A Revolutionary COLLECTOR

The first person E. D. Adams contacted after speaking to Hoover was Ralph Haswell Lutz, his former student and a member of Stanford’s class of 1906, who was then stationed in Berlin as a first lieutenant with the American Expeditionary Forces. In peacetime Lutz was a history professor at Washington University; he had also been a guest lecturer at Stanford. When America declared war on Germany in 1917, Lutz had volunteered to serve.

Adams, who had maintained a correspondence with Lutz over the years, met with him in Berlin in July 1919. By invoking Hoover’s authority as head of the ARA, Adams was able to enlist Lutz as a collector. The arrangement lasted until December; when Lutz returned to his teaching duties in Washington, Lutz would remain affiliated with the Hoover Library until his death in 1968, spearheading acquisitions efforts for the fledgling collection that were well beyond the highest expectations of Hoover and Adams.

Lutz’s first collecting trip took him across Europe, where he contacted book dealers, government officials, diplomats, presidents, chancellors, military officers, and private citizens in a herculean effort to collect the records of the Great War. In three months he traveled through France, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Italy, Switzerland, and England. Among the primary sources he was able to collect were government documents, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, photographs, monographs, and ephemeral materials that might otherwise have been lost. Crucial factors in Lutz’s success were his congenial disposition, facility with languages, and unrelenting drive. His first European collecting trip, then, laid the groundwork for the Hoover War Collection’s reputation as one of the world’s preeminent repositories for modern documentary history, thus ensuring a steady flow of packages, bundles, and boxes to Stanford.

In the summer of 1920, Lutz accepted a professorship at Stanford and began his dual role as educator and administrator of the Hoover War Collection. When Adams fell ill and was forced to reduce his teaching load and his involvement with the library in 1925, Lutz assumed the chairmanship. Throughout Lutz’s tenure certain faculty members and librarians at the main library, where the collection was first housed, made frequent attempts to take control of the Hoover collection. Because Hoover had explicitly directed in 1919 that his collection be a distinct entity at Stanford, however, neither Lutz nor his successors could concede to the incorporation of the collection into the general library. By 1925 the Hoover War Library took up 20 percent of the library, making space also a point of contention with university librarian G. T. Clark and his successor, Nathan Van Patten. The conflict over space would not be resolved until the Hoover Tower was completed in 1941.

Lutz went on additional collecting missions in 1926, 1933, and 1939, when he experienced firsthand the monumental social, economic, and political turmoil building in Europe and witnessed the peace terms of the Treaty of Versailles unraveling through revolutionary upheaval culminating in the Nazi-Soviet pact that set off World War II. Despite his belief that war was inevitable after Hitler’s rise to power, Lutz knew how critical it was to continue collecting the historical records of the 1930s, which were necessary to document the causes of the radical changes on the world scene. Thanks to Lutz’s devotion to the mission of the Hoover Library, Hoover’s collections on this period are unmatched.

Although health problems, compounded by a strenuous workload, forced Lutz to limit his involvement after 1943, he would remain at Hoover as a wellspring of knowledge and institutional memory for another quarter of a century.