
Guide to the California Institute of Technology Historical Files

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Archives

California Institute of Technology

Pasadena, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: California Institute of Technology Historical Files

Dates: 1891-

Creator: California Institute of Technology

Collection Size: 84 lin. feet

Repository: California Institute of Technology. Archives.

Pasadena, California 91125

Abstract: The Caltech Historical Files is an extensive collection related to the history of the institute. Included are files on academic divisions and programs, accreditation, administration, alumni, the Athenaeum, awards and celebrations, the calendar of events, campus development, conferences, cultural events, the curriculum, defense projects, faculty and individuals, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, local history, musical and dramatic productions, organizations, physical plant, publications, public relations, reports, societies and honors, students, and wartime activities.

Physical location: California Institute of Technology, Institute Archives.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

The collection is open for research. Researchers must apply in writing for access. The complete finding aid with full container list is available in PDF at the repository web site, [Caltech Archives Finding Aids Online](#).

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Preferred Citation

California Institute of Technology Historical Files. Archives, California Institute of Technology.

Acquisition Information

The papers in the historical files have come from a large variety of sources and have been collected over a long range of time. The collection is continually updated.

Institute History

The California Institute of Technology developed from a local school of arts and crafts founded in Pasadena in 1891 by the Honorable Amos G. Throop. Initially named Throop University, it was later renamed Throop Polytechnic Institute. Known as the California Institute of Technology since 1920, it has enjoyed the support of the citizens of Pasadena, and as early as 1908 the Board of Trustees had as members Dr. Norman Bridge, Arthur H. Fleming, Henry M. Robinson, J. A. Culbertson, C. W. Gates, and Dr. George Ellery Hale. The dedication by these men, of their time, their minds, and their fortunes, transformed a modest vocational school into a university capable of attracting to its faculty some of the most eminent of the world's scholars and scientists.

George Ellery Hale, astronomer and first director of the Mount Wilson Observatory, foresaw the development in Pasadena of a distinguished institution of engineering and scientific research. Hale well knew that a prime necessity was modern well-equipped laboratories, but he stressed to his fellow trustees that the aim was not machines, but men. "We must not forget," he wrote in 1907, "that the greatest engineer is not the man who is trained merely to understand machines and apply formulas, but is the man who, while knowing these things, has not failed to develop his breadth of view and the highest qualities of his imagination. No creative work, whether in engineering or in art, in literature or in science, has been the work of a man devoid of the imaginative faculty."

The realization of these aims meant specializing, so the trustees decided in 1907 to discontinue the elementary school, the business school, the teacher-training program, and the high school, leaving only a college of science and technology that conferred Bachelor of Science degrees in electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering.

In 1910 Throop Polytechnic Institute moved from its crowded quarters in the center of Pasadena to a new campus of 22 acres on the southeastern edge of town, the gift of Arthur H. Fleming and his daughter Marjorie. The president, Dr. James A. B. Scherer, and his faculty of 16 members, opened the doors to 31 students that September. When, on March 21, 1911, Theodore Roosevelt delivered an address at Throop Institute, he declared, "I want to see institutions like Throop turn out perhaps ninety-nine of every hundred students as men who are to do given pieces of industrial work better than any one else can do them; I want to see those men do the kind of work that is now being done on the Panama Canal and on the great irrigation projects in the interior of this country-and the one-hundredth man I want to see with the kind of cultural scientific training that will make him and his fellows the matrix out of which you can occasionally develop a man like your great astronomer, George Ellery Hale."

It would have surprised Roosevelt to know that within a decade the little Institute, known from 1913 as Throop College of Technology, would have again raised its sights, leaving to others the training of more efficient technicians and concentrating its own efforts on Roosevelt's "hundredth man." On November 29, 1921, the trustees declared it to be the express policy of the Institute to pursue scientific researches of the greatest importance and at the same time "to continue to conduct thorough courses in engineering and pure science, basing the work of these courses on exceptionally strong instruction in the fundamental sciences of mathematics, physics, and chemistry; broadening and enriching the curriculum by a liberal amount of instruction in such subjects as English, history, and economics; and vitalizing all the work of the Institute by the infusion in generous measure of the spirit of research."

