seventeenth-century Virginia and included Thomas Gates, the second governor. His family had a laudable history of political and social prominence in the United States.

Raised primarily in Philadelphia, Gates studied languages at Johns Hopkins University and graduated with an A.B. degree in 1886. He was admitted into the University of Virginia Law School but left during his first year due to problems with his eyes, deciding to move to Cleveland, Ohio to run a printing press. In the end, he did not enjoy the business, suggesting, "My fate

was sealed, and my 'job' in this incarnation sealed upon me."² He was already interested in Mesoamerica, having purchased a copy of the Maya Codex Tro-Cortesianus (Madrid) in 1898, and printing *The Maya and Tzental Calendars* as a gift for his friends in 1900. In 1905, after receiving a family inheritance, Gates left Ohio and moved to California. He entered the Aryan Theosophical Society colony at Point Loma, outside San Diego, joined the faculty of their School of Antiquity, and became the manager of the small Aryan Theosophical Press. Within this academic and religious environment, he pursued what had become his passion—a full-time study of ancient America and the Maya.³

Early Maya Research

Gates's interest in Mesoamerica had its foundation in two episodes. Early in his adult life he became disenchanted with Christianity and the materialism of the world in which he lived. He was enamored with the writings of Helena P. Blavatsky, appreciating the inclusivity of the philosophy of the Theosophists that she expounded.⁴ Blavatsky believed that ancient societies possessed wisdom and insight that far exceeded those of the modern world and that only the study of ancient language and thought brought one closer to the wisdom of the past. This idea fit with Gates's passion for languages: he eventually learned thirteen, most of them ancient. This strong belief in the importance of studying linguistics and archaeology was articulated in Gates's 1915 discussion of the importance of archaeology:

Yet true Linguistics, united to true Archaeology, are the two sciences which have preserved, and hold for us when we can read them, the real past history of Man: how his thought has found forms for expression, and what he has done. Archaeology and Linguistics are the sciences of man's past social history; what he has done, and therefore, what he must be.⁵

His interest and publication on Mayan linguistics made him one of a small and select group of scholars.⁶ Gareth Lowe suggests it was such an exclusive group that only fifteen prior to Gates had published on the topic, beginning with Lord Edward Kingsborough's reproduction of the Dresden Codex in his monumental work, *Antiquities of Mexico* (London, 1831-1848). Gates's most important American and British contemporaries were Charles P. Bowditch, Cyrus Thomas, and J. T. Goodman. There was also a small group of German scholars who were actively researching and publishing. All combined, it was a group of bright but often jealous and contentious scholars and Gates was probably the most controversial of them all. While Gates's publications were not particularly noteworthy or significant in comparison to the work of the others, his research did add to an understanding of the subject at that time. However, his eminence in the discipline came primarily from his insatiable passion and talent for collecting primary source material.⁷

Collecting Activities

Gates early recognized a critical dearth of published studies and printed primary source materials on Mesoamerica. His fascination with language led to a desire to examine all the documents available in the Mayan language. He began to carefully peruse auction and booksellers' catalogues in search of any documentation related to the Maya. He corresponded with librarians and museum directors worldwide in his quest to identify documents. He discovered a much larger universe of materials than first believed. He concluded there were probably over 100,000 pages of primary source documents written in Spanish or native languages about indigenous populations of Mesoamerica.⁸ It became his goal to obtain a copy of all of the documents either by buying the original or copying the items. He worked with Eastman Kodak Company to develop a specialized photographic paper that would improve the quality of his reproductions.⁹

From 1911 to 1916, he spent most of his time collecting, spending thousands of dollars as he visited archives and libraries in the Americas and Europe to copy documents. He encountered significant challenges in this quixotic pursuit. As his collection expanded so did his pride, which grew to unappreciated heights. He occasionally offended those with whom he worked with his obsessive personality and his demands for complete compliance with what he wanted. He engendered almost universal suspicion or hard feelings toward him by archivists, scholars, and librarians on two different continents. His reputation preceded him: he was not allowed, for example, to see the very important Maya collection housed in the Archivo de las Indias in Seville, Spain. He had serious conflicts in Europe over copyright issues and problems of domain. But he was successful and, by 1914, he possessed copies of most available materials that existed in the United States and Europe.

