
THE "DIAL" FILE

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☛ THE *DIAL* FILE
BY CHRISTA SAMMONS

On 10 April 1987 Yale University, with the help of the Beinecke Foundation, Inc., purchased the archive of the *Dial*, the leading American journal of literature and art of the 1920s, for the Yale Collection of American Literature. At the time of the purchase, Ralph Franklin, director of the Beinecke Library, noted that “today’s transaction completed the process begun at Yale almost forty years ago to document this important chapter in American literary history.” The following excerpts and notes from the American Literature Collection “*Dial* file” document that process – one that seemed at times to falter, as the *Dial* papers were twice threatened by dismemberment, but which has finally been brought to a successful resolution.

As a prominent forum for modernist poetry, art, and writing, the *Dial* was of distinct interest to Yale’s Collection of American Literature. But by the 1940s, when the American Literature Collection began its rapid development under the leadership of Donald Gallup, the co-owner of the *Dial*, Scofield Thayer, was incapacitated by ill health. Mr. Gallup began negotiations with Thayer’s partner in the enterprise:

1949 March 25. Donald Gallup to James S. Watson, Jr. “For a good many years the Yale Library has been gradually building up its collection of little magazines. We are at last approaching the position of having a substantially complete representation of such periodicals, and we are extremely eager to make the collection incomparably more valuable by preserving at Yale, for the benefit of qualified scholars, the files of some of the most important of these magazines. Naturally we think of the *Dial*, and wonder if its files would be available for preservation here.”

As a result of this inquiry, the *Dial* archive was found in storage at Thayer’s hometown of Worcester, Massachusetts. Donald Gallup successfully persuaded Thayer’s guardian, Walter A. Edwards of the law firm Edwards & Angell in Providence, Rhode Island, to have the papers transferred to Yale. As guardian, Edwards could not donate the materials, which were accepted by Yale as a deposit. Scofield Thayer’s personal correspondence was retained in a warehouse in Worcester.

1950 April 11. Donald Gallup gratefully acknowledges the arrival of the *Dial* papers, which include writings and correspondence by more than a hundred literary figures – Pound, Eliot, Thomas Mann, D. H. Lawrence, William Carlos Williams, and Yeats, to name only a few – as well as scrapbooks, clippings, advertising materials, a card file listing all contributors to the *Dial* and all the books reviewed in its pages, and a bound set of the magazine.

1955. Plans begin at the Worcester Art Museum for an exhibition of Scofield Thayer's art collection, which had been deposited there in the 1930s. In connection with the exhibit preparations, Nicholas Joost, a scholar who subsequently published several books and bibliographies on the *Dial*, is authorized to read the stored Thayer correspondence. Joost returns the more personal letters to the warehouse in Worcester, but Thayer's correspondence relating to his art collection and to the *Dial* is kept at the Museum for Joost to study.

1959 August. At the Thayer art exhibition, Donald Gallup learns that much of the Thayer correspondence now at the Worcester Art Museum is closely related to the *Dial* materials already at Yale. An eleven-year campaign to reunite the Thayer/*Dial* correspondence begins.

1959 November 10. Walter A. Edwards declines Donald Gallup's request to deposit the remaining Thayer correspondence at Yale, claiming that he needed first to examine it but has no time for the task.

1964 May. Charles P. Williamson, Donald Gallup's Yale classmate, replaces Edwards as Scofield Thayer's guardian.

1964 June 12. Donald Gallup goes to the Worcester Art Museum to examine the Thayer correspondence stored there. The Museum's director, Daniel C. Rich, agrees that Thayer's papers should ultimately be reunited but wants to keep the Worcester section of the material for the time being because much of it discusses art objects in the Thayer collection.

1964 September 18. Donald Gallup writes prophetically to Daniel C. Rich, "I feel very strongly that trustees and heirs are on the whole inclined to honor the status quo provided nothing has to disturb it. If the pictures are at Worcester and the papers for the most part at Yale when Mr. Thayer dies, the chances are better, it seems to me, that the pictures and the papers will stay where they are. But if part of the papers are at Yale and part are at Worcester, then the matter of their final disposition will have to come up for discussion in a way that would not otherwise be necessary, and I tremble for what might

happen." But Mr. Rich is not swayed by this argument and seven more years pass with the materials still separated.

1971 February 10. Donald Gallup to Charles Williamson, in a postscript. "I almost hate to bring up again the question of reuniting the two halves of the *Dial* papers at Yale. Now that the Worcester Museum has a new director is there a chance that this could be accomplished?"