Three men were responsible for the change in the Institute. George Ellery Hale still held to his dream. Arthur Amos Noyes, professor of physical chemistry and former acting president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, served part of each year from 1913 to 1919 as professor of general chemistry and as research associate; then, in 1919, he resigned from MIT to devote full time to Throop as director of chemical research. In a similar way Robert Andrews Millikan began, in 1916-17, to spend a few months a year at Throop as director of physical research. In 1921, when Dr. Norman Bridge agreed to provide a research laboratory in physics, Dr. Millikan resigned from the University of Chicago and became administrative head of the Institute as well as director of the Norman Bridge Laboratory.

The great period of the Institute's life began, then, under the guidance of three men of vision-Hale, Noyes, and Millikan. They were distinguished research scientists who soon attracted graduate students. In 1920 the enrollment was nine graduate students and 359 undergraduates with a faculty of 60; a decade later there were 138 graduate students, 510 undergraduates, and a faculty of 180. At the present time there are about 900 undergraduates, 1,100 graduate students, and 1,000 faculty (including postdoctoral fellows).

The Institute also attracted financial support from individuals, corporations, and foundations. In January 1920 the endowment had reached half a million dollars. In February of that year it was announced that \$200,000 had been secured for research in chemistry and a like amount for research in physics. Other gifts followed from trustees and friends who could now feel pride in the Institute as well as hope for its future. The Southern California Edison Company provided a high-voltage laboratory, with the million-volt Sorensen transformer. Philanthropic foundations bearing the names of Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Guggenheim came forth with needed help when new departments or projects were organized.

In 1923 Millikan received the Nobel Prize in physics. He had attracted to the Institute such men as Charles Galton Darwin, Paul Epstein, and Richard C. Tolman. In 1924 the Ph.D. degree was awarded to nine candidates.

It was inevitable that the Institute would enlarge its fields; it could not continue to be merely a research and instructional center in physics, chemistry, and engineering. But the trustees pursued a cautious and conservative policy, not undertaking to add new departments except when the work done in them would be at the same high level as that in physics and chemistry. In 1925 a gift of \$25,000 from the Carnegie Corporation of New York made possible the opening of a department of instruction and research in geology. A seismological laboratory was constructed, and Professors John P. Buwalda and Chester Stock came from the University of California to lead the work in the new division.

That same year William Bennett Munro, chairman of the Division of History, Government, and Economics at Harvard, joined the Institute faculty. Offerings in economics, history, and literature were added to the core of undergraduate instruction.

In 1928 Caltech began its program of research and instruction in biology. Thomas Hunt Morgan became the first chairman of the new Division of Biology and a member of Caltech's Executive Council. Under Morgan's direction the work in biology developed rapidly, especially in genetics and biochemistry. Morgan received the Nobel Prize in 1933.

The Guggenheim Graduate School of Aeronautics was founded at Caltech in the summer of 1926 and a laboratory was built in 1929, but courses in theoretical aerodynamics had been given at the Institute for many years by Professors Harry Bateman and P. S. Epstein. As early as 1917 the Throop Institute had constructed a wind tunnel in which, the catalog proudly boasted, constant velocities of 4 to 40 miles an hour could be maintained, "the controls being very sensitive." The new program, under the leadership of Theodore von Karman, included graduate study and research at the level of the other scientific work at the Institute, and what is known as GALCIT (Graduate Aeronautical Laboratories at the California Institute of Technology) was soon a world-famous research center in aeronautics.

In 1928 George Ellery Hale and his associates at the Mount Wilson Observatory developed a proposal for a 200-inch telescope and attracted the interest of the General Education Board in providing \$6,000,000 for its construction. The Board proposed that the gift be made, and Caltech agreed to be responsible for the construction and operation. The huge instrument was erected on Palomar Mountain. Teaching and research in astronomy and astrophysics thus became a part of the Caltech program.

From the summer of 1940 until 1945, Caltech devoted an increasingly large part of its personnel and facilities to the furthering of the national defense and war effort. Caltech's work during this period fell mainly into two categories: special instructional programs and weapons research. The research and development work was carried on, for the most part, under nonprofit contracts with the Office of Scientific Research and Development. Rockets, jet propulsion, and antisubmarine warfare were the chief fields of endeavor. The Jet Propulsion Laboratory in the upper Arroyo Seco continues under Institute management to carry on a large-scale program of research for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the science and technology of robotic space exploration.