Gates was financially stingy when it came to his own personal needs, but not in his pursuit of documents. For example, in 1915 he spent over \$25,000 on books and manuscripts. He also purchased the most innovative and expensive copying machine that existed. When he discovered a new item, he almost always purchased it immediately, believing that to wait might be fatal. He was vindicated in this approach since he saw many documents he copied in Mexico were destroyed during the Mexican Revolution. He was able to state in 1916:

When War broke out, I personally owned (then in California) had [sic] half of all known Middle American Indiana ms. material: and had just finished photographing 95% of everything in the world, know, (outside of Seville) which I did not own. That means some 75,000 pages of photos, of original mss or unprocurable imprints, mostly linguistic, but also all the early cultural records of penetration I could locate. Every great past collection found its way to my shelves.¹⁰

His focus moved south to Mexico and Central America beginning in 1914. He hired Frederick J. Smith to travel throughout Mexico and Guatemala for two years hunting for materials. Dissatisfied with Smith's results, Gates went to Mexico himself from 1917-1918. It was an eventful trip as he traversed between government-controlled areas and rebel-held parts of the country. Mexico was at the end of its revolution and in a challenging and dangerous condition. He described the intrigues of his experiences:

On this trip of some 1500 miles on horseback, at times entirely alone, at times with escorts of Zapatistas or Oaxaca Serrano Indians as protection from the marauding Carranzistas, I set myself to penetrate to those places where no one else tried to go. I stopped in fully half of all the villages in Yucatan, out to the fringe of "civilization" and the "indio rebeldes." Everywhere I hunted manuscripts in the Maya languages, kept (by) friends with the official powers, and also gathered every scrap obtainable of printed material, books, pamphlets, newspapers, posters, election notices.¹¹

His primary objective was to find indigenous language materials, but he also collected anti-Carranza materials. Never one to ignore issues, Gates became an ardent critic of both the Mexican and the U.S. governments and claimed the Carranza government characterized him as an "agent of the rebels."¹² He was particularly concerned with Mexican government policies related to the preservation of the indigenous past of Mexico. Though he may not have been appreciated by government officials, he seemed to have impressed some of the academic community with his knowledge and was named an "Honorary Professor" at the Museo Nacional de México.¹³

Guatemala

Gates did not return to California and the Theosophist School of Antiquity, but went east to pursue his research interests and become involved in lobbying activities related to the political situation in Mexico. For the next ten years, his focus was not on publishing.¹⁴ In April of 1920, he participated in the organization of the Maya Society headquartered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Gates was made president, due to his collection of materials, and Marshall Saville was named vice president. Unfortunately, Gates's controlling personality quickly doomed the organization. It functioned for a short time and sponsored no publications.¹⁵

Gates was given a position as an honorary research associate at the Carnegie Institution of Washington. In this position he became part of a research team headed by Sylvanus Morley that went to the highlands of Guatemala and Belize in 1921. This trip began a new and important phase in Gates's life. Because of the isolation from Spanish and Guatemalan cultural influences in many parts of Guatemala, Gates believed he would discover a linguistic structure among the indigenous population that closely approximated

the ancient language of pre-Columbian civilizations. He hoped to find uncorrupted texts of the early Mayan languages unlike those he had already collected that had been influenced by contact with Spanish. He hoped that by spending more time with modern Mayan dialects he could better translate older documents that would then lead to a possible breakthrough in understanding the Mayan glyphs. He stated in a letter to George B. Gordon, director of the anthropological section of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, "I may not actually read the glyphs, but I will find out much, and will make future work on a wholly new and firm foundation."¹⁶ After several months in Guatemala traveling, collecting, and studying local languages, he returned to the United States in August of 1921.

Gates became unhappy with Sylvanus Morley. While in Guatemala, he became concerned with what he considered were numerous unethical practices of Morley's, particularly related to taking artifacts out of the country without letting government officials know. Additional information gained on a return trip to Guatemala in 1922 convinced Gates that Morley could not be trusted and he broke with Morley and the Carnegie Institution.

On his trips to Guatemala, however, Gates had again impressed his hosts who named him the Director of Archaeology for the Republic of Guatemala. One of his goals was to build an archaeological museum in the country.¹⁷ In this position, he turned his attention to protecting what he felt were the interests of Guatemala while, at the same time, enhancing his own activities. In 1922, he and others successfully lobbied the legislature of Guatemala to enact legislation meant to protect and safeguard Guatemala's archaeological riches. One provision restricted what foreign archaeological expeditions would be allowed to take out of the country. They could take away only half (as opposed to all, as had been allowed) of their excavated objects; the rest would remain in the country under control of the museum. All expeditions would be under the authority and control of the General Director (Gates) and the Museum Director (also Gates).¹⁸

The restrictiveness of the law offended Morley and others, and some regarded Gates's controlling role as unethical.¹⁹ Even Gates' friend, George B. Gordon, after examining the law, questioned the numerous restrictions and chided Gates for his involvement: "This would appear to close Guatemala to scientific institutions both for archaeological work and ethnological work. Guatemala in this act goes further in this matter of exclusion than any other country. I presume that you are satisfied that this is for the general interest."²⁰ Gates began working actively to create a museum and to develop an exhibit in Guatemala for the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of Guatemala in 1924. His personal battles with Morley, however, upset his plans. In the early summer of 1923, he learned that Morley had gone around him to the Minister of Foreign Relations, Roberto Lowenthal, and secured a license to work in the archaeological site at Petén.