1971 October 26. Charles Williamson to Donald Gallup. "I am writing to Professor Joost to make sure that he is through with the papers at Worcester. If so, I will arrange to have them transferred to you." On 30 November 1971 he adds, "I am glad the correspondence is at last finding its way to the Beinecke. You realize, of course, as Mr. Thayer's guardian, I am not at liberty to make a gift of this material but it is presented on the basis of a loan during Mr. Thayer's life, with his heirs the final arbiters of its ultimate disposition."

1971 December 6. Donald Gallup to Charles Williamson. ". . . our station wagon picked up the rest of the *Dial* papers at Worcester on Saturday. They are safely here in my office now."

1973 January. Charles Williamson dies suddenly; John L. Clark replaces him as Scofield Thayer's guardian.

1982 July 29. John L. Clark to David Schoonover, Donald Gallup's successor as curator of the American Literature Collection. "I am sorry to advise you that Mr. Scofield Thayer died on July 9th at the age of 92. As you know, his so-called Dial Papers have been on deposit for some years at Beinecke. The Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York is the executor named in Mr. Thayer's will. Mr. Frederic B. Ingraham, Vice President, is in charge of the administration of his estate. I presume that in due course you will be hearing from him regarding the Dial Papers and their ultimate disposition."

1983 August 11. David Schoonover to Frederic Ingraham. "I am writing to inquire about the status of the *Dial* Papers. The library is, of course, particularly interested in learning the wishes of the Thayer heirs concerning the ultimate disposition of the papers. We would like to arrange for a discussion of the options concerning gift or purchase since circumstances may vary among the heirs. . . . we believe that the papers are one of the most important literary archives which we have because of the inter-relationships among contributors whose archives are also present here. In addition, the library has made important acquisitions recently in the area of modern art. As the major magazine discussing modern art and letters in its time the *Dial* retained a central position in cultural history and its archive would be

invaluable in the varieties of scholarship which are pursued here. I hope that we may be able to carry the discussion further. . . ."

1983 August 16. Frederic Ingraham answers that he will bring Mr. Schoonover's concerns to the attention of Thayer's heirs, but warns that they are unlikely to be in a position to discuss the final disposition of the *Dial* papers "for some time to come."

1987 January 28. Christa Sammons, acting curator of the American Literature Collection, receives a telephone call from Mr. Ingraham announcing that he wishes to pick up all of the deposited *Dial* materials for auction at Sotheby's in June. When a letter of the same date confirming the call arrives a few days later, Ralph Franklin initiates discussions with Ingraham, with David Redden of Sotheby's, and with Edward T. Clary, one of Thayer's heirs, but it proves impossible to prevent the removal of the papers from the library.

1987 February 25. The *Dial* archive is assembled and listed by the Beinecke staff; materials have to be withdrawn from the active reserve of a reader.

1987 February 26, 10 A.M. Frederic Ingraham and a Sotheby's representative spend two hours checking the contents of the *Dial* archive before packing the papers into Mr. Ingraham's station wagon around noon for the trip to Sotheby's in New York City. There the collection is to be catalogued in preparation for its auction, in lots, on June 17.

1987 February 26, 4 P.M. In a telephone conversation about the Beinecke Library's Ezra Pound collection, Christa Sammons must inform a frequent Beinecke researcher that the *Dial* archive, with its rich Pound materials, has just left the library, to be placed on the auction block. That evening the scholar apparently contacts numerous and widespread colleagues, who begin to telephone Ralph Franklin the next morning. The media follow, and Mr. Franklin's lines are rarely quiet for the next several weeks.

1987 March 12. The *New York Times* prints an article by Edwin McDowell on the impending fate of the *Dial*. McDowell quotes Yale curator-designate Patricia Willis: "To break up this irreplaceable archive is like taking a national monument and slicing it in little pieces." And Lawrence Dowler, librarian of Harvard's Houghton Library: "We have laws that protect architectural landmarks, that protect buildings from being torn down, yet we have no laws to prevent the dispersal of this major cultural landmark."

On the morning of the *Times* article, Mrs. John Robinson, a gallery owner well known for her interest in the history of the arts, alerts her husband, president of The Beinecke Foundation, Inc., of the in-

tended dispersal of the *Dial* papers. John Robinson telephones Ralph Franklin, who is sick at home, to inform him that The Beinecke Foundation might be able to help if a purchase of the collection could be arranged prior to the auction. Upon his return to the library, Ralph Franklin contacts Edward Clary, asking whether the heirs would yet consider a sale of the archive intact. Clary answers that he is not sure but will confer with the others involved in the decision.