In the 1950s, in response to the growing technological component of societal problems, the Institute began to expand the fields in which it had substantial expertise. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Institute added to its faculty several economists and political scientists who initiated theoretical and applied studies of interdisciplinary issues. A graduate program in social sciences was added in 1972. Caltech students could now engage their talents in the development of the basic scientific aspects of economics and political science, and begin to use the principles from these sciences together with those from the physical sciences to formulate and address public policies.

In 1945 Robert A. Millikan retired as chairman of the Executive Council but served as vice chairman of the Board of Trustees until his death in 1953. Dr. Lee A. DuBridge became president of Caltech on September 1, 1946. Formerly chairman of the physics department and dean of the faculty at the University of Rochester, he came to the Institute after five years as wartime director of the MIT Radiation Laboratory and remained 22 years.

DuBridge was also committed to the concept of a small, select institution offering excellence in education. Facts and figures are only part of the story, but the statistical record of change during the DuBridge administration indicates how he held to that concept. The 30-acre campus of 1946 grew to 80 acres; the \$17 million endowment grew to more than \$100 million; the faculty of 260 became 550; the number of campus buildings increased from 20 to 64; and the budget went from something less than \$8 million to \$30 million. But enrollment remained relatively constant. In 1946 the total number of students, graduate and undergraduate, was 1,391. In 1968, the year DuBridge left, it was 1,492.

Dr. Harold Brown came to Caltech as president in 1969. A physicist who had received his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1949, he had succeeded Dr. Edward Teller as director of the University of California's Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in Livermore in 1960. President Lyndon Johnson named Brown Secretary of the Air Force in 1965, and he came to the Institute from that office. Six new campus buildings were dedicated under Brown's administration, and a major development campaign for \$130 million was under way when he resigned in 1977 to become Secretary of Defense under President Carter.

Dr. Marvin L. Goldberger was appointed president in 1978. He had received his B.S. at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) and his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago. He came to Caltech from Princeton University, where he was the Joseph Henry Professor of Physics. Among the major accomplishments of the Goldberger administration were the addition of three new laboratories; the acquisition of a \$70 million grant for construction of the W. M. Keck Observatory to house the world's most powerful optical telescope; and a \$50 million pledge for the establishment of the Beckman Institute. Goldberger resigned in 1987 to become director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

In fall 1987 Dr. Thomas E. Everhart became president, coming to Caltech from his position as chancellor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Everhart graduated magna cum laude with an A.B. in physics from Harvard, received his M.Sc. in applied physics from UCLA, and earned a Ph.D. in engineering from Cambridge University. He had gained international recognition for his work in the development of electron microscopy, and he had also done research on electron beams as applied to the analysis and fabrication of semiconductors. Everhart retired as president in October 1997, but he retains his position as professor of electrical engineering and applied physics. During his tenure in office, he oversaw construction of the Keck Observatory in Hawaii, the Moore Laboratory of Engineering, Avery House, the Braun Athletic Center, the Sherman Fairchild Library, and the Beckman Institute, and he directed the successful completion of the \$350 million Campaign for Caltech.

In October 1997, Dr. David Baltimore assumed the presidency of the Institute. Baltimore, one of the world's leading biologists, was the winner of the 1975 Nobel Prize for his work in virology. He was previously Ivan R. Cottrell Professor of Molecular Biology and Immunology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and founding director of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research at MIT, serving from 1982 to 1990, when he became president of Rockefeller University. He had also earned his doctorate at Rockefeller in 1964. During the 1970s, he played a pivotal role with several other eminent biologists in creating a consensus on national science policy regarding recombinant DNA research, establishing research standards that are followed by the genetics community to this day. More recently, Baltimore has been a major figure in Washington as chairman of the National Institutes of Health AIDS Vaccine Research Committee. In 1999, he was awarded the National Medal of Science by President Clinton.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

California Institute of Technology

Jet Propulsion Laboratory

Throop Polytechnic Institute

Pasadena

Other Finding Aids

The complete finding aid with full container list is available in PDF by accessing [Caltech Archives Finding Aids Online](#).

Related Material

Accompanying the Historical Files is the Institute Archives photographic collection. Most of the images in this collection may be viewed on the Archives' [PhotoNet](#).

Throop

California Institute of Technology

Series Scope and Content Summary

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 - Chemistry and Chemical Engineering Division
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 - Geology and Planetary Science Division
 - Humanities and Social Sciences Division
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- V. Reports [ad hoc miscellaneous]
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- X. Students Boxes
- Y. War Activities [includes WWI, WWII, Cold War]
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Local and California History