Under that authorization, Morley expanded his work into Quirigúa and Copán and, without Gates's knowledge, took items from his dig and sent them to the United States. What this evolved into was a power struggle involving Guatemalan government officials, Morley and other scholars from the United States, and Gates. The final outcome of the dispute was that Gates lost the confidence and support of the Guatemalan government in 1923 and, under pressure, resigned from his positions and returned to the United States.²¹

Tulane

Gates returned to the United States struggling with serious financial difficulties. Earlier, he had purchased a hundred-acre farm in Auburn Hill, Virginia about 100 miles southwest of Washington D.C. near the city of Charlottesville.²² He also bought land in Guatemala near Chichicastenango to be his residence while in the country. Realizing his predicament, in 1921 he sold those parts of his collection related to everything north of the Maya, which he called his "Mexicana." It also included most of the items related to the political situation in Mexico collected in 1917. He turned the collection over to the American Art Association to have it auctioned. He suggested its worth to be over \$25,000 and was given a \$20,000 advance by the Association, which he used on his activities in Guatemala. Getting the items ready for sale took time, so the sale was only finally announced in 1924 for April 9-11. A detailed and impressive catalogue of the collection was published and distributed across the country.²³

The proposed sale of the collection created significant curiosity. Several potential buyers expressed interest and it looked to be an important event in the auction's history. However, sixteen days before the auction, Tulane University made an offer to purchase the entire collection as a unit and the auction was canceled. Considerable annoyance occurred in part because several potential buyers were already in New York in anticipation of the auction.²⁴

The sale of the collection to Tulane was advantageous to Gates even beyond the \$60,000 he received for the sale of the collection.²⁵ Tulane offered Gates a position to come to New Orleans to continue his research and collecting activities and also gave him the responsibility to organize and head a new academic unit called the Department of Middle American Research (now the Middle American Research Institute). The organization of the Department was abundantly supported by a generous grant of \$300,000 by Sam Zemurray, head of the Cuyamel Fruit Company. Gates's responsibility was to head the Department, identify potential students from Central America, grant scholarships, and direct their research. Gates arrived at Tulane enthusiastic about his new position and challenge, in part because his assignment included not only all of Central America but also the Caribbean.²⁶

Gates developed a grandiose vision for the Department and hoped Tulane would become for the geographical region from the United States to Panama what Alexandria had been to the Mediterranean world. For these grandiose

ideas to become a reality, significant funding was required, and it was not long before Gates suggested (demanded) to Zemurray that his grant of \$300,000 be augmented by an additional million dollars. In addition, Gates announced a program to encourage New Orleans businessmen to pay a five-year subscription of \$100 in support of the Department and his expeditions to Latin America. Based on this financial agenda, Tulane advanced Gates \$25,000 to be paid back by these funding activities. The funds supported an expedition to Mexico and Central America, two agricultural projects in Mexico and Honduras, and the purchase of books. Gates tried to hire established Mesoamerican scholars such as Thomas A. Joyce of the British Museum and Alfred V. Kidder of the Carnegie Institute. Unsuccessful in attracting established academics, he hired Frans Blom, a young archeologist from Harvard University, and an ethnologist, Oliver La Farge.²⁷

The three were soon in Mexico and Central America. Blom and La Farge headed an exploratory trip in 1925 to the Mexican states of Veracruz, Tabasco, and Chiapas, and then went to Guatemala.²⁸ This expedition was important because it was one of the first by American scholars into areas considered marginally connected to the Maya. At the same time, Gates went to Tabasco with the New Orleans Commission, which was studying the economic value of plants in the region. He joined Blom and La Farge for a week to examine the Maya site at Comalcalco, and then went to Honduras to scout sites for future projects. Gates returned to Tulane with a proposal to establish a Tulane center for scientific research in Honduras that would produce detailed studies of the country in a variety of disciplines, with the ultimate goal of improving social and economic conditions in the country.²⁹