1987 March 16. A *Washington Post* article by Jonathan Yardley takes a different tack, observing that private collectors will benefit from the auction of the *Dial* archive and that libraries eventually benefit from the activities of private collectors. Therefore librarians and scholars should perhaps be less disturbed by the possible dispersal of the papers.

1987 March 17. David Redden calls Ralph Franklin and acknowledges that the *Dial* papers can now be purchased *in toto* before the auction. Sotheby's later names an asking price of \$1,000,000, but by this time John Robinson is leaving his office for an extended period and negotiations cannot begin.

1987 March 18. The *New Haven Register* and other newspapers reprint Yardley's article.

1987 March 27. Ralph Franklin reports on the *Dial* to the Trustees of the Yale Library Associates. When Thayer's will, written in the 1920s, was probated in 1982, it was discovered that none of the persons named was still living. Four distant heirs had eventually been identified, and Mr. Franklin had entered into discussions with one of them [Edward Clary], as he had with Sotheby's and with the administrator, but as of March 27 it had not been possible to arrange a purchase prior to the auction. "It's one thing," Mr. Franklin continued, "that Yale loses the collection which of course was never really ours except in a custodial sense to begin with. That's one disappointment on our part. But the greater disappointment really is that this material, which documents an enterprise of prime importance in the history of modernism in America, should be dispersed and that, after forty years of serving scholars and scholarship, it would become unavailable for that purpose."

As a means of preserving the totality of the archive in some form, Mr. Franklin had suggested to the heirs through Mr. Clary that the library microfilm the papers, but this proposal had been met with a list of conditions to which Yale could not responsibly agree. These included the library being held accountable for any future violations of copyrights relating to the papers, assurances that Yale would still

bid in the auction, and a promise that the university would not publicly disparage the process that threatened to destroy the integrity of the collection.

Mr. Franklin concluded his report with the news that Sotheby's had made known to a number of libraries: that the *Dial* archive could be purchased until April 10 for \$1,000,000. If no buyer appeared by that date, the auction catalogue would go to press and the papers would be sold by lot on June 17.

1987 April 8. John Robinson, newly returned, calls Ralph Franklin, and negotiations with Sotheby's begin.

1987 April 9. Yale, with the support of The Beinecke Foundation, Inc., makes an offer to Sotheby's for the purchase of the *Dial* archive intact. The papers include new materials that have been brought out of storage from Worcester and the Providence law firm.

1987 April 10. Around ten o'clock in the morning Christa Sammons begins writing a news release, on the assumption that Yale and Sotheby's will reach agreement. John Robinson and his wife arrive to have lunch with Ralph Franklin, who reports that Sotheby's has made a counterproposal. Ralph Franklin and John Robinson make preliminary revisions to the news release; they agree on a Yale counteroffer, and after it has been made to Sotheby's, the Robinsons depart. Several telephone consultations about details of the news release ensue between Ralph Franklin and John Robinson as the Robinsons progress southwestward on Interstate 95. At 3:30 David Redden of Sotheby's calls, accepting Yale's last offer. Ralph Franklin hand-carries the news release to Walter Littell at Yale's Office of Public Information, and the announcement of Yale's acquisition of the *Dial* archive is put on the news wires.

1987 April 11. Both the *New York Times* and the *New Haven Register* report on Yale's purchase of the *Dial* papers.

Over the subsequent weeks, letters and words of congratulations pour in from faculty, friends, and the scholarly community. One of the most eloquent tributes comes from Paul Horgan in a letter addressed to Ralph Franklin on April 11: "What jubilation today over the morning *Times* – news that the *Dial* papers are safe and will repose *in aeternam* at Beinecke. . . . I confess that my concern was mostly an emotional one—the decade of the '20s when the *Dial* flourished most resplendently was illuminated and enriched for me in my own decade of discovery by the monthly issues as they came in their buff covers and inducted me into my cultural time. Now to know that everything one cherished there is safe as a collective por-

trait or record of that most efflorescent time is a personal satisfaction. . . . ”

1987 April 24. Ralph Franklin visits Sotheby's to examine the new materials that have been added to the *Dial* papers since they left Yale. These include a large file of previously unknown Ezra Pound letters, personal letters between Thayer and Marianne Moore, and extraordinary drawings by e.e. cummings.

1987 May 13. Ralph Franklin receives a letter from Yale President Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., stating in part, “The announcement a few weeks ago of your success in acquiring the *Dial* archive was indeed magnificent news to me and numerous others at Yale. Just to keep the collection intact would have been a major accomplishment, given the forces pressing to disperse it, but to have done that and also to have negotiated quickly and quietly its return to Yale are achievements which deserve the recognition and appreciation of the Yale community and scholars throughout the world.”

1987 July 9. The *Dial* archive returns to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.