The problems that plagued Gates throughout his life followed him to Tulane. His failures to obtain financing for his grandiose plans affected his credibility with the university. His program for subscriptions by businessmen never materialized. Pressure on Zemurray only antagonized the benefactor and resulted in no additional financial donations. The departmental budget was significantly depleted and university administrators found Gates's tactics to be dishonest and questionable. The fact that Gates spent most of his time at his farm in Virginia and in Mexico and Central America with little time in New Orleans did not help his cause. Because of these accusations, an angry Gates resigned as director of the Department on October 1, 1926 only to withdraw his resignation a few days later. Blom turned against Gates and requested he be put administratively directly under the University president, Dr. Albert B. Dinwiddie. His request was granted. Gates's library was removed and placed under the control of the Tulane University Committee. Gates instructed his attorney to begin a process against the university and planned to take his case to the American Association of University Professors. In the second week of March of 1927, the Tulane Board of Administrators voted to immediately end Gates's employment at the University. Gates was devastated and angry and

wrote a fiery accusative pamphlet in defense of his activity at Tulane. Those feelings against Tulane went with him to his grave.³⁰

He returned to his farm in Virginia without following through on his threatened suit.³¹ But he was depressed and struggled for several months while contemplating his future. He told Edward E. Ayer, "I have decided to retire entirely from the field of American archaeological work and to put my collection for sale...I shall retain a small part of the materials, for my own shelves and reading."³²

A significant element of his struggles was financial. The financial challenges of the next four years occupied his time. He was close to bankruptcy but was able to remain solvent through a variety of activities. He went through his remaining collection and selected 226 manuscripts, which he sold to Robert Garrett of Baltimore, Maryland. Garrett was an investment banker with a similar passion for collecting. In 1942, the collection was donated to Princeton University, Garrett's alma mater. Gates sold his Virginia farm in 1930 and moved to Baltimore.³³

Second Maya Society

After a few months in Virginia, Gates turned away from the grandiose plans that occupied him at Tulane and decided to keep most of his collection. He still had much of the Maya part of his collection, which had grown some during his stay at Tulane. He stated to his friend C. T. Currelly, of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada, "Following the break-up of all my dreams for Central America, in the Tulane debacle, I am settling down to just what I can do with my studies—which I should perhaps have done long ago."³⁴ Gates focused the last ten years of his life on research and publication. His alma mater, Johns Hopkins University, made him a Research Associate. He had no teaching responsibility, though he did direct Ph.D. students. He organized the Second Maya Society at the university and established a publication series through which his research was published. Before Gates's death in 1940, the Society published twenty volumes, mostly his own works. He had help from Alan W. Payne who had been with him at Tulane and some students, one of whom was Elizabeth C. Steward, who received the first doctorate under Gates's tutelage in 1936.³⁵

Gates turned his attention to the study of the language of the Maya in his first publication in 1931, *An Outline Dictionary of Maya Glyphs with a Concordance and Analysis of their Relationships*. It was beautifully published with handmade Italian paper and a gilded top. He hoped students would purchase it, but its high price of \$35.00 was prohibitive for most. It was, despite its elegant appearance, an unfortunate publication because of serious errors. It was complicated in its presentation, poorly organized, lacked an index and table of contents, and was not actually a dictionary. As a result, it was essentially ignored by the Maya academic community with the exception

of a thirty-three page glyph-by-glyph critique by Herman Beyer published in the *American Anthropologist*. Beyer stated, “When I commenced reading this costly publication I realized very soon that its author must have written it about twenty years ago, only adding a few phrases to modernize it...On the whole, the short treatise is faulty in method, full of errors regarding well-known facts, and abounds in mistakes in cross-references.” He sarcastically did admit there were a few positive aspects of the book. “All these valuable little contributions to the advance of our science, however, could be comprised in a small paper, without the need of the costly and cumbersome apparatus of the Glyph Dictionary.”³⁶ Though Beyer was a well-known expert on Mayan, the review was probably tainted with some antagonism because he had been at Tulane with Gates.

Gates did not write a response to the review and turned from analytical research on the glyphs to a focus on publishing the documents in his collection. Possibly his most important publication was the printing of the colored facsimile of the Dresden Codex in 1932. This publication was favorably received by the scholarly world. He also published volume one of a proposed *Maya Society Quarterly*, which he hoped would be a place that would make manuscript sources available in published form. The first volume was praised and Gates was pleased with what had been done.³⁷

The second volume of the quarterly, however, was never published. Gates was beginning to experience health problems and unable to give attention to all he wanted, so he focused on publishing monographs in the Society series. In 1933, he published a complete photographic copy of the Madrid Maya Codex printed on linen with wooden end boards. He also printed a variety of smaller documents. One unfortunate publication was the 1935 printing of the Gomesta manuscript, which was purported to be a sixteenth-century key to Mayan glyphs but was proved to be a nineteenth-century fraud.³⁸ He also published with a limited commentary (probably fortunately), an English translation of fray Diego de Landa’s sixteenth-century *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, entitled *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest*. It was the first English translation of the document but was to be superseded four years later by a translation of the same document by Alfred M. Tozzer, published by the Peabody Museum.³⁹ Gates then published *A Grammar of Maya* in 1938.⁴⁰

It was fitting for the life story of Gates that his last publication created controversy and resulted in his leaving Johns Hopkins. In 1929, Charles Upson Clark, professor of history at Columbia, made Photostat copies of the Vatican document of an Aztec watercolor botanical picture book and, with the permission of Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, Librarian at the Vatican, deposited the photographs at the Smithsonian Institution with a public announcement of his discovery. A few years later, Gates contacted the Cardinal and received a copy of the photographs and a letter, which he contended gave him permission

to publish them with an English translation—which he did in 1939 as *The De la Cruz-Badiano Aztec Herbal of 1552*. Johns Hopkins Press decided to print its own edition of the Aztec photographs edited by Emily Emmert for a third of the price of the Gates edition and Gates was furious. Gates left Johns Hopkins and moved into two study rooms at the Library of Congress where he continued his work on what he hoped would be a complete evaluation of Maya culture. The work was outlined and partially written by the time of his death in 1940.⁴¹

As Gates aged, his health continued to deteriorate and his research and writing activities decreased. As death approached, he renewed his interest in his earlier beliefs in theosophy. He traveled west in 1935, returning to San Diego for a visit to the Point Loma community. He also renewed his study and interest in Oriental religious thought. His life came to an end at the age of 76 on April 24, 1940 in the Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore.⁴²

Disposal of the Gates Collection

The management of the Maya Society and the disposal of his collection were left to the vice-president of the Society, his sister Edith McComas. She was able to distribute most of the publications of the Society and the organization ceased to exist. Gates's desire was that his collection remain as a unit and be placed in a library. McComas published an extensive catalog of the collection divided by type of materials.⁴³ Interest in the collection was limited among large research libraries because the valuable part of the collection—the original manuscripts—had been sold to Robert Garrett. Several Maya experts evaluated the collection. One who had particular interest was Dr. W. Wells Jakeman, a Professor of Archeology at Brigham Young University. At the time, Brigham Young University was a small regional teaching university owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their library was small with few research collections. The University did, however, have a serious interest in Mesoamerica, based primarily on the Mormon belief that the indigenous populations of the Americas were descendants of religious immigrants who left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. The University had, in fact, sponsored a large scientific expedition from 1900-02 into Mexico, Central America, and Colombia. The president of the University, Benjamin Cluff, headed the expedition. It was a fact-gathering trip and they visited and photographed several of the ruins of Mexico and Central America.⁴⁴

In the mid-1940s, the University began a small but important push to create centers of research. In part because of the presence of Dr. Jakeman, one of those areas was in Archeology/Anthropology. A separate department was established in 1946 under Jakeman and has continued to be an important part of the research component of the University. The connection between the religious belief and the department tainted its early development, but most of the research on Mesoamerica done by students and faculty has been valuable

to the field.⁴⁵ Jakeman was able to convince his administrators that the Gates collection would be an important beginning step in developing the University's research component, and the administrators put up funding for the collection to come to the library. The overall library archaeological collection has been supported by additional purchases, but the Gates documents continue to be the foundation of the Mesoamerican collection at the University.

William E. Gates and Mesoamerica

Evaluating the contribution of Gates to the study of Mesoamerican research is problematic.⁴⁶ His contemporaries were strongly divided into two camps. His friends, including many in Mexico and Guatemala, had great praise for him as a collector and a person. One such friend was T. A. Willard who wrote the following to Gates's sister Edith, "In all my experience in the archaeological field there was no one else that I had regard for as I did for your brother...In fact I do not remember ever having an argument with your brother."⁴⁷ Gates was kind to young scholars and helpful in getting them started, particularly in providing them with copies of his documents. Eric Thompson, probably the leading expert on the Maya prior to the recent explosion of information on the topic, described him this way:

Gates was a man with vision. His ideas on what should be done to set Maya research in a wide context of man and his environment were very sound and showed him years ahead of his fellows. The drawbacks were that men and money to carry them out were not available and Gates was no Aladdin to summon them to his service, although (alas!) he believed he had the knack of rubbing the lamp.⁴⁸

The other group, many of whom had been the recipients of his wrath, characterized him as an arrogant, cranky, and insensitive scholar of average academic talent who had entirely too much energy, money, and time on his hands. Robert L. Brunhouse, Sylvanus Morley's biographer, stated that Morley believed Gates to be "brilliant, erratic, and bizarre, and declared that his unpredictable habits nullified whatever usefulness he might have." Continuing, Brunhouse stated, "Gates had a peculiar temperament that brought him into conflict with everyone with whom he worked. And at times he could be crude." And finally, "When Gates was unable to control other persons, especially persons he suspected of being stronger than himself, he made desperate charges based on half-truths at best and on mere suspicion at worst."⁴⁹

To be sure, Gates was controversial, excitable, arrogant, and combative. Somehow that description fits well into the history of the profession, going back to John Lloyd Stephens, including Blom and Thompson and even extending somewhat to more recent times with Linda Schele. The discipline of Maya studies has historically attracted scholars with complicated personalities

who often had serious disagreements that slowed creative research. One thing never lacking, however, was a passion for the subject. In that sense, Gates fits well into the history of the discipline.

To suggest that Gates merely had a passion for Mesoamerica might be considered an understatement. Consider this description by J. Eric S. Thompson of their first meeting. Thompson has just traveled all night and, after arriving in Baltimore, went straight to visit Gates. They talked (Gates talked) the entire day and into the night. "Gates was so full of his plans that he heeded neither contracting stomach or passing time. I, made of less stern stuff, got hungrier and hungrier." In order not to waste time, Gates suggested they not go out to eat but dine on flavorless hot chocolate and stale crackers. "I made a beeline for the nearest drugstore—eating places were closed—when I left late that evening."⁵⁰

Part of the problem with Gates's scholarship was his energy and enthusiasm. Thompson again stated:

This enthusiasm carried Gates to the heights whence he could see every aspect of the Kingdom of Maya research spread at his feet and—there was the trouble—waiting for him in person alone and unaided to explore. When it came to preparing his material for publication, that zeal was his undoing. It made him act like a town dog out for a country walk. The scents were so many that he never managed to pick out the important ones and follow them without distraction to the kill.⁵¹

Though Gates did not appreciate being characterized as just a great collector and transcriber of documents, that characterization is without question his legacy. But all academics learn quickly that fame is fleeting. For many, it is not long until perceived brilliant analysis and discovery are soon relegated to barely a paragraph—or even just a footnote—in the dissertation of some young Ph.D. who believes he/she is coming up with the latest innovative approach that will forever change and benefit the discipline. Gates's publications probably made it to the footnote stage sooner than most and now are seldom used. He was not even mentioned in the important history of the evolution of the Mayan language by Michael Coe. But his work as a collector of materials has greatly enriched scholars and the libraries of Princeton, Tulane, and Brigham Young University. His legacy as a collector is aptly stated by John M. Weeks in his introduction to a description of his collection:

There can be little question of the value and significance of the Gates collection, and of its contribution to Middle American linguistic and historical research. Gates gathered into a central collection practically the entire corpus of extant primary source material for the region, and made much of it available to contemporary and future scholars through exchanges with several individuals and institutions. By collecting these documents Gates saved much information from eventual loss or destruction. Finally, docu-

ments which may have remained little known and unused in private hands in the Americas and Europe were made available to researchers.⁵²

What more can be said for those of us who have made it our life's work that same goal?

NOTES

1. Not all of the collection is in these three libraries. The San Diego Public Library received a gift from Gates in 1920 of several Oriental language volumes. The Library of Congress has his Theosophical materials. The Tozzer Library at Harvard includes over fifty thousand photo image copies from the Gates collection. Gates items have been identified in several other libraries. See John M. Weeks, *Mesoamerican Ethnohistory in United States Libraries: Reconstruction of the William E. Gates Collection of Historical and Linguistic Manuscripts* (Culver City, CA.: Labyrinthos, 1990), 10-20, and John M. Weeks, "Historical Notes on the Bowditch-Gates Middle American Indian Manuscript Collection at Tozzer Library, Harvard University," *Behavioral and Social Sciences Librarian* 11 no.1 (1991): 27-47.

2. William E. Gates to Alan Hazelton, July 26, 1938. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.

3. The most extensive biography of Gates is Gareth Lowe's, "Biography of William E. Gates" in MSS 279: Biography of William E. Gates: 20th & 21st Century Western & Mormon Americana, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. See <http://sc.lib.byu.edu>. The following citations will be indicated as MSS 279, LTPSC. I used his history to guide me to sources within the letters and papers of Gates, which were then personally examined. A second biography is found in Robert L. Brunhouse, *Pursuit of the Ancient Maya: Some Archaeologists of Yesterday* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 129-167. The Point Loma school was small and only became a college in 1914 and an accredited university in 1919. Emmett A. Greenwalt, *The Point Loma Community in California, 1897-1942: A Theosophical Experiment* (New York: AMS Press, 1979).

4. Helena Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1889). For a history of the movement, see Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

5. William E. Gates, *The Spirit of the Hour in Archaeology* (Point Loma, CA: The Aryan Theosophical Press, 1915), 13-14.

6. For a history of the early study of Maya writing see, J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1950). See also Michael Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992).

7. For a bibliography of his publications see, John M. Weeks, comp., *Mesoamerican Ethnohistory in United States Libraries* (Culver City, CA: Labyrinthos, 1990), 23-27.

8. William E. Gates, *The Maya Society and its Work* (Baltimore: Maya Society, 1937), 11.

9. Gareth Lowe, "Biography of William E. Gates," 17. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.

10. William E. Gates to Mortimer Graves, June 23, 1933. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC. This letter was a long detailed response to a questionnaire from the American Council of Learned Societies.

11. William E. Gates, *The Maya Society and its Work*, 10-11.

12. William E. Gates, *The Maya Society and its Work*, 15. "William Gates Dies at Age of 76," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 April, 1940, sec. A, p. 5.

13. His antagonism towards Mexican officials can be seen in a talk given much later on November 5, 1934 at Johns Hopkins University. William Gates, *Rural Education in Mexico and the Indian Problem* (Mexico: [s.n.], 1935).

14. His only publication during this ten-year period was a short ten-page article in the appendix of a book by Sylvanus Morley, "The Distribution of the Several Branches of the Mayance Linguistic Stock," in Sylvanus Morley, *The Inscriptions at Copán* (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1920), 605-17.

15. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Sylvanus G. Morley and the World of the Ancient Mayas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 153.

16. Letter to George B. Gordon, March 5, 1921. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC

17. "Museum Enriched by Gift of Works on Chinese Art," *San Diego Union*, August 14, 1921. Gates had stopped in San Diego on his way home from Guatemala where he gave a gift of Chinese linguistic books and documents to the San Diego Public Library.

18. For a discussion of Guatemalan laws related to the preservation of cultural patrimony, see Alfonso René Ortíz Sobalvarro, *La defensa jurídica del patrimonio cultural* (Guatemala: Procurador de los Derechos Humanos, 1994).

19. William B. Gates to George B. MacCurdy, January 27, 1923, William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC. The Carnegie Foundation was also concerned that items not be taken from the country and would fine researchers found involved in this practice. For the Guatemalan view, see J. Haroldo Rodas Estrada, *El Despojo cultural: la otra máscara de la conquista* (Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción (Guatemala): Caudal, 1998), 116.

20. George B. Gordon to William Gates, February 5, 1923. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.

21. For a history of this conflict taken from Gates' correspondence, see Gareth Lowe, "Biography of William E. Gates," 32-43. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC. For a version from the Morley side see, Brunhouse, *Sylvanus G. Morley and the World of the Ancient Mayas*, 188-201.

22. The farm had at one time been part of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. In 1922, he brought from Guatemala a Quiché native to help in his study of the language, who stayed only a short time and returned to Guatemala "homesick." See, William E. Gates to T. A. Willard, January 9, 1923.

23. *The William Gates Collection: Manuscripts, Documents, Printed Literature Relating to Mexico and Central America* (New York: American Art Association, 1924).

24. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Pursuit of the Ancient Maya*, 141-3. Philip Brooks, "Notes on Rare Books," *New York Times*, 18 Feb., 1934, BR23.

25. The value of the collection is questionable. The auctioneers felt they could bring in over \$100,000 by selling the items separately; however, J. Eric S. Thompson, at the time a young Mesoamerican scholar, evaluated the collection and felt it was probably only worth \$20,000. Thompson seriously questioned Tulane's purchase. "There was, of course, no one at Tulane with any idea of its coverage or of its worth. It would seem that Gates had gotten about three times the value of his collection and a job for life; Tulane had gotten a library lacking most of the standard works on the Maya and other peoples of Middle America and a director who would direct operations from his home in Virginia, for it had been agreed that Gates should spend as much or as little time in New Orleans as he wished. He spent little time in the department." J. Eric S. Thompson, "After the Smoke of Battle," 77, William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Pursuit of the Ancient Maya*, 142.

26. William E. Gates, *A Gage of Honor: The Development and Disruption of the Department of Middle American Research of Tulane University at New Orleans* (Baltimore: Maya Society of Johns Hopkins, 1926), 3-4. This pamphlet is primarily a printing of the correspondence between Gates and Tulane. For information on Zemurray see, Lester D. Langley and Thomas

Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

27. See Robert L. Brunhouse, *Frans Blom, Maya Explorer* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976).

28. A description of the trip is found in Frans Blom and Oliver La Farge, *Tribes and Temples: A Record of the Expedition to Middle America Conducted by the Tulane University of Louisiana in 1925*, two vols. (New Orleans, LA: Tulane University of Louisiana, 1926-27).

29. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Pursuit of the Ancient Maya*, 145. Gareth Lowe, "Biography of William E. Gates," 17. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC. He was approached by a representative of the Guatemalan government to establish a similar center in Guatemala.

30. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Pursuit of the Ancient Maya*, 148-51.

31. William E. Gates, *A Gage of Honor*, 6. For a description of the collection see <http://lal.tulane.edu/gates2coll.html>.

32. William E. Gates to Edward E. Ayer, January 10, 1927. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.

33. For a biography of Garrett see, *Robert Garrett & Sons, Incorporated: 1840-1965* (Baltimore, Press of Schneidereith and Sons, 1965). For a history of the collection see, Teresa T. Basler and David C. Wright, "The Making of a Collection: Mesoamerican Manuscripts at Princeton University," *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 43 no.1 (2008): 29-55. See the Gates' collection site at Princeton, <http://libweb5.princeton.edu>.

34. William E. Gates to C. T. Currelly, October 10, 1927. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.

35. For a small history of the Society, see William E. Gates, *The Maya Society and its Work*.

36. Herman Beyer, "A Discussion of the Gates Classification of Maya Hieroglyphs," *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 35 (Oct./Dec., 1933): 659, 694. See a discussion of Beyer in Michael Coe, *Breaking the Mayan Code*, 143-4.

37. William Gates and Agostino Aglio, *The Dresden Maya Codex: Reproduced from Tracings of the Original, Colorings finished by Hand* (Baltimore: Maya Society at the Johns Hopkins University, 1932).

38. William Gates, *The Gomesta Manuscripts, of Hieroglyphs and Customs: in facsimile* (Baltimore: The Maya Society, 1935). Franz Blom, "The Gomesta Manuscript: A Falsification," *Maya Research* 2 (1935), 234-47.

39. Diego de Landa, *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest* (Baltimore: The Maya Society, 1937). Diego de Landa, *Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán: A Translation*, edited by Alfred M. Tozzer. Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Vol. 18 (Cambridge: The Museum, 1941).

40. William Gates, *A Grammar of Maya; Being a Complete Grammar of the Sixteenth Century Language, with an Introduction* (Baltimore: Maya Society, 1938). Like much of his writing, it was ignored by the profession, though it did sell enough to go through two editions.

41. He donated his religious literature on theosophy to the Library of Congress in 1939.

42. "William Gates Dies at Age of 76," *Baltimore Sun*, 25 April, 1940, sec. A, p.5.

43. *The William Gates Collection* (S. I.: s.n., n.d.).

44. For a history of the expedition, see Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, vol. 1 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975) 289-329.

45. Most of the research is published in the series, Publications, New World Archaeological Foundation. See Thomas A. Lee, *New World Archaeological Foundation obra, 1952-1980* (Provo, UT: New World Archaeological Foundation, 1981).

46. For a list of contributions, see Gareth Lowe, "Biography of William E. Gates," 51-3. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.

47. T. A. Willard to Edith McComas, October 1, 1941. William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.
48. J. Eric Thompson, "After the Smoke of Battle," 81, William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.
49. Robert L. Brunhouse, *Sylvanus G. Morley and the World of the Ancient Mayas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 188, 197-8, 153.
50. J. Eric Thompson, "After the Smoke of Battle," 74-5, William E. Gates Papers, MSS 279, LTPSC.
51. *Ibid.*, 84.
52. John M. Weeks, compiler, *Mesoamerican Ethnohistory in United States Libraries*, 17. This publication is an important descriptive catalog of the entire collection and holding libraries.